

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

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Today, there are many who are divorced; some before, some after becoming Christians, who are anguishing over the question of whether or not they may remarry. They want to follow Jesus' teaching as He is their Lord, but need help in understanding. I address this writing to and for the benefit of these brothers and sisters.

The marriage relationship is first a relationship: a man and woman together, in mutual support, concern, commitment, fidelity and responsibility. This is a love relationship. Christ's love for the Church, His bride, is the pattern for the husband's love for his wife – totally self-giving, nurturing, protecting, to the point of death and beyond. The Church's response to Christ, her bridegroom, is the pattern for the wife's love for her husband – honoring, respectful, obedient, totally self-giving even to the point of death. Actual love makes all of this a joy. Children are the multiplication of this love and joy.

Many people are married without having the essentials for this marriage. Some never intend to give totally or continually and so have a "cut-off". Some are married for prestige and wealth and so intend to totally receive. Some men marry for security, to be taken care of, as if in a womb. And so, never having left Father and Mother, are not joined fully to their wives. Some do not have themselves to give themselves. Some women are married because they were raped or because they were bearing an illegitimate child and the "shame" of that was greater than the shame of having done wrong. Some just drifted into marriage because it seemed "easier." Some men are married to obtain a caretaker, maid and sexual playmate.

In short, many of what the world calls legally married are far from what the Bible intends by marriage. "What God has joined together let no man put asunder means that God is the one who brings about His type of relationship to reflect His glory as well as that what He brings about, no man is permitted to undo. It does not mean that whatever man puts together is, *ipso facto*, what God wants to be.

The essentials of marriage are three – God, man and woman. God is the essential first leg of this three-legged relationship. Without Him, it can only totter and shatter. If this does not appear so, it is only because there is a world of artificial props which last – only for a while.

There are marriages which are not of God and which are never meant to be. There are also marriages which, though missing in important ways, can be literally saved as Christ is allowed into the personal lives of the husband and wife and their relationship consecrated to the Lord. And there are marriages in which the man and woman were, from the beginning, seeking the Lord and following His will in leading them together for life.

God will always make the difference in any relationship. Allowed in, God will make the relationship right – joined rightly or separated rightly. As only He has the power to give life and take life, so only He has the power to join rightly and separate rightly, to make right a relationship needing improvement.

The words of Jesus speak directly to the marital reality, its intended permanence, and its cause of disruption. Jesus speaks to the inmost motives and hidden intents of man, to the Spirit of his heart, as if to say, "You commit adultery by looking lustfully – I don't give you the option of plucking out your eye to stop you from sinning, since you can still imagine what you cannot see. I say 'Pluck out your eye.' only to give you the option of not sinning. I do not say to cut off your arm as a better option than sinning. I say stop sinning so we need never speak about cutting off your arm. And now you know,

for I have told you, how serious I consider sin to be. I have no pleasure in the death of anyone but that he should have life to the fullest. Give me your hearts and I will have your actions.

"You who are a husband, do not think that you can switch in mid-stream, whatever you may have heard to the contrary. Men say 'legal' when you leave your wife and take a new one, but God says, 'Adulterer.' and so you are, even now in the planning of this thing. Your heart is adulterated. It is mixed. And the half a heart you take out with you is the half a heart you bring to your new partner.

"And you, though you are not married, you who wait to marry someone who is planning a divorce to marry you, know that the one for whom you wait to marry, though 'divorced', is still married and you become what your heart already is, adulterous. So, whatever you do, be single of heart and the good pleasure of my Father will be granted to you."

It is the intent of the mind and the motivations of the heart and the reality and permanency of God's work rather than juridical status that Jesus is concerned with. It is preventive medicine that the Good Physician administers for persons and for the body politic. The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. John 1:17.

The Bible teaches that God's work is permanent and that when God joins two people into "one flesh", man is forbidden to undo or "put asunder." This prohibition includes the parties to the marriage as well as outsiders. But the command "Let not man put asunder.", carries with it an implication. Jesus could have said "what God has joined together, man cannot put asunder." But He did not say that. Instead, He said, "Let not man put asunder.", as though He were acknowledging the ability of man to break the bond, but at the same time, commanding him not to do so. It is a recognition that the relationship can be put asunder. It is of the same order as "do not cross the street", indicating that it is possible to cross the street but "one ought not to do so", that it is wrong to do so. It is like the command, "do not bear false witness", indicating that it is possible to bear false witness but "do not do so." Scripture thus testifies to the fact that the marriage relationship can actually be broken, and this fact our experiences in life confirm.

God says that marriage is to be a lifetime totally committed on-going relationship. It is to reflect the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and to be a parable of the love between Christ and His bride, the Church. This relationship is breakable in a thousand and one thoughtless, non-loving, selfish ways, and in the one great betrayal, the literal abandoning of one's spouse to be joined personally and physically to some one else. That is, adultery. Christ means to uphold God's word and to help man to become part of it, which must start with the command to "give it all you've got", which means "no exit" permitted.

But what for those whose marriage relationships have already been put asunder by infidelity, or broken on the rocks of thoughtlessness and lack of caring year after year, or desertion or beatings of various kinds or for countless other evidences of Christ being kept out, still standing and knocking? There are people in this category who are presently single and single-hearted to the Lord who redeemed and forgave them and who want above all to follow Him, only Him, finally Him! Scripture has no special message for them that would prohibit them or permit them in remarrying. What is prohibited to all others is prohibited to them. What is permitted to all other is permitted to them—only listening to His voice so as not to be ashamed at His glorious coming.

The world cannot make marriages and the Church can only echo what God has spoken, and since this is so, how important it is to listen to the Lord and be led by Him in our present relationships and in our proposed ones. When we rest on God's Word to our Spirit, we can stand against the world. Without Him, we fold under our own weight. It is like the knowledge of God's forgiveness. The Bible tells us "acquitted", "forgiven", "You are my children.", but it is only when His Spirit bears witness

with our Spirit that we know the Father, no matter what the world says. In the same manner only God's approving presence can give us the rocklike surety which will stand the day of trial.

Scriptures

Matthew 5:27-32
1 Corinthians 7:10

Mark 10:1-2
Luke 16:18

Note 1: What Matthew applies to man, Mark applies to woman. "The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her, and if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too." This is then a divine principle of relationship rather than a cultural "advantage" of the male. (Also reflecting gentile milieu (Rome) of Mark's Gospel?)

Note 2: The placement of Matthew 5:31-32, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of fornication, makes her commit adultery; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery", within a series of teachings which all stress a certain intensification of the inward, the true motivation and the intent, rather than the outward and the legal, suggest that Jesus' intent is not to speak about "states" such as the married, the divorced, etc., but the motivational elements in people that bring about or violate relationships. That is, a person's intending to break a relationship in order to marry another; or the man intending to "receive" someone who has done this for him. And this indeed is the understanding of Mark's Gospel, "The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty, etc."

Note 3: The Gospel of Mark's, "a man (Luke's, anyone) who divorces his wife and (KAI – Greek, wa-Aramaic and Hebrew) marries another is guilty of adultery against her", is more probably to be translated, "a man (anyone) who divorces his wife so as to marry another commits adultery against her (his wife). See KAI to introduce a result. Pg. 393f. A Greek-English Lexicon for the New Testament. Arndt and Gingrich, Univ. of Chicago Press. This translation is in accord with the realism of Jesus' teachings. Thus, it is not adultery to divorce your wife. That is desertion, bad enough! The adultery is enacted in the joining to another. The intent of adultery is in the divorcing your wife so as to marry another.

Note 4: Matthew 5:34 – "Everyone who divorces his wife, except for case of fornication (unlawful sexual intercourse) makes her an adulteress" – so the Jerusalem and Revised Standard Versions. "Causeth her to commit adultery" – so the King James Version. The word in Greek and Aramaic is a verb, *moicheuthenai*, *d'tgor* to commit adultery, rather than the noun *moichos*, Adulterer(ess). Thus Jesus is saying concerning a woman who has been put away by her husband, though she has not engaged in unlawful sexual intercourse, not that this woman is to be considered an adulteress (because of the fact that she is divorced), but rather that the man who does this to a woman (by divorcing her and leaving her unprotected and open to be taken by another man, etc.), making her, *poiei*, (forcing her into temptation?) commit adulterous acts. The censure is on the man, not the woman. Again Jesus' emphasis is on the heart's intent and the real consequence to human life in "indulging" that intent, rather than on the establishing of a "state", i.e. the state of a woman being unjustly put away being considered an adulteress. Jesus, the Good Physician, by enlightening the reality, is giving a good dose of preventive prescriptions. See Amdt and Gingrich, Pg. 528 for verb *moicheuo*.

Note 5: Church Blessing and Annulment: The Church cannot make people married. Two people are married by intentionally giving themselves to each other in the most complete, irrevocable, loving, physical, supportive, responsible way,--publically before men (hence society's interest in regulating and licensing) and spiritually before God (hence the Church's interest in blessing). Society may allow the Church to act as a civil agent in performing the marriage (as it is in the United States), or prohibit it (U.S.S.R.), but the Church, as such, cannot make a marriage. Neither may the Church divorce a couple since the Church cannot enact what Christ forbids. The Church may only "bless" a marriage. That is,

the church may recognize a marriage as a marriage and pray for God's grace on the marriage. The people say Amen to the prayer and Amen to the marriage. The church may also annul a marriage. This is not to dissolve a marriage, since marriage may not be intentionally dissolved, but rather it is to declare that a marriage does not presently exist, or most usually, has never existed. The purpose of a declaration of annulment is to be helpful. It is to declare the fact of non-marriage so that the man and woman may, if so led, feel free to marry. Annulment is also to tell all other members of the Community that the man and woman are free to marry, and if they do so, they are not committing sin.

The Church knows of only one remedy for sin, including "marital" sins; repentance and the blood of Jesus Christ, then there is full fellowship. There is no "second class" citizenship for God's people, no marital "limbo." There is only true sonship and heirs of eternal life,

The Church cannot bless what God does not bless, nor say "Annulled" to what God knows truly exists. That is why its ministers need to be truly helpful and understanding of what the true situation is and the parties concerned, truly honest and open. God, the Holy Spirit, must be the one who takes over all of these matters. The Church may and does err, but God is always right and that is what counts! His will has a way of always winning out for us that means that we will always have a way in Him to rectify what is presently wrong.

Note 6: The above interpretation of the New Testament teaching is also found among a few Early Church Fathers. Tertullian, for example, before he became a Montanist, wrote in Adversus Marcionum, about the year 207, "I maintain, then, that there was a condition in the prohibition which He now made of divorce, the case supposed being that a man put away his wife for the express purpose of marrying another. His words are: "Whoever puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her that is put from her husband, also commits adultery." "Put away", that is, for the reason wherefore a woman ought not to be dismissed, that another wife may be obtained. For he who marries a woman who is unlawfully put away is as much of an adulterer as the man who marries one who is undivorced. Permanent is the marriage which is not rightfully dissolved; to marry, therefore, while matrimony is undissolved, is to commit adultery. Since therefore, His prohibition of divorce was a conditional one, He did not prohibit absolutely; and what He did not absolutely forbid, that He permitted on some occasions, where there is an absence of the cause why He gave this prohibition. In very deed, His teaching is not contrary to Moses, whose precept He partially defends, I will not say confirms."

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