

Divorce and Remarriage

“And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mark10:8-9)

It is with great fear and trembling that I set out to record my thoughts on this subject. I say fear because this particular issue has been the source of much division and rancor among brethren who see eye to eye on practically every other subject in the Bible but find reason to dis-fellowship one another over differing views on this matter. I have no desire to cause division over my conclusions but know that I must invariably be at odds with some as a result. I more greatly fear that I might be found standing against the very truth that I desire to uphold which is the Word of GOD, the Bible, because of my innate weakness and lack of understanding. Yet at the same time I am in even greater fear that I might be found unfaithful in declaring what I believe to be the whole counsel of GOD as it has been revealed to me. So I take my stand upon that which I believe to be true for I can do nothing else.

In our best state we are *“altogether vanity”*, so I am well aware that I can be wrong in my conclusions since at best we see through a glass darkly in our comprehension of the things we have been taught. I know that there have been numerous books, articles, and pamphlets written on this subject, over the years, and I do not presume to have more wisdom on this topic than others. I have read the writings of others on this matter in time past (most all of whom are far more qualified than I to write on any subject) but it has been several years since I last consulted the writings of men on this question. I have not arrived hastily at my present conclusions and do not unequivocally say that I will never change my mind on the matter or that it is not possible that I can be given greater light. In fact I have held several different opinions on the matter over the years but now feel fairly settled in what I believe to be what the scripture teaches on this issue.

At the outset let me say that it does not matter what my opinion is on this issue any more than what someone else’s opinion may be. If our “opinions” are not based on what is clearly taught in the Bible, which we believe to be the written word of GOD, then they are not worth having regardless of our learning or station in life. We must look not only at the letter of the scripture, but the context in which it is written, as well as the lessons that are being taught by the examples given in the scripture on this issue where we find it discussed. Not only that but we must take what the scripture says upon the subject as a whole rather than centering our thoughts on this passage or that. If one picks and chooses certain verses while disregarding others then one can arrive at any conclusion he might desire. So we must take what the whole Bible says on the matter knowing that there are no contradictions and that there is one cohesive truth taught throughout its pages. With that in mind, I cast myself wholly upon the mercy of GOD, hoping that GOD’s people might be edified and comforted by these thoughts set forth herein, and that any error set forth by the same might be overruled.

I have no particular “axe to grind” in recording my thoughts here. I have seen some men argue in favor of divorce and remarriage because they themselves were divorced. I have seen others argue against it because of certain situations that have arisen where a stringent and unwavering position in opposition to it was deemed more suitable to solving problems associated with it. Our personal circumstances should have no bearing on how we view what the scripture says on the

matter although it is practically impossible not to let the various situations which arise in our lives, have some influence on how we look at it. I have personally been happily married to the same woman for 33 years which out of 35 isn't bad (I am only kidding). I thank GOD that HE has given me a wife who has stood by my side through thin and thick, and continues to tolerate all of my eccentricities, for the past 35 years. (*editors note: this was written about twelve years ago, so we have been married now 47 years.*) It is only by the grace of GOD that we have made it thus far and it shall be by the same that we shall endure to the end.

At one time divorce and remarriage was a relatively rare occurrence in our society and almost never mentioned or experienced among the saints of GOD. Today, however, there is hardly a family left that has not had to deal, on some level, with the sorrow and pain caused by divorce and the labyrinth of problems which are spawned by remarriage. Sadly this has become true among many of those who profess faith in CHRIST as well. It would be difficult, if not impossible; to find an assembly of GOD's people wherein none of those present had ever been divorced and/or remarried. This is, no doubt, somewhat indicative of our LORD's statement; "*Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:8) These are indeed dark days and it appears that there is a famine of hearing in the land.

We know and understand the scriptures to teach (and can observe with our own eyes) the fact that men are born with a propensity to transgress the commandments of GOD. "*The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*" (Psa 58:3) So it does not come as a shock to us that divorce is a prevalent occurrence. The fact is that every one of us would find himself or herself embroiled in the sorrows of a broken marriage if GOD did not in mercy keep us from it by preserving the unions in which we find ourselves. As Paul said, "*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*" (1Cor 4:7) So it is indeed according to the great mercy and blessing of GOD that any marriage should endure and prosper. Yet the scripture is plain that woe be to the man or woman who should disrupt or destroy a marriage, whether it be their own or someone else's.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

To discover the primary purpose of marriage we must go to the writings of the Apostle Paul who said, "*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" (Eph 5:31-32) GOD has instituted marriage as a living illustration of the relationship between CHRIST and HIS Bride, the Church. Paul describes in great detail the role of the man and the woman in marriage and then informs us that he is actually speaking of the roles of CHRIST and the church. If this be the case then we can see quite clearly why GOD would have us to hold marriage in a high esteem and why it is incumbent upon men and women to not break that union. What a high privilege that has been given to the sons of men that they might illustrate the love of CHRIST for HIS bride, and what a blessing to the daughters of men that they might in turn manifest the devotion and obedience of the bride to the BRIDEGROOM.

Now of course there is a more mundane purpose in marriage, (which by the way is only given to mankind), since the angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. GOD instituted marriage for the benefit of mankind. GOD endued men and women as well as the rest of HIS creation with

the ability to procreate or reproduce after their own kind. In order to bring this to pass HE gave the animal portion of HIS creation (we include man in this part, only to distinguish him from the plant world) a sexual drive which would cause them to desire to come together in a union which would result in the reproduction of their species.

This ability and desire was not a result of man's fall into sin, but of GOD's creation and purpose as are all things since HE is the absolute Sovereign of the Universe and does all things according to HIS own will. Until man sinned he had no shame attached to his sexuality. *"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."* (Gen 2:25) Yet when he had transgressed the LORD's commandment he was brought into shame about it and made aprons from fig leaves to cover up his nakedness. GOD instituted marriage as a covering for that shame making an acceptable way for man and woman to be united in a sexual union. *"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."* (Heb 13:4)

Beyond the sexual union, marriage was also intended for the mutual benefit of the husband and the wife to support and help one another through the ups and downs of life. Not only that but marriage is designed for the benefit of the offspring of that union, since they are brought up with the varied forms of discipline, love, and example which can only be supplied by members of the opposite sex. Regardless of the psychobabble of our present day, men are to be men, and women are to be women. GOD made them different physically, emotionally, and cognitively, and it is this difference which can be seen by their offspring that helps the children to develop into productive and well adjusted men and women. One of the marks of GOD's judgment of any people (or nation) is that the lines between the sexes become blurred or confused and chaos and ultimate destruction is always the result. *"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."* (Rom 1:26-27)

So the purpose of marriage is primarily to illustrate the relationship of CHRIST and HIS Church. In that illustration GOD has designed marriage to be a proper venue for the sexual union of man and woman to be carried out. The ultimate result of that union is the birth of children which are to be nurtured and instructed in the environment of a family unit but the union itself is for the benefit of the husband and wife in cementing the bonds of their love for one another. In it all men and women and their children are profited by the institution of marriage and have received it from the hand of the LORD as a great blessing and help.

MARRIAGE AND THE LAW

The LORD gave the Law of Moses to the children of Israel for their instruction and as the grounds for a covenant which they ultimately despised and broke, but HE had established HIS law in the earth long before that occurrence. (see Rom.1:17-2:27) The institution of marriage was from the beginning and GOD's purpose for it was established before Moses was given the Ten Commandments. *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."* (Gen 2:24) No provision at all was made for divorce in this law because GOD's purpose for marriage did not include the destruction of it. Divorce is the exact

antithesis to marriage so it should never be looked at as a suitable option which a man or woman can take advantage of whenever they feel like it. Had GOD a delight of any kind in divorce HE would no doubt have mentioned it as an alternative to marital fidelity and would have included the conditions for a suitable “escape” from it in its institution.

When the Law of Moses was given, it had in it the first provision for divorce. We find the first mention of a “*bill of divorcement*” in Deuteronomy 24:1 although the putting away of a wife is mentioned in 22:13-21. The LORD JESUS explained that this provision was added to the Law of Moses because of the hardness of men’s hearts. (see Mat.19:8) The Law of Moses had in it no flexibility (as any law of letters) and demanded that a woman found not to be a virgin at the time of her marriage was to be stoned if her husband discovered it. (see Deut.22:13:21) Those who appeal to the Law of Moses need to keep this in mind. The provision for divorce seems to favor men and the prohibitions against it seem to favor women (see Deut. 22:19). It is clear that the whole issue of divorce and subsequent remarriage was not a matter of convenient and mutual benefit even under the provisions of that Law.

Under the Law of Moses the writing of a bill of divorcement freed a man or women to marry another (see Deut.24:2) so it does seem that remarriage is allowed under that Law, with some restrictions. It would appear that the purpose of divorce allowed in the Law of Moses was to free someone from the contract of marriage as if it never existed. Divorce is the destruction of marriage. Those who take delight in the letter of the law can also take delight in divorce and remarriage as it is set forth in those tables of stone.

CHRIST’S TEACHING ON DIVORCE

The Pharisees were strict keepers of Moses’ Law (or so they thought) as well as the myriad precepts that were added to it over the years. It was unto them primarily that the LORD’s teachings about the intent of the Law were directed although HIS teaching is applicable to all of HIS hearers. When the LORD came into the earth teaching the precepts of HIS kingdom, HE made it very clear that HE did not come to destroy the Law of Moses but rather to fulfill it. HE did this first by the sacrifice of HIMSELF. Then HE also set forth a clearer declaration of the intent of Moses’ Law in the establishment of HIS law in the earth which actually preceded the giving of Moses’ Law. Moses’ Law was added because of sin (see Gal.3:19) and was only a temporary part of the fulfillment of the bringing in of the PROMISE which is by and of JESUS CHRIST. (see Gal.3:10-29) Paul said, “*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*” (Gal 3:24)

We can only imagine therefore the shock and amazement upon the minds of the Jews when HE began to teach the pure Law of HIS Kingdom and how that it was based upon a different principle than the keeping of GOD’s commands according to the letter rather than according to its spirit and intent. CHRIST taught that obedience to the law had to do more with the heart and soul than it did with doing that which men could see in an outward form. None of the Pharisees (nor other Jews) had any consideration of themselves as adulterers until the LORD came saying, “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” (Matt 5:27-28) HE established the righteousness of GOD before their eyes and of course stirred up the enmity of religious men while at the same time humbling those in the dust

who were given eyes to see and ears to hear. A man in his natural state sees the glory of the Law as being what it says, the man who has been born again comes to see that the glory of it is in what it means.

Under Moses' law a man could put away his wife by giving her a bill of divorcement yet CHRIST came teaching that to do so was the result of wickedness and led to even more wickedness, yea even adultery; which was to the Jew, one of the most heinous of crimes, (next to blasphemy), that one could commit. The full impact of HIS teaching had to fall on these Jews like a ton of bricks. Here the LORD JESUS was actually saying that they were not only adulterers but they were those who caused others to be adulterers by their disregard of the sanctity of marriage which they viewed as a matter which could be dispensed with according to the letter of the Law rather than being concerned with that which GOD had established from the beginning. They were not desirous of performing righteously before GOD; rather they were satisfied to walk according to the lusts of their flesh as long as they "thought" GOD permitted it. Many today still seem to labor under the same delusions.

Some have interpreted CHRIST's teaching here (see Mat.19:4-12) on divorce to have with it the tacit approval of it if "fornication" was involved, believing that "fornication" is limited to pre-marital sex. Now I do not believe that is at all what HE is saying but rather believe HE is referencing the fact that Moses did allow divorce when a woman was found to be not a virgin on her wedding night but HIS teaching obviously goes much further than that; causing even his disciples to say "*It is not good to marry*" (see Mat.19:10).

The Greek word for fornication is "porneia" and is the root word from which our present day word "pornography" comes. It basically means "harlotry" or "sexual uncleanness" and encompasses all forms of sexual deviance, including adultery, incest, and sodomy. All fornication is not adultery but all adultery is fornication. The LORD reiterated the fact that when a man and a woman come together in marriage they become "*one flesh*", "cleaving together" (i.e.; glued). We understand HIS words to mean that they become united as one and are to do all things in that fashion, but the primary meaning of becoming "one flesh" has to do with the sexual union of two people. Paul alluded to this very fact when he said "*What? know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.*" (1Cor. 6:16) Sexual uncleanness is a breach of GOD's law regardless of what "kind" of deviance (from GOD's intention) one may be involved in. Two teenagers groping one another's bodies in the back seat of a car are no less guilty of it than a married woman who sells herself as a harlot on the street of a city. Nor is the man who fills his eyes and mind with pornography any less guilty of the same or the woman who fantasizes while filling her mind with some soap opera or romance novel. All sexual uncleanness is sin, pure and simple. He who has broken the law in one point has broken it in all.

What it appears to me that the LORD is teaching here in the 19 chapter of Matthew is that divorce is never "acceptable". It can only be tolerated "from the human point of view" whenever the marriage is already broken by sexual unfaithfulness and uncleanness. In essence I think HE literally said it is wrong to be divorced (with a view to be remarried) unless ones wife becomes a harlot; in which case the marriage is already destroyed by that action. Hence his disciples' strong reaction and HIS teaching that only some men are given the ability to avoid sexual sin. The only way to literally avoid the sin that HE describes here is to never be sexually stimulated. This gift is given to relatively very few. No amount of willpower can bestow it upon a man (or woman) and therefore it is better for him (or her) to marry and remain faithful to one's spouse in all things.

The clear teaching of CHRIST concerning HIS law is to make it apparent to all of those to whom HE is pleased to give understanding, that we are all guilty of sin and any hope of counting ourselves righteous by that law are hopeless. Who has loved his neighbor as himself or who has consistently prayed for those who despitefully use us? Who has gladly turned the other cheek to our persecutors? Who has never violated the sanctity of marriage in any wise? I, for one, am glad that HE is our LAWKEEPER and our SUBSTITUTE. How otherwise can we be judged faithful before HIS FATHER's face?

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN THE PAULINE LETTERS

There are no contradictions in the HOLY SCRIPTURES and there is no conflict in the things that Paul writes with those things which the LORD JESUS CHRIST taught when HE walked on the earth among men. However the teachings of the Apostles are based on what HE taught and are by the Apostles given a fuller explanation and application that HE was pleased to give in HIS own ministry. (see Eph.2:20) It was not in HIS purpose to dwell continually upon the earth therefore HE went away but HE sent HIS SPIRIT to lead us into all truth. If everything HE intended to say about divorce and remarriage was to be found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark or the Law of Moses, HE would not have given HIS Apostles the charge that HE did nor would it have been necessary for us to have the rest of the New Testament writings. The letters of Paul are just as much the word of GOD as are those things which the LORD JESUS spoke with HIS own human lips.

I believe that Paul was given greater insights into the purpose and will of GOD than any man (other than the LORD JESUS) who has ever lived before or since the coming of the LORD. It is primarily through his ministry and letters that the vast majority of the disclosure of GOD's purpose and instruction has come to us. Therefore it is necessary that we look at what he had to say on this subject since he covers it in great detail in the seventh chapter of I Corinthians, though he actually never mentions the subject of divorce except by implication.

He begins the chapter (v.1) by saying that it would be a good thing if a man never got married. There are no "requirements" in the Bible which say a man (or woman) must be married or must be single for that matter. In fact there are great advantages in not being married.(v.32) but there are great advantages in being married as well. (v.2) While it is "theoretically" a good thing for a man not to have a wife and the care that goes with it, he says that "practically" most men and women should be married in order to avoid "*fornication*" (i.e.; sexual impurity). Therefore he instructs husbands and wives to consider that their bodies actually belong to their spouses and are to give themselves to each other in sexual union on a regular basis unless they mutually consent to abstaining from it for short periods of time in order to devote themselves to prayer and fasting. (v.3-5)

He reiterates that he is not commanding them to marry but letting them know that they are not "unspiritual" or "disobedient" if they do maintain or seek out a marital union. (v.6) We assume that Paul was unmarried (at least at this time) from what he says next. (v.7,8) At least we are certain that he is speaking of remaining in a "celibate" state. He basically repeats what the LORD told HIS disciples; that the desire and ability to remain in this state (of celibacy) could only be borne by those who were thus made able by the gift of GOD. He found it to be a great advantage, for himself, since he did not have the added worry of attending to a wife's needs and welfare, but he repeats that this is not necessarily the best course for everybody since this gift (of

celibacy) is not given to most. Therefore, rather than burning in lust and uncleanness he advises those who are unmarried to marry or remarry as the case may be. (v.9) In using the word unmarried he is perhaps referring to those who have never been married but likely is addressing some who were divorced for some reason. He mentions the “unmarried” with widows, and makes reference to “virgins” later on. Remember that “divorce” is the ending or destruction of a marriage and the very concept of such has the purpose of remarriage in mind. Let me interject this thought into the discussion: a man’s (or woman’s) need for sexual fulfillment does not end because they are divorced nor is the gift of celibacy somehow conferred upon them when they are. So he says to avoid fornication they should marry, unless they are able to be celibate. Otherwise they are trading one sin for another which could turn out to be the source of even more sorrow and woe. This does not mean that men should be married simply because of lust, because the LORD does speak of those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of GOD. He is not saying that we should not exercise self-control but simply is aware that this is not always the best option for all men (or women).

Then he turns his attention to those that are already married (v.10) and repeats what the LORD said, *“that a man should cleave to his wife”* (and vice versa). Since he is speaking to believers he very strongly admonishes them not to separate from one another but if they do they should not do it in order to marry someone else, nor should they rush into remarriage. What I believe he is counseling them on is that if there is mutual agreement that they desire to be apart then the only acceptable conduct for them is to remain in an unmarried state. On the other hand if they still have sexual needs they must not turn to someone else but rather be reconciled (or satisfied) with their spouse. Shouldn’t believers, of all people, be striving to get along? (v.11) He seems to make an allowance for a separation but does not give carte blanche approval for them to divorce in order to seek another sexual partner which is quite prevalent today even as it was then. As a side note it is interesting that Paul first addresses the case of a woman departing from her husband, since the Law of Moses made no express provision for women to divorce in the same fashion as it did for men. This is an illustration of the fact that women and men are not regarded as superior or inferior to one another in the Kingdom of GOD. (see Gal.3:28)

In the preceding case Paul merely quoted what he knew CHRIST had already expressly commanded in the Gospels, now he makes an application which is not specifically covered there and says “to the rest speak I, not the LORD. (v.12). This does not mean that what Paul says here is not absolute truth but he speaks of conclusions that he has arrived at not simply by reiterating what the LORD actually said during HIS ministry but based on the understanding that the LORD had given him on this subject.

Paul is covering ground here that, up to this time, never had to be covered. He is not speaking to the nation of Israel but to the true Israel of GOD which includes Gentiles and Jews alike. The Jews were commanded to put away those wives which they had taken from among the heathen. (see Ezra 10:11) Paul is saying to these Corinthian Christians that because a believer may have an unbelieving spouse is no grounds in itself to separate or divorce. (v.12,13). The children of such a union are not rendered “unclean” but are set apart from the children of unbelievers because of the blessed influence put upon them by the believing spouse as is the whole household. (v.14)

On the other hand he says that if an unbelieving spouse cannot continue to dwell with the believer (no doubt chafing at the believers devotion) and departs, then the believing spouse is no longer under the bondage of marriage and is free to remarry without condemnation. Yet he admonishes the believer not to be hasty in this matter because it may yet be possible to be reconciled once again to the departed one which is a far better state than to remarry and not be

able to be reconciled. (v.15,16) But once again he returns to the fact that not everyone has the ability to remain in a celibate state so rather than being in a continual state of “burning” (see v.9) one must make a decision to do what he (or she) must do.(v.17) Those who make hard fast rules concerning what they believe the scripture to teach about remarriage seem to conveniently ignore this fact. Paul has not here made it “easy” or “convenient” to be divorced and remarried but is somewhat “pragmatic” about the realities of what occurs when one is abandoned in a marriage.

Next he mentions that being a Christian does not require adopting certain callings or practices. If one is not circumcised and becomes a believer then there is no need for him to become circumcised. On the other hand if he is circumcised he does not need to be ashamed of it nor think that it will enhance his standing with GOD. If a man becomes a believer while he is a servant (slave or indentured servant) then a man ought to use his knowledge and gift as a believer to be a better servant rather than seeking to be free from his servitude. None of these external things either hinder or enable a man to walk with CHRIST. (v.18-24) We are not to do what we do to be seen of men or to try to please men. He even makes application of this very thought to marriage. (v.27) It is not necessary that the Christian should either be hindered or strengthened by being married, so an unmarried believer should not think he (or she) would be better off as a believer to be married nor vice versa.

Paul expresses the same thought here in verse 25 that he set forth in verse 12 as he addresses the matter of “virgins” (i.e.; those that have never been married at all). Now it is interesting that he specifically mentions “virgins” here as opposed to the “unmarried” which he spoke of in conjunction with “widows” in verse 8. This seems to me strong grounds to believe that he was indeed speaking of those who at one time were married (v.8) but because of divorce or whatever they were at the present time “unmarried” rather than the “virgins” which he speaks of here. He seems to be saying that because of the present situation (v.26) (distress) it would probably be better to remain unmarried. He might have had reference to the specific days of persecution which the early church was subject to or perhaps simply to the trials and tribulations of normal life in this world in which all of GOD’s children are strangers and sojourners. If a person is married they should not be seeking to be “loosed” from their spouse.(v.27) Nor should a person who has been “loosed” from a spouse by death or divorce (perhaps relating to what he mentioned in verse15) necessarily seek out another spouse. Yet if they do decide to remarry they have not committed some unpardonable act. In any event he comes back to the fact that getting married or not getting married cannot be termed “right or wrong”. (v.28) However, one must understand that such unions (especially those involving remarriage) will carry with them their own set of woes and problems.

Getting married does carry with it great responsibilities and one’s life could be simplified by not being married but he does not want to labor the point so that those who feel the need to be married should feel some condemnation in it. Then he makes them all mindful that whether they are married or not they must not let either state be an hindrance to them in seeking out the things of the Kingdom of GOD. (v.29-31) Life is short enough without the added time that it takes to have a good marriage. Those who are married are always going to have reason to have more earthly concerns than those who are not so encumbered. (v.32-34) His comments here show that it is proper for the husband to be attentive to his wife’s needs and the wife to the husband’s. It is also interesting to point out that Paul uses the word “unmarried” here to relate to “virgins” as though the term can be interchangeable from those who are presently in an unmarried state and those who have never been in a married state. Again he does not want to labor the point he is

making to the end that they would be confused.(v.35) about the propriety of marriage but that they may have full understanding of the necessity of the proper devotion of GOD's children.

These next few verses (v.36-38) are not easily understood by us probably because we are not acquainted well with the Jewish customs of that time regarding marriage. Yet I think we can gain a proper understanding of them by examining the intent of Paul's teaching. He probably has reference to the practice of betrothal (engagement in our modern use) wherein a bride was promised to a prospective bridegroom long before they were married and often at a young age. He addresses himself either to the one who is betrothed to a virgin (damsel) or to the parents of the young girl who is so betrothed. It is not wrong to marry or to give someone in marriage is the simple meaning of what Paul is saying, let them be married, there is certainly no shame attached to either being wed or not according to the needs of the man and the woman. Perhaps this is a friendly admonition to those who are determined to live in a celibate state but have second thoughts about it. Rather than allow them to continue to struggle and "burn" in this state Paul says go ahead and get married, there is no second class citizen status connected to any of GOD's children. We are all made fully accepted in the BELOVED.

Paul unequivocally states what the principle of Law states: A woman is bound to her husband (and vice versa) in the institution of marriage as long as he (or she) lives (v.39) but if her husband is dead she is loosed from that law. He says exactly the same thing in Romans 7:2,3 where he is illustrating the believers relationship to the law. In order to properly understand what he is saying here and what he is saying there it is necessary to recognize that he is not teaching about marriage in Romans and he is not teaching about the law here. Now the Law was never "killed" or destroyed by CHRIST but fulfilled by HIM. Because of what CHRIST has done for us we have been set free from it or we have been divorced from the law even though the law is very much alive, yet to those who are in CHRIST JESUS it has no power to condemn or rule over us. So in essence it is dead insofar as we are concerned. *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."* (Rom 8:2) There is no doubt that the rigors of the law would bring us into condemnation each and every time we look on a woman to lust or call someone a fool yet we are not subject unto that "principle of law". Rather we serve CHRIST in spirit and truth and are concerned with more than outward conformity to a code of ethics or moral standard. This is not to say that we disregard the plain teaching of our LORD or that we are free merely to whatever seems good in our sight, far from it. Those who have been re-born by HIS SPIRIT have become acquainted with the spiritual nature of the Law and their own inability to live up to its high demands. They do not despise the Law because of their failure to keep it. Instead they magnify the righteousness of it and are made desirous of being conformed to CHRIST that they might love it even more purely and walk in its precepts more perfectly.

Our acquaintance with the "law" reminds us of our own weakness and inability to keep the law, and well it should for that is what the law is designed for. (see Rom.7:6-18). It is somewhat outside of the scope of our discussion here to go into detail on the "law" and the believer's relationship to it but a proper understanding of that is quite necessary to have a proper view of what Paul is saying here and elsewhere concerning the "law". I am quite convinced that the most faithful of marriage partners is no more an exact "keeper" of the law than the person who has a total disregard of it. "Law" knows no degrees, either one is in conformity to it or he is not. If that be the case then no one I know, leastwise myself, could be described as a "law keeper". Neither can I in good conscience put someone in bondage to it by selecting or citing particular statutes which are more important to be kept than others.

It appears to me that Paul is reiterating the exacting nature of the "law" in order to remind these Corinthians of the high esteem which should be given to the marriage bond. When a marriage bond is broken one cannot consider themselves as guiltless nor should they who have broken this bond feel that they are footloose and fancy free as if nothing ever occurred. Divorcing someone does not just cause the problem of sin to go away, nor might I add does it create it. He is not sanctioning divorce or trying to say it is alright any more than the LORD JESUS did in HIS teaching on the mount or to the Jews. GOD's people should not divorce their spouses, this is not an acceptable behavior among the saints of GOD nor should it be looked upon as such.

If the marriage bond is broken (v.40) then the believer who is left is free to marry, but they should give no consideration to taking a spouse who is not of the household of faith. Regardless of ones marital status, there are going to be problems which must be dealt with. As GOD enables HIS people let them walk according to the light and ability which they have, giving glory to HIS name and desiring to be obedient to their calling. Can any who are the called of the LORD gladly disobey HIS precepts or count HIS word to be of no value?

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Divorce is a blight upon society in general because it is contrary to the purpose of the institution of marriage. Remarriage is but another complication which is added to an already bad situation, especially when children are involved. If this is true for society in general how much more is it true among those who are to be the salt and light of the world, a city which is set upon a hill and cannot be hidden? So the question is should those who are Christians divorce and remarry? The answer is simply: No.

Having said that we should also say that they should not curse, gossip, seek revenge, drink too much, boast, fight, speak evil of someone, use time unwisely, complain, be unkind, think evil thoughts, lie, etc; and the list goes on. Are we making light of divorce and remarriage, absolutely not, anymore than John made light of sin in general when he said, *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* (1John 2:1). The goal for GOD's people is always to avoid sin of any type. Sin, which surrounds divorce and remarriage, is not sin of a different or more heinous variety. All sin is sin, and a disregard of a proper use of marriage is sin regardless of who does the disregarding or where it may occur.

The reality of life as a human being is that sin is present with us and sometimes we find ourselves overtaken in it. We are usually quite adept at making excuses for our own sin and seeing the sin of others as something we could avoid. GOD's born again children are no less prone to sin than those who are not born of the SPIRIT, yet they are given a tender heart which is pricked by it, as the HOLY GHOST reveals it for what it is. They are not in bondage to sin as are others. Our proneness to sin is not an excuse for it, nor can we hide behind the shield of GOD's predestinated purpose as making it allowable. How often the LORD has allowed us to pursue our folly in order that HE might humble us before HIS feet in due time! Were it not for HIS restraint upon us everyone of us would pursue the lusts of our flesh to our own ultimate destruction.

Sometimes even the children of GOD have pursued the destruction of their marriages or have engaged in sinful acts which demonstrated a disregard for the sanctity of them. Nothing can make

their actions acceptable or proper but they, themselves, can be and are broken in the LORD's time to see their folly and lament their error. They cannot go back from the place they are and correct the wrong they have done anymore than a person who spreads lies and gossip about someone to their hurt can effectively take those words back, but they can move forward leaning upon the only thing that can give them any sort of peace which is the covering of JESUS CHRIST. Unless we are ready to say that there are certain sins which even the blood of CHRIST cannot cover can we say that to be divorced and remarried is not forgivable or puts the believer in the position of being a continual lawbreaker in some sense that they are not already by nature.

I do not believe that such a position encourages divorce, among the true children of GOD, anymore than reminding GOD's people that *"there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in CHRIST"* does. However, it does set forth a way to deal with the problem which everyone will admit is epidemic, which is not hypocritical or judgmental. No greater or less issue should be made of divorce and remarriage than any other sin to which men are prone to fall into or have fallen into. This is most especially true when we give consideration to those who have been divorced and remarried before being brought out of darkness and into the light of CHRIST. They do not come into the family of GOD as the black sheep of the family anymore than any other transgressor. They do not have a black mark on their record which cannot be erased. All things are become new to those who are in CHRIST.

Some may ask, well how does all this apply to those who are to be set apart as elders since the scripture says, they are to be the "husband of one wife"? (see I Tim.3:2; Tit.1:6.)⁴ It seems that this question has taken on a life of its own in the minds of some. I have known of some who think it to be the single most important aspect of these qualifications mentioned in Paul's letters. I believe it is no less important than the rest but most assuredly not more so. It seems clear to me that the issue Paul is addressing here to Timothy and Titus is not one of whether or not a man has ever been married to more than one woman in his lifetime but whether or not he is currently married to more than one. Polygamy is not congruous with the teaching of Paul concerning the purpose of marriage so it would be difficult if not impossible for a man with multiple wives to proclaim that truth with any degree of credibility. The same could be said of a man who is notorious for divorce and remarriage or one who demonstrates little regard for the sanctity of marriage, being a womanizer. Not only that, but if we are going strictly by this letter aspect of the law, then an unmarried man could not be considered and some of Paul's teachings would have to be corrected. The issue here seems to be that one must have a proper consideration of marriage at the present time rather than what he may have done in the past. Paul does not mention the necessity for a man to be free from sexual indiscretions because it is implied in the fact that he is faithful to one woman ruling out that likelihood.

In my thinking, a stringent view on this "one wife" issue can sometimes border on hypocrisy when one is determined that to be the "husband of one wife" means that one has never in their lifetime been married to but one woman. The reason I say that is because this position seems to disregard one of the principles of marriage which is *"two shall become one flesh"*. Just before writing the seventh chapter of I Corinthians Paul declared *"What? know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh."* (1Cor. 6:16) The implication is that in the eyes of GOD such a union is the same as that which occurs in "marriage", in point of fact as he quotes that scripture. If we are going to be consistent in demanding that a man who is a prospective elder never have been divorced and remarried we must also inquire into his whole sexual history to be sure he has never had any sort of sexual relations with any woman other than

his wife in his lifetime or else we must ignore this basic tenet of “marriage” and dismiss his “sin” as something to be winked at.

I think the teaching of Paul gives weight to the concept that this qualification means that a man has a history of an enduring, faithful relationship with one woman. Divorce that occurred in the past is a matter which is over and done with. It cannot be considered a proper or desirable thing but it can be overcome by not returning to it. A man who has recently divorced his wife in order to wed another or who has a habitual practice of the same should not be considered for the office not simply because of his divorce and remarriage but because he has no regard to the sanctity of marriage and therefore no proper understanding of the relationship of CHRIST to HIS Church. Such a person would be demonstrating the likelihood that he is a stranger to grace.

The setting apart of elders is a function of the local assembly rather than some sort of sacerdotal bestowal of powers and ability by other men. Therefore it is incumbent upon each congregation to choose out those who meet the qualifications set forth in the scriptures and in regard to the subject of marriage be sure that they are men who believe in and exemplify the sanctity of marriage as well as its purpose and function. Local churches are well acquainted with the lifestyles of those who assemble with them so they are able to best judge the suitability of a man’s marital status more so than adhering to some decorum established to promote a certain discipline among groups of churches. When churches set up hierarchies and unions with other congregations they are likely to set apart elders as some sort of clerical class rather than as men who are simply called to be caretakers and servants of the flock of GOD in a certain location. Not only that but their relationships (with other congregations) which are more than just fellowship in the LORD become a power unto themselves and ultimately can cause division and strife where there would be none if each congregation tended to their own affairs without regard to anything other than a dependence on the LORD to guide them through HIS word.

What should a believer (especially the young, but not exclusively) do who desires to walk in obedience to the LORD but finds himself (or herself) divorced? If they have the ability (a gift) to remain in a celibate state without being tempted to sexual impurity they should not seek out a wife (or husband) just so they can be married. They should prayerfully consider their needs and desires before the LORD asking HIM for guidance. If they have a need to marry in order to avoid fornication then they should seek out a wife among those of like faith in JESUS CHRIST and need feel no condemnation in being remarried, not because they have done something commendable but because JESUS CHRIST has given HIMSELF for our covering and takes away our sin as far as the east is from the west and remembers it no more. Then they should apply themselves to being attentive and faithful unto the spouse which the LORD has provided as well as applying to HIM for mercy on a daily basis to walk in a proper consideration of the sanctity of marriage and service to HIM.

How should those who are believers regard those believers who have been divorced and remarried? My simple answer would be; with the same compassion and regard which the LORD exhibited to the woman who was taken in adultery. We do not have the right to condone any sin which HE does not condone (which is none) but then by the same token we do not have the right or commandment to condemn any of those children whom HE has received. Much heartache over this issue could be avoided by simply remembering this. GOD is quite able to deal with HIS children who have fallen into sin of any type and we can rest assured that all of those that belong to HIM will be chastened and corrected in HIS own time and manner. On the other side of the coin, I realize that the stringent views some have expressed about this matter are held primarily because they do not want anyone to be encouraged into thinking that divorce and remarriage is

perfectly acceptable among GOD's people just because it is perfectly acceptable to the world. We must never adopt the standards of the world but it is not necessary to single out one sin above others to make an issue of. If one characteristic ought to prevail among the LORD's people it would have to be "forgiveness", for he to whom much is forgiven, forgives much.

Some will no doubt view my ramblings on this subject to be designed to excuse and approve of divorce and remarriage. When they do so, they will demonstrate that they do not understand at all what I am saying or either that I have done a poor job of communicating my thoughts. Divorce should be avoided at practically all costs but when it cannot be (or even when it has not been) then there are remedies for the sons of GOD wherein they do not have to live the rest of their days under a dark cloud with the "scarlet letter" upon their foreheads as though they are second class believers who now must bear the burden of their sin. Life as a child of GOD is not a bed of roses in the best of situations; when divorce and remarriage enter that picture those difficulties will be multiplied many times.

None who have remained true and faithful to their spouses but have departed from the LORD have been obedient to the LORD. Neither, I might add, have any of those who have departed from their spouses while paying lip service to believing the truth of GOD been so. True obedience is found in those who know the source from which all true obedience comes and have bowed their knees to HIS lordship and sought HIS mercy as those who know they shall perish without it. Those who have a clear understanding of CHRIST's love for HIS church and her devotion to HIM can see the love which a husband must have for his wife and the devotion and obedience that a wife must demonstrate to her husband. This is the example of a perfect marriage. All marriages must stand or fall as they are compared to this.

It is my sincere hope that these thoughts, as random as they may seem to some, might be of profit and help to the little children of the LORD's Kingdom. I also say to all who read these comments and find some offense herein, it has not been my intention to inflict such except insofar as the truth of the LORD might bring such by the application of it by HIS SPIRIT into whose hands I commit this short treatise on a very momentous subject. Any truth spoken herein must surely be attributed to HIM who is the TRUTH. Any error is solely due to my own ignorance. May our LORD JESUS CHRIST be praised!
mam