

Let us read together 2 Cor. 6,14-18: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Thus far from the Word of God.

The subject in hand is not new to us as representatives of M. B. Churches. It has been under consideration repeatedly in our local congregations; it has frequently found its way into the deliberation room of our Reference and Counsel and is not a stranger at all to our convention floors.

Whatever the motive, may I now invite you to look at the subject before us as objectively as we possibly can, and claim the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth." Jn. 16,13a.

- I. Biblical Precepts Concerning Marriage of Believers with Nonbelievers
- II. Biblical Principles Governing Marriage of Believers with Nonbelievers
- III. Biblical Portrayals of Marriages of Believers with Nonbelievers
- IV. Biblical Process of Disciplinary Action in Case of Marriage

I. Biblical Precepts Concerning Marriage of Believers with Nonbelievers

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1. In the Old Testament we find this command given to the children of Israel: "And I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods." Ex. 23,31-32. This precept is being enlarged upon in the following passages: "Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and thou take of their daughters unto thy sons and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods." Ex. 34,15-16. We should take note at once of the close connection between marriage and worship- marriage of a strange partner leads to worship of strange gods. A fuller statement of the precept is found in Deut. 7,1-3: "When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son." This explicit command is being reiterated in Old Testament passages such as: Josh. 23,12-13; Ezra 9,10-13; Neh. 13,27 and others.

It is to be observed that not nearly as many direct references to this subject are given

2. in the New Testament. Is this because the believers of the New Testament have the benefit of the O. T. Scriptures, and that the believer of the New T. finds himself under the law of the Spirit of Life? Rom. 8. However, there are some indirect references given e.g., "She is at liberty to marry whom she will, only in the Lord" 1.Cor. 7,39 In marriage, as in all else, the Christian must be mindful that he acts as a member of the body of Christ. A marriage of a believer with a nonbeliever is not "in the Lord", it is in the flesh, it is contrary to the express precepts of God's Word of both the Old and the New Testaments. If marrying a nonbeliever is contrary to the commandments of the Lord, then we conclude that marrying a nonbeliever is sin in the sight of God. For sin is the transgression of the law, whether it be the letter of the law or the law of the Spirit of life.

It could have been comparatively easy for the children of Israel to be aware of the line of demarkation between them and the Gentiles. They had been hedged in by God Himself with a culture and a creed all of their very own. They had received the light of divine revelation and the sign of circumcision which separated them from all the surrounding heathen nations, together with other prerogatives as found in Rom. 3,1-2 and 9,3-4.

It is much more difficult for persons of a Russian Baptist and Greek-Orthodox background, for both of these have the same cultural background, provided they live in the same country and province; both fear the same God with that peculiar Russian piety. Those of you who are following the memoirs of Brother and professor W. Ph. Marzinkowsky, Mt. Carmel, Palestine, currently published in "Die Mennonitische Rundschau", will have observed how deeply the roots of the faith of this Russian, evangelical believer are grounded in the Greek-Orthodox creed. For a person of like background it would be rather hard to

grasp that intermarriage between these two faiths, if one party were unsaved, would constitute a breach of the law of God.

The same would apply to a person of Mennonite or M. B. background. If, for example, an unsaved girl of M. B. background were to marry a true believer of some other branch of Mennonite faith, this would also be a transgression of the law in the sight of God. If, on the other hand, a born again believer of the M. B. congregation marries a man of Mennonite background who has not been born again, this too is transgressing the precepts of Scripture. Our common culture and creed make it very difficult for anxious mothers and young lovers to see the difference. We need to remind ourselves again and again that a person who has been born again belongs to a different world than the one who is not born again, regardless of common Mennonite "Zwieback" background.

This then is the biblical precept: The saints are not to intermarry with the unsaved, believer with a nonbeliever, even though he or she may not be unbelievers in the strict sense of the word.

There are but few direct references on marriage of the believer with a nonbeliever, but there are quite a number of

II. Biblical Principles Governing Marriage of Believers with Nonbelievers

1. The Biblical principle of God's provision in marriage which makes it possible to avoid a wrong choice. As an illustration of this principle we may look to the very first marriage on record. "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' (a helper fit for him- R.S.V.) And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her to the man." Gen. 2,18.21-22. This is indeed divine provision. Father Isaac asked his son Jacob the heart-searching question: "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly my son?" And he said, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Gen. 27,20. That was not true. Not the Lord God, but Jacob's mother had brought it to him. This is a perfect picture of a hasty marriage of a son with a nonbeliever. It is not true for him to say that God has brought her to him, for very often, as in the case of Jacob, the mother is to blame. God makes the right provision - "a helper fit for him" or suited to him. The Lord God will bring a believer to the believer, and not a nonbeliever. If in the sovereignty of the Lord's providential working He has chosen for a girl to lead a single life, He will even then provide the possibility of a truly happy and full life for her. It is much better to live a single life with God than a married life with an ungodly man.

Let us furthermore look at

2. the Biblical principle of God's unerring leading which renders marriages of believers with nonbelievers inexcusable. He has said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Psa. 32,8. If young people and adults would only learn to pray, "Teach me to do thy will; for Thou art my God....." Psa. 143,10. One of the primary lessons which the beautiful story of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, recorded in Gen. 24, conveys, is that of God's unerring guidance of the believer in the matter of marriage. Our God will definitely guide any young person to the right person, provided that we patiently trust Him for it.

Rebekah lacked patience in her concern for Jacob's blessing.

Consider with me, moreover, marriage of the believer with a non-believer in the light of

3. the biblical principle of common interest between two candidates for marriage. Amos, the practical man from the country side, the herdman, says concerning this biblical principle, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3,3. The born again believer has the mind of Christ. His interests are directed towards spiritual values, whereas the nonbeliever's interests lie in the earthly, in the natural, or even in the carnal realm. As was mentioned above, the believer and the nonbeliever are citizens of two different worlds. As the bird has its element in the sunlit sky; as the fish has its element in the fresh waters of the lake, even so the worm has its element in the darkness of the dirt. A nonbeliever may promise the believer, and even keep that promise, that he will go to church with her, but his interest is not there. How many have broken such and other promises. The believer should have never expected the nonbeliever to adhere to such promises contrary to nature. Since the sphere of interest between such persons is as far apart as the heaven is above the earth, we conclude with Amos that it is not possible for these two to walk together in God-pleasing harmony.

Another principle of the Bible concerning marriage of believers with nonbelievers is

4. the principle of union and fellowship. The text read at the outset of this paper says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. 6,14 "Unequally yoked" is a metaphor derived from Deut. 22,10 which reads, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together." This is only one metaphor of many in the Old Testament which shows that "God has made distinction in nature, and these are not to be confounded by mixing of things distinct. The ox and the ass were chiefly used in husbandry; but as they were of different size and strength, it was not only fitting that they should not be yoked to the same plough, but it might be cruel so to yoke them." (Pulpit Commentary) These metaphors have a distinct spiritual application for us living in the era of a new spiritual economy. There is no closer yoke than that of the bond of marriage. "... and the two shall be one flesh". Eph. 5,31 b. To secure real happiness and harmony the fellowship between husband and wife reaches far beyond the realm of physical union. "The fellowship of k i n d - r e d m i n d s is like to that above", we sing. When the physical, the emotional, the mental and the spiritual blend into a perfect whole, you have real fellowship. This union and fellowship is so beautiful and real that Paul uses it to show forth the relationship of Christ to the believer- the Church. Eph. 5,32 This can only be attained on the basis that both partners of the marriage relationship are genuine believers in Jesus Christ. This union finds expression in the things of God by fellowshiping around His Word and in prayer and by giving of our means to the extension of the kingdom. Denied this fellowship the believing partner of the marriage relationship will eventually starve to spiritual death.

And again there is

5. The biblical principle of separation. "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not

the unclean thing....." The principle of separation goes right back to the first pages of Holy Writ when God divided the light from the darkness. Gen. 1,4b. The word "divide" occurs repeatedly in the Creation account which points to the truth of redemption in creation. The believer is sanctified, set aside, divided, by the will of Jesus Christ, through the offering of His body once for all. Hebr. 10,10. Initially, this took place at the time of our conversion, and this principle of separation is to be maintained throughout our earthly journey. The believer is organically joined to His Lord, who is the head of the body of the church. If then the believer joins hands with a nonbeliever in marriage, he returns to one from whom he had been set aside by the Holy Spirit. "No one can serve two masters", the Master has said, "for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other....." Mt. 6,24. Before leaving the divine precepts and principles of the law of marriage, it might be in place to point out some apparent exceptions to the rule:

We must, of course, allow for such mixed marriages before the giving of the law, even though we have evidence in Scripture that saints before the giving of the law were already being governed by the principles of divine law.

a. Moses, for example, married an Ethiopian woman. Ex. 2,21; Numbers 12,1. He married Zipporah, the daughter of the priest of the Midianites. This became a bone of contention later on in Moses' life. Numbers 12. But in a sense Moses was justified in marrying her because she was an offspring of the holy seed. In Gen. 25,1-2 we learn that the Midianites were the offspring of Abraham through his wife Keturah. From what information we can gather of the marriage of Moses it would seem that it was far from ideal. His wife was disgusted at the Jewish rite of circumcision when she was forced to circumcise her son, a duty which had been neglected by Moses when the children were small. She said on that occasion, "Surely a bloody husband art thou to me", and repeated, "A bloody husband thou art because of the circumcision." Ex. 4, 24-26. Is it any wonder then that she returned to her father's home until Moses under God had performed the great mission of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt. When her father later on brought her and the children to Moses in the wilderness, we find that Moses kissed his father-in-law (Ex. 18,7), but nothing is said of the joy of meeting his family. So it would appear that Moses' choice was not a happy one. This exception proves the rule which God has laid down for His people.

Another exception is

b. Joseph. We would say that he had no other choice. Since this was before the giving of the law, and since we do not find that the Scriptures censure him for it, we shall leave it at that.

Then there are some exceptions which occurred after the giving of the law. There is the marriage of

a. Samson. He married a Philistine at Timnath. His parents did not approve of this mixed marriage, but the verdict of the writer of the record is, "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines." Judges 14,4

Furthermore, there is the marriage of

b. Boaz and Ruth, recorded in the book of Ruth. However, she had come to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. Ruth 2, 12. It was also God's gracious providential working that Ruth should become

a link in the lineage of our Lord. Ruth 4,22 and Mt. 1,5. These are some of the exceptions which prove the rule that according to God's precepts and principles there was to be no intermarriage between believer and a nonbeliever.

Having considered the biblical precepts and principles governing the marriage of believers with nonbelievers, we want to further look at some illustrations or

III. Biblical Portrayals of Marriages of Believers with Nonbelievers

A very early illustration of what it means when a believer marries a nonbeliever is found in Gen. 6 concerning

1. The sons of God who came in unto the daughters of men. We read of them, "...the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose..... and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." Gen. 6,2-4 "Mighty men" perhaps means mighty in authority. Calvin comments, "...the first nobility of the world, honourable robbers, who boasted of their wickedness." Whatever our interpretation of "the sons of God", whether they were angels or saints on earth, the result was that of a wicked generation. This is the first recorded violation of the marriage act of God.

And as we march on along the corridors of time we come upon the illustration of

2. Abraham who fell into the folly of marrying Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of Sarai. His going into Hagar was clearly contrary to God's plan and purpose for Abraham. The consequences of his folly are with us to this very day. The enmity between Ishmael and Isaac, the Arabic and Jewish worlds has never ceased to flare up from time to time. Whenever God's precepts, principles, plans and purposes in marriage are thwarted it genders untold sin, strife and sadness.

If Abraham, the father of the faithful, fell into such folly, what could we expect of his great-grandson

3. Esau, who at the age of forty married Judith, the daughter of Beeri, the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon, the Hittite. Gen. 26,34-35. Later on, upon the occasion of the instruction given by Isaac to his son Jacob, not to marry a wife of the daughters of Canaan (Gen.28,1), "Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son.... to be his wife." Gen. 28,8-9. This latter marriage was apparently an appeasement policy for having married the daughters of the Hittites. For of his first two wives we read that they were a g r i e f o f m i n d unto Isaac and to Rebekah. This is indeed a sad commentary upon the marriage of one who at least nominally belonged to the household of faith. How often has this been repeated in the history of the Christian church that the nonbelieving sons= and daughters-in-law were nothing but a grief to their parents.

The most effective illustration of all is perhaps that of

4. Solomon with his many strange wives. It is one of those strange paradoxes of history that the wisest man who traversed the sands of earth should serve as an illustration of such sad folly.

He had the full advantage of the revelation of the will of God concerning marriage; he was well versed in the precepts of the law and acquainted with the principles laid down by the Lord God of Israel. And there were special precepts in the law concerning the conduct of a future King in Israel. Deut. 17,14-18. The king was not to multiply horses to himself- this he did; he was not to multiply wives to himself- and this he did! and that from among the heathen nations. 1 Kings 11,1-3. Neither was he to multiply silver and gold- which again he did! "Solomon loved many strange women.... and his wives turned away his heart." This was the very sin of which the Lord had repeatedly warned His people through Moses, the lawgiver. Let us take heed to these portrayals of Scripture lest we fall into their negative example. Let us sum up the warning contained in the above portrayals in the words of Tennyson:

"Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay
As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down!"

We have by now spent considerable time on the precepts, principles and portrayals of marriages of believers with nonbelievers. At a brief session of the Reference and Counsel of the Can. Conference at Corn, Oklahoma, it was decided by this body that my main emphasis should be on the aspect of the discipline of believers who marry a nonbeliever. Any disciplinary action, however, must be firmly rooted in the Word of God. Therefore I found it to be incumbent upon me to deal with the foregoing which may now serve as a firm basis from which we may discuss our last concern, viz., the

IV. Biblical Process of Disciplinary Action in Case of a Marriage of a Believer with a Nonbeliever.

1. Some examples of disciplinary measures employed in this respect in the Old Testament. Let us first of all look at

1) the example of Nehemiah. When during Nehemiah's time of reform Israel intermarried with heathen nations round about, the servant of the Lord reacted violently. It wrought in him "indignation".... vehement desire, ... zeal, ... revenge," that his countrymen might "be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7,11). This intermarriage had left its undesirable mark on the children. "Their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." Neh. 13,24. Something similar occurs in a home today when a believer marries a nonbeliever. Their children acquire part of the language of the unbelieving father and part of the language of a believing mother. As Nehemiah proceeds to disciplinary measures we find that he contended with the offenders; he cursed or reviled them; he smote certain of them; he even plucked off their hair; he exiled the grandson of a high priest (13,28), and made the offenders swear after him that they would not do this again. Neh. 13,25. Whether or not these measures were in keeping with Old Testament ethics, I am not prepared to state, but they are certainly not in line with New Testament procedures in discipline. However, these severe measures are a strong indication of the severity of the crime committed. If intermarriage under the old economy was so wrong in the sight of God, what must it be to Him under the new economy in which we enjoy the benefits of God's full revelation.

2) Another example is that of Ezra's measures of discipline. Ezra 9-10. We might say that his measures were more "evangelical." The difference may be explained to some extent in their differing personalities as well as in their respective offices of service. Ezra was a great Bible teacher which no doubt had had a mellowing effect upon his character development; Nehemiah was a governor, a man of rules and regulations.

Upon learning that the people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites had not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations; that they had taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed had mingled themselves with the people of those lands, and that the princes and rulers had been chief in this trespass he reacted in the following manner: He rent his garment and his mantle as a sign of deep grief; he plucked off the hair of his head and his beard (not the hair of the offenders as Nehemiah did later), and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice. He had a cooling off period, which Nehemiah failed to observe. At the evening sacrifice he rose up from his heaviness, and fell on his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord. He poured out his heart before God. We do not have time to read his prayer, but all along in the course of it he identifies himself with the sins of his people. Blushing for shame he confesses, ".... for we have forsaken Thy commandments." Can we learn something from Ezra for New Testament disciplinary action? How does a mixed marriage affect us in our day? Are we as deeply grieved as he was? Or do we assume the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees who brought a guilty woman before the Lord saying in so many words, "Aha! we caught this offender in the very act!" They were ready to meet out the punishment prescribed by the law. Do we possess and practice the patience of Ezra? Has it ever occurred to us that that marriage of the believer with a nonbeliever could have been the result of my sin of neglect in instruction? Have we learned to talk to God about these intermarriages as Ezra talked to Him in his day? It follows, that our process of disciplinary action would be radically changed if we were possessed by an Ezra-like spirit. When Ezra had finished his confession before God, there came the encouragement from a member of the congregation for definite action. Ezra 10,2. It is of utmost importance that the congregation, rather than discourage the leadership, encourage the same to take action in the realm of discipline. There is a morbid hesitancy evident in our midst today when it comes to disciplinary action.

The people were called together. Confession was made, and they separated themselves from the people of the land and from the strange wives. Ezra 10. These measures of separating the wives from their unlawful husbands and the children would hardly be applicable today. But it must be re-iterated that the severe disciplinary action in the O.Testament conveys to us the severity of the offence.

At last we are ready to consider

2. the process of disciplinary action in the New Testament in our

1) Proper prerequisites in the church are essential for whole^{day} some disciplinary action. Part of the great commission reads, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Mt.28, 19a. Hans Legiehn in his "Biblische Glaubenslehre" aptly points out that whenever and where-ever there is no care (Pflege) of the members of the church, discipline is not possible or justified. If the church has failed to teach its members to faithfully observe whatsoever the

Lord has commanded; if the church has failed to encourage and provoke one another to love (2 Thess. 1,3-4; Hebr. 10,24); if the church has neglected to exhort and to help those overtaken by a fault (1 Thess. 5, 14; Gal. 6,1) then we ought to ask ourselves seriously: do we have a right to excommunicate? But the church should not stop there. It ought to repent of its neglect, and then proceed with proper disciplinary measures.

a. Through proper instruction and care of the members of the church many evils could be prevented. We are all agreed that prevention is to be preferred to punishment. The old saying has it, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." There are young believers who are ignorant of the fact that a believer is not to marry a nonbeliever. If this ignorance has not been met with proper instruction, can we still speak of "automatic excommunication"? ("wenn jemand einen Unbekehrten heiratet, der ist automatisch ausgeschlossen"). I do not think that when our denomination first introduced the fact of automatic excommunication that our Brethren meant it in the sense to which it has been misconstrued down through the years. Some look upon automatic excommunication as an easy way out of trouble in church discipline. "If a believer marries a nonbeliever he is thereby excommunicating himself from the church- period! He is out automatically! And we do not have to bother with him." Now, my dear Brethren, this is definitely a very wrong attitude to assume.

We need to remember that all our disciplinary actions are to be redemptive. We want to help the erring member to find his way back into fellowship with God and with the church. "Helfet ihm wieder zurecht" is the scriptural injunction. It is to be treatment in a hospital, and not in the halls of judgment. A man in a life boat rowed up to another man drowning in the cold waters of a lake. When he was close enough to him he handed him the oar to pull him out of the water. The operation failed repeatedly until the drowning man in desperation cried out, "Hand me the warm end of the oar", for the other end was glossed over with ice. It would seem to me that automatic excommunication is handing the brother the icy end of the oar.

In the light of the above considerations what are

2) some of the steps of procedure in disciplinary action.

a. there is to be personal admonition to the end of restoring a brother overtaken in a fault. Gal. 6,1; Mt. 18,15. "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." This should not wait till the marriage has taken place, but rather as soon as we notice that there is a friendship developing between a believer and a nonbeliever toward marriage. Caught in time many a young person could no doubt be dissuaded from his intentions.

If the attempt in personal advice and admonition fails

b. "take with thee one or two more", Matth. 18,16. When two or three deal with the offender, there is the possibility of becoming beligerent which should by all means be avoided. With Paul we must always be beseeching them, not commanding, demanding or even threatening them with excommunication. The offender will invariably resent the slightest hint of force or threat, but will usually be open for a beseeching approach.

When such a joint effort breaks down

c. "tell it to the church". Mt. 18,17. The church is the last

court of appeal. She takes the case into earnest prayer, and subsequently decides on the course of action. In some cases it might prove to be the proper course to set the offender aside, withholding from him the right of fellowshiping around the Lord's table, even before excommunication. If the person in question is a genuinely born again believer, he will sense acutely the loss of such fellowship, and it may lead to repentance.

Then, if he fails to hear the church

d. "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Mt. 18, 17 Here is where excommunication comes in, as the following verses clearly point out. One who walks disorderly, and has been duly admonished we are not to have company with "until he is ashamed of himself" (2 Thess. 3, 14 New Engl. Bible). Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. As long as he is on the admonishing list, we are to consider him a Brother, but when all the above steps have been taken, and the offender fails to respond, then "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and as a publican". "Regard him as no longer a brother Christian, but as one "without"- as the Jews did Gentiles and publicans", (Jamieson, Faucet and Brown).

Should the excommunication take place before or after the marriage? Personally I do not see why the excommunication should wait until the marriage has taken place. If the person has been duly warned and dealt with in a brotherly spirit, and obstinately refuses to respond, the course is open for action. If, however, the church has neglected its duties, it is not justified to proceed with excommunication even right after the marriage. The party should be dealt with to help him to see his wrong. It should always be our aim to lead the offender to repentance. If the person shows genuine fruits of repentance, it would seem to me that we could dispense with the excommunication altogether. The person in question could be put on a period of probation, and if the repentance and the fellowship prove to be genuine, he could be restored to the full privileges of church membership. If the one concerned shows no signs of repentance, the church would have no other choice but to proceed with the excommunication. Let it be clearly understood, though, that every case should be considered individually and carefully on its own merits or demerits.

A closing question: Are we justified, on the basis of Scripture, to excommunicate at all in case of a marriage of a believer with a non-believer? We have clearly seen in the foregoing that the intermarriage of a believer with a nonbeliever is a transgression of the precepts of God. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." 1 Cor. 5, 6b-7a. "Put away from yourself that wicked person," Paul writes to the Corinthians. Now we realize that a person marrying a nonbeliever could not be compared with that "wicked person" in 1 Cor. 5, and yet if a person refuses to repent and to mend his ways after due instruction and admonition, is it not wickedness to persist in such an attitude?

The argument has often been put forward that we should not excommunicate such believers on the basis that so few of them ever find their way back into the fold. To that we might answer that we may leave the consequences of excommunication in the hands of Him in whose name the excommunication has been carried out. Very often, especially in our day of shallow conversions, it occurs that the excommunicated ones had never been born again. It is clear that in such cases the excommuni-

cation will not work, but it is also clear that such nonbelievers have no place in the congregation of the righteous.

It may be helpful to quote from the "Complete Writings" of Menno Simons page 1041, on this issue. The quotation is taken from the so-called Wismar Articles and reads, "In the first place we hold concerning those who marry outside the congregation, that these persons shall be put out of the congregation and avoided until they manifest a proper Christian life before God and the Brethren". Read also beginning on page 413 in the same book on Menno's view on excommunication.

"And the Lord give thee understanding in all things!" 2 Tim. 2,7b.

Amen!