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REMARRIAGE OF DIVORCED IN LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

To write on remarriage of divorced people is a most difficult and unpleasant assignment. The experiences described by those words contradict so clearly the highest ideals of God in marriage life; they cut so deeply into human relationships and involve so completely the whole human personality and numerous social ties that objective insight and evaluation is nigh impossible and, finally, they have caused almost endless theological and ecclesiological debate among Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants - each asserting to have the final and absolute biblical answer. We are inclined to believe that Rashdall is not far from the truth when he writes:

"The difficulty which we experience in determining what our Lord actually taught on this matter (divorce) impressively illustrates the absolute impossibility of basing detailed rules for the guidance of modern life upon isolated sayings of Christ. That the ideal is permanent monogamous marriage is undoubtedly the principle which Jesus taught; and the ideal still appeals to all the higher ethical feeling of our time. By what detailed enactments the ideal may best be promoted, which is the less of two evils when the ideal has been violated and made impossible, is a question which must be settled by the moral consciousness, the experience, the practical judgment of the present" (Rashdall, Convenience and Christ, Page 106).

This may seem like ethical relativism. Could it be ethical relevance? We shall not debate the point. In any case it should warn us of overconfidence in absoluteness or finality in our interpretation and application. We must proceed with caution, yet with firmness and unity according to the light and wisdom the Lord grants unto us. This is not the time for hesitance and indefiniteness. Let us be open minded but not open ended.

A Biblical Order

With these preliminary remarks we turn our attention to a biblical order which could help us in delineating our subject.

It is well to remember that the Bible deals both with divine ideals for man and society as well as with the stark human and sinful realities of

life which are operating on a subideal level. The first are re-enforced by promises and commands, the latter are tolerated in silence (suffered, not commanded) or curbed by legislation in order to thwart man in his sinful passions and practices and keep them within certain bounds. We must therefore carefully study the silence and the negative legislation in matters of subideal behavior.

#### The Divine Ideal of Marriage.

It can hardly be doubted that the divine ideal for marriage includes at least the following factors as authoritatively taught in Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

1. Monogamous marriage, (one man and one woman). Note the words of Christ expounding the original ideal: "For this cause shall a man (singular) leave ... and shall cleave to his wife (singular) and they twain shall be one flesh" (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8).
2. The permanency of marriage, - leave ... and cleave unto ...
3. Marriage is for most intimate fellowship and relationship in which personality finds its satisfaction and fulfilment - they shall be one flesh.
4. Marriage is for mutual supplementation and complementation as expressed in the concept "helpmeet," or "answering to." Note that separation is not envisaged by death nor by sin. Do not conclude, however, that marriage is an eternal institution.

#### The Possibility of the Disruption of the Divine Ideal

That this divine ideal can be modified and even shattered by sinful man is clear from the pages of Holy Writ. Sinful man can and does live on a subideal level. Thus the practice of polygamy is a matter of biblical record and divorce and remarriage was suffered to take place in O. T. times under specific legal restriction and according to legal proceedings.

These are never commanded or divinely endorsed. They are tolerated. This must be emphasized. They are not according to the blessed will and wise plan of God. They will always be accompanied by deep scars, untold inward sufferings and outward disruptions no matter what the causes and circumstances may be.

However, to say that the divine ideal cannot be completely disrupted and scuttled is to go not only beyond the realities of history and life but also beyond the words of Christ Himself. He specifically tells us: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The words "let not man put asunder" most assuredly imply the possibility of man disrupting a divinely instituted union. If it is objected that Christ does not here use the word for divorce, I merely reply that the two expressions "joined together" and "put asunder" are in direct antithesis. Whatever the one means the other reverses. If joining together results in one flesh, putting asunder is the undoing of this oneness of flesh. Man in his sinfulness and wickedness can disrupt and shatter the divine ideal. Such power God has bestowed upon man.

#### Causes which Disrupt the Divine Ideal.

The Bible lists two specific causes which disrupt the divine ideal and undo the marriage union. These are the grave sins of fornication (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9) and wilful desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15). It must be observed, however, that in neither case is divorce commanded nor is it automatic. The ideal is that it should not take place. Thus no specific directions are given in case it does come about.

The Bible also admits that the marriage union may be disrupted for other reasons, but it does not spell them out nor does it deal with them in a similar manner (Mark 10:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11). Nevertheless they are real.

Let us then first establish the sad fact of the actual disruption of the marriage union which makes divorce legitimate to the degree that no divine condemnation rests upon the act. This will cast some light on the problem of remarriage of divorced persons. For this we turn to Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16.

Matthew 5:32

From the outset, I declare that in loyalty to the manuscripts, I reject any ideal of interpolation of the exception clause in either Matthew 5:32 or 19:9. There is no justification for such a position, though there may be some textual question regarding the last part of Matthew 19:9 "and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." However, since the same words are found in 5:32 the fact of these words still stands.

I also decisively reject the interpretation that Christ's words here spoken are applicable to the Jews only whose perverted ideas regarding divorce He sought to correct by a true interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. (W. Fisher-Hunter in the Divorce Problem, see Jewish Encyclopedia - Hillel and Shammai dispute on divorce). If such a position were to be taken, consistency would compel me to relegate the whole "Sermon on the Mount" to the Jews. While this could save us many social inconveniences it also would rob us of the highest ideals of Christian ethics and discipleship. The "but I say unto you" speaks eternal and abiding truth and establishes principles applicable for all ages.

A third problem revolves around the words "fornication" (porneia) and "adultery" (moxeia). It is claimed that the former refers to sexual sin committed before marriage while the latter describes unfaithfulness and illicit sexual intercourse subsequent to marriage and that only the former allows divorce.

What saith the Scriptures? While there are passages in which there may be such distinction and both words are mentioned as separate sins, the distinction does not stand up under the general tenor of the Bible especially the N. T.

The N. T. seems quite consistent that adultery donotes unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another, (Luke 18:11; 1 Cor. 6:9; John 8:3; Mat. 13:4). Such uniformity, however, cannot be maintained in relation to fornication as the following passages indicate: John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13,18; 7:2; 2 Cor. 13:21; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:21; 9:21; 21:8. (Note: Gal. 5:19 "The word adultery is not in the best Greek texts hence the reason for its omission in the translation" -Kenneth S. Wuest in Word Studies, Galations 1, p. 157. The Epistle to the Galations by C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine does not list adultery but only fornication, uncleanness and lasciviousness and draws our attention to the fact that these three words are found together again in 2 Cor. 12:21, p. 282. Vine further comments on Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 -fornication stands for, or includes, adultery --Expository Dictionary of N. T. Words, Vol. II, p. 125). The distinction in the O. T. is also not absolute. To be dogmatic and distinguish sharply between the two terms, applying one only to pre-nuptial and the other to post-nuptial illicit sexual behaviour cannot be maintained biblically.

Yet, a distinction between fornication and adultery seems to be justifiable. Adultery, seemingly, refers more to specific post-nuptial acts of sexual sins though not necessarily so (compare Matthew 5:28) while fornication is first, a general term describing all manner of illicit sexual behavior including adultery and secondly, it refers more to a habitual life given to such practices as we commonly denote by whoredom, prostitution, or a life with an individual other than the marriage partner. (Note: to

identify fornication with nakedness (Heb. ervan) of Deut. 24:1, cannot be substantiated by a word study, or word usage in the Bible nor Jewish and Christian interpretation.)

Matthew 19:1-9

While the context of Matthew 19:9 differs from 5:32, a word study of the passage would not cast additional light on the question of the legitimacy of divorce because of fornication.

Conclusion

From these passages I am compelled to draw the woeful conclusion that the sin of fornication is of such devastating nature that it does disrupt the most sacred and deepest human relationship and shatters the marriage bond. To say less is to think less of the abominable sin of fornication than Christ made the sin to be. We shall return to the passage in Matthew later to continue the question of re-marriage.

I Cor. 7:1-15

First Corinthians Chapter 7 is the major position document in Paul's writings relating to our subject and problem and deserves careful consideration. It is important to note the general setting of our passage:

The church of Corinth had submitted a threefold problem to Paul -

1. Matters relating to marriage;
2. Concerning things offered to idols;
3. Concerning spiritual gifts;

Our chapter is the answer to problem number one - Paul outlines four guiding principles:

Principle One

Under prevailing circumstances the unmarried state may have its advantages but it is surrounded by grievous dangers. Marriage is not the lesser of two evils but a safe-guard against evil. There is no implication here that the celibate state is holier than the married, it is a more

prevarious position, however (1 Cor. 7:1-9).

Principle Two

The ideal of God is that husband and wife be not separated, (not to be put asunder). If separation takes place, two ways are open to the separated:

1. Let her remain unmarried; - separation without remarriage.
2. Let her be reconciled to her husband, -reconciliation, (7:10,11).

Principle Three

The believer (husband or wife) has no right to divorce the unbeliever upon religious grounds. Marriage bonds concluded before conversions must not be disturbed by the Christian after conversion because of being unequally yoked together, (7:12-14). The Christian may not initiate separation on the basis of faith or unfaith.

Principle Four

If the unbelieving marriage partner insists on separation "let him depart", is Paul's permissive imperative. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.

The first three principles present little difficulty as far as interpretation is concerned. This is not so with principle four. Serious differences exist in the interpretation of verse 15. Three points need to be clarified -

First, we need to consider the words of Paul: "but to the rest speak I, not the Lord" (12).

Second, we need to investigate the words "let him depart."

Third, we must find the meaning of "not under bondage."

The Apostolic Verdict

We have the apostolic verdict as to its authority, its content and its result.

Its Authority

The change from "not I, but the Lord" v.10 to "I, not the Lord" v.12 is most significant though frequently overlooked. Only here is it found in this form in all of Paul's writings and must be carefully noted. It points out the consciousness within Paul that the problem stated in verses 10 and 11 is authoritatively dealt with by the Lord. No doubt the apostle is referring to Christ's teaching on divorce as found in the tradition of the church at that time and later recorded in the gospels. However, the problem as stated in verses 12-15 has not been dealt with before. Here Paul hands down an authoritative apostolic verdict in relation not to legal divorce (putting away) but irresponsible desertion (going away) due to religious antagonism and intolerance. He speaks it as a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:25).

Its Content

"Let him depart" is the apostolic verdict. If the unbelieving marriage partner separates himself from the believing marriage partner, the believer has neither a right to force the unbelieving partner to stay nor to hinder him in proceedings of separation. The phrase "let him depart", is rather emphatic. What all is involved in this one Greek word? We shall examine this later.

Its Results

Not under bondage is the result of such separation for the believer. It is this statement as the previous one that causes serious difficulty. Here authorities divide into several camps. Does the apostle mean that wilful desertion and disruption constitutes a severing of marriage bonds so completely that the marriage vows have been cancelled out and that the innocent partner is constituted a single, unmarried individual, free from marriage commitments and responsibilities? In simple words, does wilful desertion equal divorce in results? Contextually this seems to be the

unmistakable meaning. Before we give our reasons why we believe so, let us look at some objections.

Two objections are raised against such a conclusion:

1. It is objected that such a statement by the apostle would be a contradiction to the plain teaching of Christ.

To this objection, I reply, first, that Paul was fully conscious of the fact that he was going beyond, but not contrary to His Master. Because of this he does not fall back upon the words and teaching of Christ but upon his own apostolic authority (compare again "not I, but the Lord," v. 10, and "I, not the Lord, v. 12). It should be noted that Paul is most careful in delineating authority in this chapter. He speaks by "I command yet not I, but the Lord," thus specifically referring to the teaching ministry and authority of Christ. Again, he speaks in his own apostolic authority knowing that he has a command of the Lord. This includes our passage. Finally he speaks as "my judgment" or opinion, as divinely illumined prudence teaches him. Paul, thus is aware when he is within tradition (as teaching of Christ), revelation (which certainly is progressive though never in conflict) and illumination. While the former are absolute, the latter is conditioned by time and culture.

Second, Christ deals with the question of "putting away." Paul, again, speaks about wilful desertion on the part of an unbeliever. There is a great difference between putting away and irresponsible going away.

Third, there is a difference in the tone and mood Paul uses in verses 10 and 11 where he deals with the marriage relationship of believers and the injunctions of verse 15 when wilful desertion is considered. In the first it is an apostolic charge, a command "Let not the wife depart ...

let not the husband put away ... with a double imperative in between "let her remain unmarried ... let her be reconciled." In the second instance it is the permissive imperative ... let him depart (let him be gone) not under bondage in such cases.

Paul is not contradicting his Master. He is declaring a principle to regulate unprecedented cases in the life of the church among the Gentiles as he had to do in many other instances.

2. The second objection is raised on the basis of toning down the real meaning of "let him depart" or "not under bondage". W. Fisher-Hunter makes a sharp distinction in the biblical usage of the words bondage (v. 15) and bound (v. 27,39). He admits, however, that the two words are closely related etymologically and socially. Vine considers them akin.

W. Fisher-Hunter points out that the latter word is used at least three times in relation to the permanency of marriage relationships (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27,39) whereas the former word is not so used anywhere. It seemingly expresses more the idea of enslavement to man or a bondservant of God.

Thus he reaches the conclusion that though separation has come and with it a certain freedom to the believer that this does not go so far as to dissolve the marriage union and relationships.

Murray, Jennings, Ellicott, H. A. W. Meyer, Lenske, Codet, Edwards, Robertson and Plummer, Derby, Alfort, C. Hodge, F. W. Grant, to mention only some, come to the opposite conclusion.

I confess that I am inclined to stand in the line of the latter and this for three reasons:

First, because of the gravity of the sin of desertion. In the case

of the husband it is an act of unfaithfulness towards his wife and irresponsibility towards his house. Such a man is worse than an infidel, Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 5:8. In the case of the wife, desertion constitutes an act of rebellion against the order of God and man.

Second, because of the emphatic "let him/her depart." Let us look at the meaning of this statement which is but one word in the Greek. It is used in this form 13 times in the N. T. (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9; Luke 1:4; 18:1,2; Rom. 8:35,39; 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15,15; Phe. 1:15; Heb. 7:26). Six times it refers to the marriage union. Twice our Lord employs it and it is rendered "put asunder", which words form the clear antithesis to "joined together". Thus the "putting asunder" is unbinding what the "joining together" bound together. Such is our Lord's usage of the word.

Again, Paul uses it four times in our chapter. He enjoins the believers on the basis of the words of the Lord not to "put asunder" or not to be separated (1 Cor. 7:10,11). Should they, however, insist on "putting asunder," such separation can be accomplished, but they are not only transgressing Christ's law, they are also put under the bondage not to remarry (7:11). The woman must remain an unmarried woman. She is thus placed under a new command. And though she is not bound to a husband, she is bound by a command, the command to remain unmarried. The putting asunder, however is real. It is not merely setting up separate households or living separately. If taken in all seriousness and radicalness it is a total severing of the marriage union, a putting asunder, constituting the woman and unmarried (the same Greek word as used in verse 8 to describe the unmarried) woman who according to verse 8 is permitted to marry.

The force of the Greek here must not be minimized. Ellicott points out that the Greek word for "let him depart" is the judicious name for "malicious desertion" and must be taken in all seriousness being put in

the permissive imperative. Robertson and Plummer add "if therefore the heathen partner seeks divorce, the Christian partner may consent." Again, "but if the one who remains a heathen demands divorce, the Christian is not bound to oppose divorce" (International Critical Commentary). Leahy writes: "What disrupts and destroys the marriage is the fact that he keeps himself separated. Paul uses a condition of reality and thus thinks of an actual case. The two verbs are durative: 'If he keeps himself separate, let him keep himself separate.' .... short and done with .... the marriage is ended; let it remain thus.... desertion is exactly like adultery in its effects. Both disrupt the marriage tie." (The Epistles to the Corinthians, pp. 294, 295).

We dare not tone down the depth of the words "let him depart." They speak of the seriousness of the situation. What Christ in anticipation as a possibility forbade, becomes experience and reality here. Man in his sinfulness can and does put asunder what God has joined together not only by a life of fornication but by an act of will.

There may be a deeper meaning to such passages as Matthew 10: 34-37 and Luke 14:26 than we are prepared to admit or to experience. Faith and unfaith may separate as truly and really as any other cause.

Third, because of the words of Paul "not under bondage", I grant that here as well as in the previous paragraph there is room for debate and difference. Tolerance is needed. Yet we must move on. Time and experience do not wait for us. It must be admitted that the study of the word translated by bondage does not shed conclusive light on the meaning of the concept. It is clear that it declares freedom for the believer. In this all mentioned commentators agree. But the nature, breadth and depth of this liberty is not defined. Neither will a study of the usage

of the word in the Bible as a whole help us much on the way. It is a word used in a rather broad sense. We must therefore look elsewhere for help. I believe our chapter does give us some guidance.

Let us look first at Paul's proceedings in the chapter. Paul has specific instructions for the relationships of husband and wife (vv.1-5). He has a plain word for the unmarried and widows (7-9). He has a clear and decisive word for believing husbands and wives (10-11). He has a definite command for believing husbands in relation to unbelieving wives and vice versa (12-14). And, I believe, he has a clear word for the deserted believer - he/she is not under bondage, he/she is free. Free from what? Free for what? Here Paul is silent and we do well to remain silent. We cannot grant permission to remarry nor can we set up legislation to hinder it. While there may be advice, there can be no decision. The individual must decide.

Second, commentators are fairly well agreed that the two words bondage (v.15) and bound (vv. 27,29) have a common root - deo, and thus are etymologically related. It would seem, therefore, natural to believe that not bound in verse 15 is the opposite from that which is bound in verses 27 and 29. As the one is bound (in marriage) so the other is unbound (in marriage) thus indicating the dissolution of the marriage bond.

Third, consider the contrast between verses 10 and 11. Here we have a specific command "let her not depart". But if she violates this command, the second command sets in with the specific instruction "let her remain unmarried". In contrast to this Paul instructs "let him/her depart" with the consequence "a brother or sister is not under bondage in such a case."

This contrast is rather significant and seems to me to imply the total liberty of the deserted believer from the marriage bond and all

previous marriage commitments and responsibilities.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above facts, I cannot avoid but to conclude that wilful desertion due to a state of a mind of unbelief on the part of the unbeliever equals divorce in consequence. It dissolves the marriage bond and sets the believer free from former marriage relationships.

Our studies thus far yield the following facts:

First, the possibility exist that the marriage ideal of God can be modified and/or shattered by sinful and wilful man;

Second, that the Bible permits or suffers divorce and the dissolution of the marriage relationships.

Third, that fornication and wilful desertion constitute legitimate causes for the dissolution of the marriage relationship.

It must be emphasized, however, that such dissolution is not according to the perfect will and benevolent purpose of God but one of the evils of sin operating like a cancer within mankind. Forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration comes closer to the ideal of God no matter what the causes of disruption may have been. The latter principle is clearly taught in the experience of Hosea even though it is not specifically commanded.

REMARRIAGE OF DIVORCED PEOPLE

To consider the remarriage of divorced people in the light of the N. T. is even more difficult than to speak about divorce for the simple reason that the N. T. speaks to the latter problem but is silent on the former issue. This is not surprising because the Bible does not command or legislate sub-ideal behavior. It regulates, forbids and judges such life. We should thus not expect to find commands and permission for re-

marriage. This would be abnormal. The same God who promulgates the highest and noblest ideals cannot legislate lower and lesser ideals, though He may permit man to live and to operate on a sub-ideal, prescribed level. Well does F. W. Robertson say: "It is abundantly evident (from Scripture) that God, cannot give advice; He can only issue a command. God cannot say: 'It is better to do this,' His perfections demand something absolute: Thou shalt do this; Thou shalt not do this." We must, therefore, respect divine silence and/or we look for prohibitions and regulations to guide us in the matter of remarriage of divorced people. This principle, if accepted and applied, could chart our ways somewhat through the wilderness.

Remarriage, according to the N. T. must be carefully classified because it may take place under varying circumstances.

Class One

Remarriage of widows and widowers is neither commanded nor forbidden. It is accepted as a human prerogative and is a matter of human wisdom and convenience (Rom. 7:1-14; 1 Cor. 7:6-9)

Class Two

Remarriage of people divorced because of fornication, or marriage union severed because of irresponsible desertion is an open matter. Here the Bible is silent. It is neither commanded nor forbidden as a careful study of the passages verifies. It thus becomes a matter of individual and personal conscience before God and society. Spirit-enlightened personal wisdom and convenience remain the guide. For the church to legislate against it, is to go beyond the Scriptures.

There is nothing in the words of Christ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:1-9 that forbids remarriage of people divorced because of fornication. Christ does not even reflect negatively upon remarriage in such cases. Neither is there legislation in the writings of the apostles, specifically Paul

in 1 Cor. 7:15 that would make remarriage of a deserted believer sinful. For a church to make it sinful is to assume divine, authoritative legislative powers outside of revelation. We concede that a church, anxious to express the highest ideals of God rather than to meet realities of life and seek the preservation of its own purity rather than serve as an agency of God in the redemption of sinful man has a right to legislate against remarriage of individuals divorced because of fornication or dissolved marriage vows because of desertion. Such legislation may be under circumstances wise and wholesome. However, the church must not claim revelational authority for such legislation, for such there is not. It must rather reason from Scriptural silence and social conveniences. Neither does the Bible authorize us to distinguish between the innocent party and the guilty party according to Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 in the matter of remarriage. If this seems to open the doors then we must not forget that it is Christ who speaks or does not speak at this occasion. His silence is difficult to interpret, yes, almost painful to me. Yet, there He is, and All-wise one. We must not make His silence into positive permission nor can we turn it into negative legislation.

To deny the legitimacy and the prerogative of remarriage after divorce because of fornication or dissolution of marriage union because of desertion is to read our sentiments and judgments into the silence of Christ and Paul. It may even contradict the sound advice of the apostle as stated in 1 Cor. 7:1-9 especially 8 and 9 and place our judgment and wisdom above the wisdom of the Creator who said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him (Gen. 2:18).

Again we emphasize that forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration is preferable and far more ideal. However, if such cannot be done, re-

marriage cannot be forbidden on the basis of the words of Christ or Paul.

Class Three

Remarriage of divorced for other causes than fornication and desertion becomes a complicated practical problem but less difficult to evaluate and judge biblically.

Two facts stand out in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:2-9; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10,11.

First: divorce does take place for other reasons than fornication or desertion. This is clearly implied in all the words of Christ. Divorce violates the creation order of God (Mark 10:6-9). It constitutes a definite transgression of a basic law of God, disrupts a divine institution and shatters a divine ideal. Then, too, it readily becomes the cause of adultery as Christ so plainly teaches (Matthew 5:32b). The same attitude and verdict is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:10,11. Let no one minimize the sin of divorce with all its evil consequences and judgments when it takes place for other reasons than stated in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15.

However, to believe that divorce does not truly take place except for the above two causes is not to read the Scriptures fully. The "joining together" becomes an actual "putting asunder" if man so wills. The married woman becomes an unmarried woman (v. 11, the same word as used in verse 8 unmarried). There is no bond which man yielded to sin cannot disrupt. This is the awfulness of man's ability and responsibility.

Second, remarriage in all cases under class three constitutes adultery. This is the uniform verdict of all four passages in the gospels recording the words of Christ (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11,12). Paul expresses his verdict in four imperatives "let not the wife depart, ... let her remain unmarried, ... let her be reconciled ... let not the husband put away his wife ... (1 Cor. 7:10,11).

This is a most solemn and sobering biblical fact and allows for no debate, modification or exception. Thus a double sin hangs over class three. They transgress a basic law of God and they commit adultery. And most surely, the way of the transgressor is hard.

The reason why remarriage in this case constitutes adultery is not stated. Our logical conclusion usually is because God has not recognized such divorce and thus still considers them one flesh. However, this is human reasoning, not divine revelation. The Bible does not say so. To the contrary, Paul does recognize the separated wife as an unmarried woman and Christ reckons in all passages with the fact of actual divorce. Without referring to fornication, He says in Mark: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (10:9). Thus the possibility exists. Yet, in spite of such human sundering which is transgression remarriage constitutes adultery.

We draw attention however, to the fact that the narrower concept adultery is used in all cases and not the much severer word fornication.

This needs to be kept in mind. While remarriage involves the partners in a grievous act of sin (adultery), this sin can be repented of and forgiven without disrupting life, it does not involve them in a debauching life of sin (fornication) which must be repented of and forsaken before forgiveness and restoration can take place.

In the light of the above, we conclude that the Bible is silent on remarriage of biblically legitimate divorced (fornication) persons or believers whose marriage is dissolved because of the desertion of an unbelieving partner. All evaluation and judgment is reserved.

The Bible speaks in no uncertain terms about the sin of all other remarriages. Yet the Scripture does not place them outside of forgiveness if repentance takes place, nor does it demand their dissolution.

However, the very silence about the first and the pronounced sin of the second places both of them on a sub-ideal level even in a sinful order of mankind, though we dare not place both on the same level and judge them equally.

#### Remarriage and the Church

Should people divorced and remarried be accepted into the Church as members? Our answer is an unequivocal yes to the above question and this for several reasons:

My first reason is based upon the biblical principle that people who have repented of this sin and have appropriated divine forgiveness are actually forgiven without remarriage having been disrupted. As forgiven sinners they are biblically entitled to church membership and fellowship. Surely it is not in keeping with the N. T. ideal to keep forgiven people outside of the church. They are members of God's household and members of His royal priesthood.

Secondly, the silence of the Bible is sufficient reason to admit them to church membership. The Bible does not legislate against it. In the light of the prevailing conditions in the times of apostolic churches it is difficult to doubt that numerous cases of irregularity from the first marriage existed among the converts. Yet no specific regulations are covering their entrance into the church. Therefore, believing that they are at least tolerated church members, we may proceed. Spirit-filled enlightened prudence may direct us to the contrary in specific cases and under specific circumstances.

Thirdly, my next reason is based upon the practice of Paul. Consider the church membership as it developed in Corinth and in Ephesus (1 Cor. 6: 9-11; Eph. 2:1ff; 5:1ff). It was a rather humiliating company. But the life in times past, if forgiven, must never stand in the way of church

membership. While the church is a church militant, it may also need to become a salvation army, a home, a nursery, a hospital, a mending institute, yes, many things except a graveyard. Let us make room in our churches for every repentant and forgiven sinner regardless of his past. There was room in the church of Paul.

Four, my fourth reason is the scriptural principle laid down in 1 Cor. 7:16ff. Here the converts are exhorted to remain in the civil and human relationships in which the grace of God has found them. Certainly nothing would be gained in disrupting further human relationships by demanding separation of remarried people. The instruction of Paul in this whole chapter is a drive to avoid any and all disruptions of human relationships if at all possible. If God forgives without disrupting who is the church to demand disruption? Let us be careful in our demands. Let us practice the mind of Christ and follow the example of Paul.

However, what about service opportunities and positions in the church? In church positions and service assignments a scriptural principle operates which too often is overlooked. While forgiveness and church fellowship are the minimal prerequisites, they are not the only requirements. Church positions and church assignments are made on the basis of spiritual maturity, spiritual gifts, and moral and social idealism. This must be kept in mind.

Therefore, while we whole-heartedly welcome them into the church fellowship, they should humbly decline every type of church office, public ministry and representation. If they have not reached this maturity, they need nurture rather than public service assignments. Thus both the grace of God as well as the severity of God will be made manifest in the church and to society. We must not give way to sentimentalism. There are scars that cannot be transformed into beauty. They

remain scars. We must not only think of the welfare of the particular individuals. We must also keep in mind that the church must function as light in society, making known both the severity as well as the grace of God.

If it is argued that this is not complete forgiveness and restoration and thus it is misrepresenting the grace of God, I beg to take exception to such reasoning.

The Bible is clear and emphatic that forgiveness is free and bounteous, without measure is it available to the repenting and believing sinner. This we must carefully guard, emphatically teach and radically practice.

The Bible is also specific in the teaching of the completeness of restoration in and to fellowship. Nothing must be permitted to stand in the way of full fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9).

The Bible, however, is equally emphatic upon spiritual, moral and social requirements for service. This is clearly evident from such passages as Acts 1:21,22; 6:3-5; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 4:12,13. These are not exhaustive; they are only representative.

Let us not confuse the issue. Salvation is of grace, it is free and pardon is abundant. This comes to the repentant believer with no strings attached. Service, however, is not thus appropriated. It is a grace God does commit unto us according to His sovereign will, righteous demand and holy ideals. Thus service will bring rewards. Not so salvation. And certainly there will be a difference in the degrees of rewards as the Bible clearly teaches. Thus there will be differences before God. Not all will reap the same reward not hold the same positions in the presence of Christ. Some will shine as the stars, some will wear a crown, some will rule over more cities. Let us not become sentimental in the distribution of God's gifts and responsibilities.

It is not fully scriptural to place salvation, fellowship and service on the same level. They are distinguished and distinguishable. The one is appropriated by faith, the other is committed by the Lord, who sets His own moral and spiritual qualifications. In this we humbly bow before a righteous judge as well as a gracious Savior.

Dr. G. W. Peters

futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness . . . . But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light . . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret." (Eph. 4:17-24; 5:3-7, 11, 12).

Rather than getting the mind-set of the world we need constantly to be transformed by the renewal of the mind," we need "to set our minds on things above," we must heed the exhortation of Paul when he said, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

## 2. Some Concerns and Guidelines Related to this Principle

Now, in the life of discipleship the problem arises as to how his basic principle of separation is to be carried out in a practical way. Sometimes people have withdrawn from this kind of world. Individuals have gone into monasteries. Groups of believers have moved into sheltered communities where this world could not encroach. Is that the answer? According to

Jesus' prayer it is not. He said, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world." How could the disciples in any generation be the salt of the earth or the light of the world if they were not in the world?

How then can separation be practically carried out? How can a person be in the world but not of the world? How can a church help believers to find this fine balance without becoming either legalistic or permissive? Let me suggest a few ideas.

(1) Stress should be placed on the basic principles of discipleship. Church rules should not be emphasized apart from these basic principles. I agree with the position taken in the paper *The Church, Its Regulations and the Individual Member*, by Marvin Hein, on the need for church rules. But these rules should always be related to the basic principles.

(2) The disciplined life needs constant emphasis. The need for this is greater in our permissive society than it has ever been before. Often Christians clamor for more freedom to follow personal, selfish inclinations. The arguments given to pursue questionable courses of conduct in the name of realism are mainly excuses to give room for satisfying the lusts of the flesh. Jesus insisted that following him meant denial of self.

(3) We need to be consistent in the application of the principle of separation. To insist that all movie going is wrong, without saying anything about TV viewing, reading, or the thought life, is inconsistent. It would be consistent to say that TV viewing, reading, thought life, and movies that appeal largely to the base desires of the old nature, are wrong and do not belong in the life of the follower of Christ. It would also follow that those things which are constructive, sensible, meaningful, in any of these areas, are acceptable. When, however, a church definitely feels that movie going, for instance, is not to be practiced by its members, those becoming part of that church ought to abide by these convictions. The personal liberty I may feel to do something must be tempered by my concern for the whole body of believers and the weaker brother. Personal liberty must never become a bondage which makes me say, "Since I feel I have the liberty to do it, I must do it."

(4) The application of the principle of separation includes more than the world of entertainment. It includes the impact of this materialistic age on the church. The self-discipline which the disciple of Jesus Christ must practice, and the discipline the church should exercise, must relate to those who are entangled in materialism as well as those entangled in the pursuit of worldly pleasure.

Arno Wiebe

# Remarriage of the Divorced in the Light of Scripture

To write on remarriage of divorced people is a most difficult and unpleasant assignment. The experiences described by those words contradict so clearly the highest ideals of God in marriage life; they cut so deeply into human relationships and involve so completely the whole human personality and merous social ties that objective insight and evaluation is almost impossible; and, finally, they have caused almost endless theological and ecclesiastical debate among Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants each asserting to have the final and absolute biblical answer. We are inclined to believe that the answer is not far from the truth when he writes:

The difficulty which we experience in determining what our Lord actually taught on this matter [divorce] impressively illustrates the absolute impossibility of basing detailed rules for the guidance of modern life upon isolated sayings of Christ. That the ideal is permanent

monogamous marriage is undoubtedly the principle which Jesus taught; and the ideal still appeals to all the higher ethical feeling of our time. By what detailed enactments the ideal may best be promoted, which is the less of two evils when the ideal has been violated and made impossible, is a question which must be settled by the moral consciousness, the experience, the practical judgment of the present (Rashdall, *Conscience and Christ*, Page 106).

This may seem like ethical relativism. Could it be ethical relativism? We shall not debate the point. In any case it should warn us of overconfidence in absolutivity or finality in our interpretation and application. We must proceed with caution, yet with firmness and unity according to the light and wisdom the Lord grants unto us for such a time as this. This is not the time for hesitance and indefiniteness. Let us be open-minded but not open-ended.

## A BIBLICAL ORDER

With these preliminary remarks we turn our attention to a biblical order which could help us in delineating our subject.

It is well to remember that the Bible deals both with **divine ideals** for man and society as well as with the stark human and sinful realities of life which are operating on a **sub-ideal** level. The first are reinforced by promises and commands, the latter are tolerated in silence (suffered, not commanded) or curbed by legislation in order to thwart man in his sinful passions and practices and keep them within certain bounds. We must therefore carefully study the silence and the negative legislation in matters of sub-ideal behavior.

## THE DIVINE IDEAL OF MARRIAGE

It can hardly be doubted that the divine ideal for marriage includes at least the following factors as authoritatively taught in Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; I Cor. 7:39. (Rom. 7:1-4 must be applied carefully. It is used allegorically and is not a doctrinal statement.)

(1) Monogamous marriage, (one man and one woman). Note the words of Christ expounding the original ideal: "For this cause shall a man (singular) leave ... and shall cleave to his wife (singular) and they twain shall be one flesh" (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8).

(2) The permanency of marriage: leave ... and cleave unto ...

(3) Marriage is for most intimate fellowship and relationship in which personality finds its satisfaction and fulfillment — they shall be one flesh.

(4) Marriage is for mutual supplementation and complementation as expressed in the concept "helpmeet," or "answering to." Note that separation is not envisaged by death nor by sin. Do not conclude, however, that marriage is an eternal institution.

## POSSIBILITY OF THE DISRUPTION OF THE DIVINE IDEAL

That this divine ideal can be modified and even shattered by sinful man is clear from the pages of Holy Writ. Sinful man can and does live on a sub-ideal level. Thus the practice of polygamy is a matter of biblical record and divorce and remarriage was suffered to take place in O. T. times under specific legal restrictions and according to legal proceedings.

These are never commanded or divinely endorsed. They are tolerated. This must be emphasized. They are not according to the blessed will and wise counsel of God. They will always be accompanied by deep scars, untold inward sufferings and outward disruptions no matter what the causes and circumstances may be.

However, to say that the divine ideal cannot be completely disrupted and scuttled is to go not only beyond the realities of history and life but also beyond the words of Christ Himself. He specifically tells us: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The words "let not man put asunder" most assuredly imply the possibility of man disrupting a divinely instituted union. If it is objected that Christ does not here use the word for divorce, I merely reply that the two expressions "joined together" are in direct antithesis. Whatever the one means the other reverses. If joining together results in one flesh, putting asunder is the undoing of this oneness of flesh. Man in his sinfulness and wickedness can disrupt and shatter the divine ideal. Such power God has bestowed upon man.

## CAUSES WHICH DISRUPT THE DIVINE IDEAL

The Bible lists two specific causes which disrupt the divine ideal and undo the marriage union. These are the grave sins of fornication (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9) and willful desertion (I Corinthians 7:15). It must be observed, however, that in neither case is divorce commanded nor is it automatic. The ideal is that it should not take place. Thus no specific directions are given in case it does come about.

The Bible also admits that the marriage union may be disrupted for other reasons, but it does not spell them out nor does it deal with them in a similar manner (Mark 10:9; I Corinthians 7:10,11). Nevertheless they are real.

Let us then first establish the sad fact of the actual disruption of the marriage union which makes divorce legitimate to the degree that no divine condemnation rests upon the act. This will cast some light on the problem of remarriage of divorced persons. For this we turn to Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9; I Corinthians 7:1-16.

### Matthew 5:32

From the outset, I declare that in loyalty to the manuscripts, I reject any ideal of interpolation of the **exception clause** in either Matthew 5:32 or 19:9. There is no justification for such a position, though there may be some textual question regarding the last part of Matthew 19:9 "and whoso marrieth her

which is put away doth commit adultery." However, since the same words are found in 5:32 the fact of these words still stands.

I also decisively reject the interpretation that Christ's words here spoken are applicable to the Jews only whose perverted ideas regarding divorce he sought to correct by a true interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. (W. Fisher-Hunter in the Divorce Problem, see Jewish Encyclopedia — Hillel and Shammai dispute on divorce). If such a position were to be taken, consistency would compel me to relegate the whole "Sermon on the Mount" to the Jews. While this could save us many social inconveniences it also would rob us of the highest ideals of Christian ethics and discipleship. The "but I say unto you" speaks eternal and abiding truth and establishes principles applicable for all ages.

A third problem revolves around the words "fornication" (por'neia) and "adultery" (moseia). It is claimed that the former refers to sexual sin committed before marriage while the latter describes unfaithfulness and illicit sexual intercourse subsequent to marriage and that only the former allows divorce.

What saith the Scriptures? While there are passages in which there may be such distinction and both words are mentioned as separate sins, the mentioned distinction does not stand up under the general tenor of the Bible, especially the N. T.

The N. T. quite consistently uses **adultery** to denote unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another, (Luke 18:11; I Cor. 6:9; John 8:3; Heb. 13:4). Such uniformity, however, cannot be maintained in relation to fornication, as the following passages indicate: John 8:41; Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; I Cor. 5:1; 6:13,18; 7:2; II Cor. 13:21; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; I Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:21; 9:21; 21:8. (Note: Gal. 5:19—"The word **adultery** is not in the best Greek texts hence the reason for its omission in the translation" (Kenneth S. Wuest in *Word Studies*, Galatians 1, p. 157). The Epistle to the Galatians by C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine does not list adultery but only fornication, uncleanness and lasciviousness and draws our attention to the fact that these three words are found together again in II Cor. 12:21, p. 282. Vine further comments on Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 that fornication stands for, or includes, adultery (Expository Dictionary of N. T. Words, Vol. II, p. 125). The distinction in the O. T. is also not absolute. To be dogmatic and distinguish sharply between the two terms, applying one only to pre-nuptial and the other to post-nuptial illicit sexual behaviour cannot be maintained biblically.

Yet, a distinction between fornication and adultery seems to be justifiable. Adultery, seemingly, refers more to specific post-nuptial acts of sexual sins though not necessarily so (compare Matthew 5:28) while fornication is first, a general term describing all manner of illicit sexual behavior including adultery and secondly, it refers more to a habitual life given to such practices as we commonly denote by whoredom, prostitution, or a life with an individual other than the marriage partner. [Note: to identify fornication with nakedness (Heb. ervan) of Deut. 24:1, cannot be substantiated by a word study, or word usage in the Bible nor Jewish and Christian interpretation.]

### Matthew 19:1-9

While the context of Matthew 19:9 differs from 5:32, a word study of the passage would not cast additional light on the question of the legitimacy of divorce because of fornication.

### Conclusion

From these passages I am compelled to draw the woeful conclusion that the sin of fornication is of such devastating nature that it does disrupt (in nature but not necessarily legally) the most sacred and deepest human relationship and shatters the marriage bond. To say less is to think less of the abominable sin of fornication than Christ made the sin to be. We shall return to the passage in Matthew later to continue the question of re-marriage.

## A CONSIDERATION OF I COR. 7:1-15

Corinthians 7 is the major position document in Paul's writings relating to our subject and problem and deserves

careful consideration. It is important to note the general setting of our passage:

The church of Corinth had submitted a threefold problem to Paul:

- (1) matters relating to marriage;
- (2) concerning things offered to idols;
- (3) concerning spiritual gifts;

Our chapter is the answer to problem number one — Paul outlines four guiding principles:

### Principle one

Under prevailing circumstances the unmarried state may have its advantages but it is surrounded by grievous dangers. Marriage is not the lesser of two evils but a safe-guard against evil. There is no implication here that the celibate state is holier than the married, it is a more precarious position, however (I Cor. 7:1-9).

### Principle two

The ideal of God is that husband and wife be not separated (not to be put asunder). If separation takes place, two ways are open to the separated:

- (1) Let her remain unmarried (separation without re-marriage).
- (2) Let her be reconciled to her husband (reconciliation) (7:10,11).

### Principle three

The believer (husband or wife) has no right to divorce the unbeliever upon religious grounds. Marriage bonds concluded before conversions must not be disturbed by the Christian after conversion because of being unequally yoked together, (7:12-14). The Christian may not initiate separation on the basis of faith or unfaith.

### Principle four

If the unbelieving marriage partner insists on separation "let him depart," is Paul's permissive imperative. A brother or a sister is not under **bondage** in such cases.

The first three principles present little difficulty as far as interpretation is concerned. This is not so with principle four. Serious differences exist in the interpretation of verse 15. Three points need to be clarified:

In the first place, we need to consider the words of Paul: "but to the rest speak I, not the Lord" (12).

Secondly, we need to investigate the words "let him depart."

Thirdly, we must find the meaning of "not under bondage." The three together constitute an "Apostolic verdict."

## THE APOSTOLIC VERDICT

We have the apostolic verdict as to its authority, its content and its result.

### Its authority

The change from "not I, but the Lord" (v. 10) to "I, not the Lord" (v. 12) is most significant though frequently overlooked. Only here is it found in this form in all of Paul's writings and must be carefully noted. It points out the consciousness within Paul that the problem stated in verses 10 and 11 is authoritatively dealt with by the Lord. No doubt the apostle is referring to Christ's teaching on divorce as found in the tradition of the church at that time and later recorded in the gospels. However, the problem as stated in verses 12-15 has not been dealt with before. Here Paul hands down an **authoritative apostolic verdict** in relation not to legal divorce (putting away) but irresponsible desertion (going away) due to religious antagonism and intolerance. He speaks it as a command of the Lord (I Cor. 7:25).

### Its content

"Let him depart" is the apostolic verdict. If the unbelieving marriage partner separates himself from the believing marriage partner, the believer has neither a right to force the unbelieving marriage partner to stay nor to hinder him in pro-



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ceedings of separation. The phrase "let him depart" is rather emphatic. What is involved in this one Greek word we shall examine later.

#### Its results

Not under bondage is the result of such separation for the believer. It is this statement as the previous one that causes serious difficulty. Here authorities divide into several camps. Does the apostle mean that wilful desertion and disruption constitute a severing of marriage bonds so completely that the marriage vows have been cancelled out and that the innocent partner is constituted a single, unmarried individual, free from marriage commitments and responsibilities? In simple words, does wilful desertion equal divorce in results? Contextually this seems to be the unmistakable meaning. Before we give our reasons why we are inclined to believe so let us look at some objections.

Two objections are raised against such a conclusion:

(1) It is objected that such a statement by the apostle would be a contradiction to the plain teaching of Christ.

To this objection, I reply, first, that Paul was fully conscious of the fact that he was going beyond, but not contrary to his Master. Because of this he does not fall back upon the words and teaching of Christ but upon his own apostolic authority [compare again "not I, but the Lord," (v. 10,) and "I, not the Lord (v. 12)]. It should be noted that Paul is most careful in delineating authority in this chapter. He speaks by "I command yet not I, but the Lord," thus specifically referring to the teaching ministry and authority of Christ. Again, he speaks in his own apostolic authority knowing that he has a command of the Lord. This includes our passage. Finally he speaks as "my judgment" or opinion, as divinely illumined prudence teaches him. Paul, thus is aware when he is within tradition (the teaching of Christ), revelation (which certainly is progressive though never in conflict) and illumination. While the former are absolute, the latter is conditioned by time and culture.

Secondly, we reply that Christ deals with the question of "putting away." Paul, on the other hand, speaks about willful desertion on the part of an unbeliever. There is a great difference between putting away and irresponsible going away.

Thirdly, we should note that there is a difference in the tone and mood Paul uses in verses 10 and 11, where he deals with the marriage relationship of believers, and the decisive injunctions of verse 15, where willful desertion is considered. In the first it is an apostolic charge "Let not the wife depart.. let not the husband put away..." with a double imperative in between, "let her remain unmarried... let her be reconciled." In the second instance it is the permissive imperative "... let him depart" (let him be gone), not under bondage in such cases.

Paul is not contradicting his Master. He is declaring a principle to regulate unprecedented cases in the life of the church among the Gentiles as he had to do in many other instances.

(2) The second objection is raised on the basis of toning down the real meaning of "let him depart" or "not under bondage." W. Fisher-Hunter makes a sharp distinction in the biblical usage of the words **bondage** (v.15) and **bound** (v.27,39). He admits, however, that the two words are closely related etymologically and socially. Vine, on the other hand, considers them akin.

W. Fisher-Hunter points out that the latter word, "bound," is used at least three times in relation to the permanency of marriage relationships (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27,39) whereas the former word is not used anywhere. According to his interpretation, it expresses more the idea of enslavement to man or a **bondservant of God**.

Thus he reaches the conclusion that though separation has come and with it a certain freedom to the believer, this does not go so far as to dissolve the marriage union and relationships.

Murray, Jennings, Ellicot, H. A. W. Meyer, Lenske, Godet, Edwards, Robertson and Plummer, Darby, Alford, C. Hodge, F. W. Grant, to mention only some of the Bible commentators come to the opposite conclusion.

I confess that I am inclined to stand in the line of the latter and this for three reasons:

In the first place, because of the gravity of the sin of desertion. In the case of the husband it is an act of unfaithfulness towards his wife and irresponsibility towards his house. Such a man is worse than an infidel, Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 5:8. In the case of the wife, desertion constitutes an act of rebellion against the order of God and man.

Secondly, because of the emphatic "let him/ her depart." Let us look at the meaning of this statement (which is but one word in the Greek). It is used in this form 13 times in the N. T. (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9; Acts 1:4; 18:1,2; Rom. 8:35, 39; 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15; Phe 1:15; Heb. 7:26). Six times it refers to the marriage union. Twice our Lord employs it and it is rendered "put asunder," which words form the clear antithesis to "joined together." Thus the "putting asunder" is unbinding what the "joining together" bound together. Such is our Lord's usage of the word.

Again, Paul uses it four times in our chapter. He enjoins the believers on the basis of the words of the Lord not to "put asunder" or not to be separated (1 Cor. 7:10,11). Should they, however, insist on "putting asunder," such separation can be accomplished, but they are not only transgressing Christ's law, they are also put under bondage not to remarry (7:11). The woman must remain an unmarried woman. She is thus placed under a new command. And though she is not bound to a husband, she is bound by a command, the command to remain unmarried. The putting asunder, however is real.

The force of the Greek here must not be minimized. Ellicott points out that the Greek word for "let him depart" is the judicious name for "malicious desertion" and must be taken in all seriousness being put in the permissive imperative. Robertson and Plummer add "if therefore the heathen partner seeks divorce, the Christian partner may consent." Again, "but if the one who remains a heathen demands divorce, the Christian is not bound to oppose divorce" (International Critical Commentary). Lenske writes: "What disrupts and destroys the marriage is the fact that he keeps himself separated. Paul uses a condition of reality and thus thinks of an actual case. The two verbs are durative: 'If he keeps himself separate, let him keep himself separate.' ... short and done with ... the marriage is ended; let it remain thus ... desertion is exactly like adultery in its effects. Both disrupt the marriage tie." (*The Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 294, 295).

We dare not tone down the depth of the words "let him depart." They speak of the seriousness of the situation. What Christ in anticipation as a possibility forbade, becomes experience and reality here. Man in his sinfulness can and does put asunder what God has joined together not only by a life of fornication but by an act of will.

There may be a deeper meaning to such passages as Matthew 10:34-37 and Luke 14:26 than we are prepared to admit or to experience. Faith and unfaith may separate as truly and really as any other cause.

Third, because of the words of Paul "not under bondage." I grant that here as well as in the previous paragraph there is room for debate and difference. Tolerance is needed. Yet we must move on. Time and experience do not wait for us. It must be admitted that the study of the word translated by bondage does not shed conclusive light on the meaning of the concept. It is clear that it declares freedom for the believer. In this all mentioned commentators agree. But the nature, breadth and depth of this liberty is not defined. Neither will a study of the usage of the word in the Bible as a whole help us much on the way. It is a word used in a rather broad sense. We must therefore look elsewhere for help. I believe our chapter does give us some guidance.

Let us look first at Paul's proceedings in the chapter. Paul has specific instructions for the relationships of husband and wife (vv. 1-5). He has a plain word for the unmarried and widows (7-9). He has a clear and decisive word for believing husbands and wives (10-11). He has a definite command for believing husbands in relation to "unbelieving wives" and vice versa (12-14). And, I believe, he has a clear word for the deserted believer — he/she is not under bondage, he/she is free. Free from what? Free for what? **Here Paul is silent**

and we do well to remain silent. **We cannot grant permission to remarry nor can we set up decisive legislation to hinder it.** While there may be advice, there can be no absolute and binding decision. The individual must decide according to his conscience and the conscience of his church and community.

Secondly, commentators are fairly well agreed that the two words **bondage** (v. 15) and **bound** (vv. 27,29) have a common root (**deo**) and thus are etymologically related. It would seem, therefore, natural to believe that **not bound** in verse 15 is the opposite from that which is **bound** in verses 27 and 39. As the one is bound (in marriage) so the other is unbound (in marriage) thus indicating the dissolution of the marriage bond.

Thirdly, consider the contrast between verses 10 and 11. Here we have a specific command: "Let her not depart." But if she violates this command, the second command applies, with the specific instruction: "Let her remain unmarried." In contrast, Paul instructs, "Let him/her depart," with the consequence, "a brother or sister is not under bondage in such a case."

This contrast is rather significant and seems to me to imply the total liberty of the deserted believer from the marriage bond and all previous marriage commitments and responsibilities.

#### CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above, I am inclined to conclude that willful desertion due to a state of a mind of unbelief on the part of the unbeliever equals divorce in consequence. It dissolves the marriage bond and sets the believer free from former marriage relationships.

Our studies thus far yield the following facts:

(1) The possibility exists that the marriage ideal of God can be modified and/or shattered by sinful and willful man;

(2) That the Bible permits or suffers divorce and the dissolution of the marriage relationships.

(3) That fornication and willful desertion constitute legitimate causes for the dissolution of the marriage relationship.

It must be emphasized, however, that such dissolution is not according to the perfect will and benevolent purpose of God but one of the evils of sin operating like a cancer within mankind. Forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration come closer to the ideal of God no matter what the causes of disruption may have been. The latter principle is clearly taught in the experience of Hosea even though it is not specifically commanded.

### Remarriage of Divorced People

To consider the remarriage of divorced people in the light of the New Testament is even more difficult than to speak about divorce for the simple reason that the New Testament speaks to the latter problem but is silent on the former issue. This is not surprising because the **Bible does not command or legislate sub-ideal behavior**. It regulates, forbids and judges such life. We should thus not expect to find commands and permission for remarriage. This would be abnormal. The same God who promulgates the highest and noblest ideals cannot legislate lower and lesser ideals, though he may permit man to live and to operate on a sub-ideal, prescribed level. Well does F. W. Robertson say: "It is abundantly evident (from Scripture) that God cannot give advice; he can only issue a command. God cannot say: 'It is better to do this,' his perfections demand something absolute: Thou shalt do this; Thou shalt not do this." **We must, therefore, expect divine silence** and/or we look for prohibitions and regulations to guide us in the matter of remarriage of divorced people. This principle, if accepted and applied, could chart our ways somewhat through the wilderness.

Remarriage, according to the N. T. must be carefully classified because it may take place under varying circumstances.

#### Class one

Remarriage of widows and widowers is neither commanded nor forbidden. It is accepted as a human prerogative and is a

matter of human wisdom and convenience (Rom. 7:1-14; 1 Cor. 7:6-9).

#### Class two

Remarriage of people divorced because of fornication, or marriage union severed because of irresponsible desertion is an open matter. **Here the Bible is silent**. It is neither commanded nor forbidden as a careful study of the passages verifies. It thus becomes a matter of individual and personal conscience before God and society. Spirit-enlightened personal wisdom and convenience remain the guide. For the church to legislate against it, is to go beyond the Scriptures.

There is nothing in the words of Christ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:1-9 that forbids remarriage of people divorced because of fornication. Christ does not even reflect negatively upon remarriage in such cases. Neither is there legislation in the writings of the apostles, specifically Paul in 1 Cor. 7:15 that would make remarriage of a deserted believer sinful. For a church to make it sinful is to assume divine, authoritative legislative powers outside of revelation. **We concede that a church, anxious to express the highest ideals of God rather than to meet realities of life and seek the preservation of its own purity rather than serve as an agency of God in the redemption of sinful man has a right to legislate against remarriage of individuals divorced because of fornication or dissolved marriage vows because of desertion.** Such legislation may be under circumstances wise and wholesome. However, the church must not claim revelational authority for such legislation, for such there is not. It must rather reason from Scriptural silence and social prudence. Neither does the Bible authorize us to distinguish between the innocent party and the guilty party according to Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 in the matter of remarriage. If this seems to open the doors then we must not forget that it is Christ who speaks or does not speak at this occasion. His silence is difficult to interpret, yes, almost painful to me. Yet, there he is, an All-wise one. We must not make his silence into positive permission nor can we turn it into negative legislation.

To deny the legitimacy and the prerogative of remarriage after divorce because of fornication or because of the dissolution of the marriage union due to desertion is to read our sentiments and judgments into the silence of Christ and Paul. It may even contradict the sound advice of the apostle as stated in 1 Cor. 7:1-9 (especially 8 and 9) and place our judgment and wisdom above the wisdom of the Creator who said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

Again we emphasize that forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration is preferable and far more ideal. However, if such cannot be done, remarriage cannot be forbidden on the basis of the words of Christ or Paul.

#### Class three

Remarriage of divorced for other causes than fornication and desertion becomes a complicated practical problem but less difficult to evaluate and judge biblically.

Two facts stand out in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:2-9; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10,11.

(1) Divorce does take place for other reasons than fornication or desertion. This is clearly implied in all the words of Christ. Divorce violates the creation order of God (Mark 10:6-9). It constitutes a definite transgression of a basic law of God, disrupts a divine institution and shatters a divine ideal. Then, too, it readily becomes the cause of adultery as Christ so plainly teaches (Matthew 5:32b). The same attitude and verdict is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:10,11. Let no one minimize the sin of divorce with all its evil consequences and judgments when it takes place for other reasons than stated in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15.

However, to believe that divorce does not truly take place except for the above two causes is not to read the Scriptures fully. The "joining together" becomes an actual "putting asunder" if man so wills. The married woman becomes an **unmarried woman** (v. 11, the same word as used in verse 8 **unmarried**). There is no bond which man yielded to sin cannot disrupt. This is the awfulness of man's ability and responsibility.

(2) Remarriage in all cases under class three constitutes adultery. This is the uniform verdict of all four passages in

the gospels recording the words of Christ (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11,12). Paul expresses his verdict in four imperatives "let not the wife depart . . . let her remain unmarried . . . let her be reconciled . . . let not the husband put away his wife . . ." (I Cor. 7:10,11).

This is a most solemn and sobering biblical fact and allows for no debate, modification or exception. Thus a double sin hangs over class three. They transgress a basic law of God and they commit adultery. And most surely, the way of the transgressor is hard.

The reason why remarriage in this case constitutes adultery is not stated. Our logical conclusion usually is that God has not recognized such putting asunder and thus still considers them **one flesh**. However, this is human reasoning, not divine revelation. The Bible does not say so. To the contrary, Paul does recognize the separated wife as an unmarried woman and Christ reckons in all passages with the fact of actual divorce. Without referring to fornication he says in Mark: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (10:9). Thus the possibility exists. Yet, in spite of such human sundering which is transgression remarriage constitutes adultery.

We draw attention however, to the fact that the narrower concept **adultery** is used in all cases and not the much severer word **fornication**.

This needs to be kept in mind. While remarriage involves the partners in a grievous act of sin (adultery), this sin can be repented of and forgiven without disrupting life, it does not involve them in a debauching life of sin (fornication) which must be repented of and forsaken before forgiveness and restoration can take place.

## Conclusion

In the light of the above, we conclude that the Bible is silent on remarriage of biblically legitimately divorced (fornication) persons or believers whose marriage is dissolved because of the desertion of an unbelieving partner. All evaluation and judgment is reserved.

The Bible speaks in no uncertain terms about the sin of all other remarriages. Yet the Scripture does not place them outside of forgiveness if repentance takes place, nor does it demand their dissolution.

However, the very silence about the first and the pronounced sin of the second places both of them on a sub-ideal level even in a sinful order of mankind, though we dare not place both on the same level and judge them equally.

## REMARriage AND THE CHURCH

Should people divorced and remarried be accepted into the Church as members? Our answer is an unequivocal **yes** to the above question and this for several reasons:

My **first** reason is based upon the **biblical principle** that people who have repented of this sin and have appropriated divine forgiveness are actually forgiven without remarriage having been disrupted. As forgiven sinners they are biblically entitled to church membership and fellowship. Surely it is not in keeping with the N. T. ideal to keep forgiven people outside of the church. They are members of God's household and members of his royal priesthood.

**Secondly**, the **silence of the Bible** is sufficient reason to admit them to church membership. The Bible does not legislate against it. In the light of the prevailing conditions in the times of apostolic churches it is difficult to doubt that numerous cases of irregularity from the first marriage existed among the converts. Yet, no specific regulations are covering their entrance into the church. Therefore, believing that they are at least tolerated church members, we may proceed. Spirit-filled enlightened prudence may direct us to the contrary in specific cases and under specific circumstances.

**Thirdly**, my next reason is based upon the practice of Paul. Consider the church membership as it developed in Corinth and in Ephesus (I Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:1ff; 5:1ff). It was a rather humiliating company. But the life in times past, if forgiven, must never stand in the way of church membership. While the church is a church militant, it may also need to

become a **salvation army**, a **home**, a **nursery**, a **hospital**, a **mending institute**, yes, many things except a **graveyard**. Let us make room in our churches for every repentant and forgiven sinner regardless of his past. There was room in the church of Paul.

**Fourthly**, I find a reason in the scriptural principle laid down in I Cor. 7:16ff. Here the converts are exhorted to remain in the civil and human relationships in which the grace of God has found them. Certainly nothing would be gained in disrupting further human relationships by demanding separation of remarried people. The instruction of Paul in this whole chapter is a drive to avoid any and all disruptions of human relationships if at all possible. If God forgives without disrupting who is the church to demand disruption? Let us be careful in our demands. Let us practice the mind of Christ and follow the example of Paul.

**However**, what about service opportunities and positions in the church? In church positions and service assignments a scriptural principle operates which too often is overlooked. While forgiveness and church fellowship are the minimal prerequisites, they are not the only requirements. Church positions and church assignments are made on the basis of **spiritual maturity**, **spiritual gifts**, and **moral and social idealism**. This must be kept in mind.

Therefore, while we wholeheartedly welcome them into the church fellowship, they should humbleheartedly decline every type of church office, public ministry and representation. If they have not reached this maturity, they need nurture rather than public service assignments. Thus both the grace of God as well as the severity of God will be made manifest in the church and to society. We must not give way to sentimentalism. There are scars that cannot be transformed into beauty. They remain scars. We must not only think of the welfare of the particular individuals. We must also keep in mind that the church must function as **conscience** in society, making known both the severity as well as the grace of God.

I draw attention to our choice words: "office, public ministry and representation." By this we make a distinction. There seems to be a moral and biblical objection to assign "family ministries," services which deal only with the internal relationships of the church. To assign them to positions where they become "the face" of the church to the public is another matter.

If it is argued that this is not complete forgiveness and restoration and thus it is misrepresenting the grace of God, I beg to take exception to such reasoning.

The Bible is clear and emphatic that forgiveness is free and bounteous, without measure is it available to the repenting and believing sinner. This we must carefully guard, emphatically teach and radically practice.

The Bible is also specific in the teaching of the completeness of restoration in and to fellowship. Nothing must be permitted to stand in the way of full fellowship (I Cor. 1:9).

The Bible, however, is equally emphatic upon spiritual, moral and social requirements for specific service assignments. This is clearly evident from such passages as Acts 1:21,22; 6:3-5; I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; I Tim. 4:12,13. These are not exhaustive; they are only representative.

Let us not confuse the issue. **Salvation** is of grace, it is free and pardon is abundant. This comes to the repentant believer with no strings attached. **Service**, however, is not thus appropriated. It is a **grace** God does **commit** unto us according to his sovereign will, righteous demand and holy ideals. Thus service will bring rewards. Not so salvation. And certainly there will be a difference in the degrees of rewards as the Bible clearly teaches. Thus there will be differences before God. Not all will reap the same reward nor hold the same positions in the presence of Christ. **Some** will shine as the stars, some will wear a crown, some will rule over more cities. Let us not become sentimental in the distribution of God's gifts and responsibilities.

It is not fully scriptural to place salvation, fellowship and service on the same level. They are distinguished and distinguishable. The one is appropriated by faith, the other is committed by the Lord, who sets his own moral and spiritual qualifications. In this we humbly bow before a righteous judge as well as a gracious Savior.

G. W. Peters