

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

A. The Historic Positions

- a) The Church has historically taken many positions on this matter.
- b) The question has been debated from time of Christ, and even from the time of Moses.
- c) The concept of nullity, used by Catholic Church, i.e., the marriage was pronounced invalid on the basis that the necessary ingredients of a proper union were not really present to begin with. It was not a truly Christian marriage, in effect. ' To divorce and remarry before the death of one partner is to live in adultery.

The reformers (Luther, Calvin and Knox, Wesley, etc) on the other hand did recognize certain legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage , such as adultery, desertion and cruelty.

- (i) However, these grounds were legitimate only as judged by the Church or corporate body.
- (ii) Since marriage union is related to God and society, as well as vowing couple it was held that corporate body of the Church must also give its approval of a divorce as well as to an ensuring remarriage.
- (iii) The reformers saw that man was not necessarily made for marriage but that marriage was made for man (this is believed to be Biblical).

1. The Current Rethinking

- (a) Christians, most protestant Church bodies, have begun in rethinking and revising their views in the issue of divorce and remarriage because of increased influx of divorces into the Church. However it is not that the Church had to change her doctrine simply because the society has a problem, although it does, she has to face reality about things she had never realised before. The question is what are those realities.
- (b) We have to look at different Bible passages that address the issue of divorce and remarriage, eg, by Moses, Christ and Paul. They seem to speak differently on the issue. Each seems to give an allowance for divorce and remarriage.

- i) Moses' Old Testament allowance of divorce on the ground of some 'uncleanness' is unclear, and its meaning was debated even in time of Christ.
- ii) Christ, in the gospels, appears to grant the legitimacy of divorce and remarriage by the 'exception clause' in Matthew, but does not mention it in Mark or Luke.
- iii) Paul on the other hand, does not speak of Christ's allowance for divorce, but appears to recognise another legitimate ground, that of desertion. We then are left with the problem of what the Bible does recognise as legitimate grounds for divorce and possible remarriage. Can these passages be harmonised for application today or were they relevant only in their historical settings?

N.B.: God established a monogamous marriage to promote godliness in the home and the nation (*Malachi 2: 14 - 16*). Therefore He says He hates divorce. The Solemn question that confronts us right here is, why doesn't God say divorce is sin but comes out clearly that adultery is sin? Which of the two does He hate the most, adultery or divorce?

2. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH

(a) The issue at stake

1. It is a revealed secret that the modern home is in serious trouble. Marriage counsellors work around the clock trying to save marriages; but in the process they more often than not discover that they try in exasperation to save marriages that never 'existed'. Quite a good number of marriages are tottering on the rocks while others end unceremoniously where either party simply walks away permanently or the other drives a bullet through the brains of the other party. To put it in mild terms, marriage today is unattractive especially to many young people. Divorce has practically become a way of life for many in our society. The marriage vows for many are a tounge-in-cheek recital, with the tacit understanding, "*Till divorce do us part*".

Yesterday, a divorcee was viewed as a second class Christian in Christian circles. Lest we as a Church become judgemental and self righteous in this regard, we need to recall that countless Pastors fall victims to marital tragedy.

One serious question is how much is the Church doing to curb the problem? The Church, as a pillar of truth, has a remedy and the

principles for the prevention of the marital dissolution. The answer is with us because we are our 'Brothers' keepers'.

2. This paper seeks to look into:
 - (a) The purpose of marriage as designed by God.
 - (b) The causes for disintegration of this godly institution.
 - (c) The believer's right to remarry.
 - (d) To see if the Bible permits divorce and remarriage.
 - (e) Moses, Jesus and Apostle Paul's views on marriage and divorce then conclusion. This is designed to be a discussion paper for the Evangelical Church brethren and those who will benefit from these truths.

(b) God's purpose in instituting marriage

(i) What was not good

Without dwelling much upon the issue of creation, it suffices to briefly point it out that although God had pronounced everything else He had made to be 'good; when He made a bachelor, He admitted it was '**not good**'. Something was missing. This pronouncement, of course, was simply introductory to His fashioning the woman who was to be Adam's complement and companion. Noting that all the animals had complementary mates, Adam found himself especially alone (not lonely), unfulfilled. He then proceeded to administer anesthesia, borrowed one of Adam's ribs, and formed the woman (Eve). The rib He returned in the charming personality of the woman. Although the Lord certainly could have used more dust as His raw materials for Eve's creation, He chose rather to create her from Adam's body. Perhaps this was to intensify the couple's bond of unity and in fact, that of the whole race. The ancient devines have often noted that God did not fashion her from Adam's foot - bone, nor from a head - bone (as symbolizing either her dominating man or being dominated by him). Rather, He chose a bone close to the man's heart to symbolize affection (love). The primary intention seems to be that of her closeness to his heart, both to be protected under his arm and for her to be protectress of his inmost life and heart. Their unity and spiritual equality are certainly suggested in this creative process (*cf. Gal. 3: 28; Malachi 2: 15*).

The climax of the story, however, was the union or marriage of Adam and Eve. God brought them together and united them. After uniting them, He commanded them to be 'one flesh' and not to be separated

(*Gen 2: 22 - 24*). Thus the first institution God ordained was that of the home, which reminds us that Jesus also began His earthly ministry by attending a wedding at Cana, bringing blessing to a home (*John 2*). His concern for the home is always primary, as emphasized throughout the Bible. In fact a home and a godly assembly were one and same thing to Him. That is why there is no mention of a separate place of worship for Adam, Eve and his children because God meant that they produce a godly offspring for Him (*Malachi 2: 15*). In other words, the home was meant to be an assembly of godly people; hence Paul says a home and the Church are a mystery, while talking about marriage of whose head or leader is man.

(ii) What Exactly Was God's Purpose In Instituting Marriage?

Although many a purpose were envisioned by God in establishing of the marriage relation, several should be highlighted as basic. Recognizing these most fundamental purposes will help to give us a proper perspective as we think of divorce and remarriage, besides that of a properly functioning home.

- **Propagating The Race**

The most obvious purpose was that of having children i.e. - to propagate the race. God's first command to the couple in Eden was, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' (*Gen. 1 : 28*). This related them to physical nature in its inherent ability to reproduce. It also served to keep the race fresh.

This mating command introduces us to God's general principle of involving men and women as workers together with Him. He didn't just fill the earth with multitudes of people as He did the heavens with angels. In the creative process of men, He assigned men, in turn, to be procreators with Him in furthering His creative work. Not that it was to be done in a haphazard way, but only accordingly to be God's directive (*Heb. 13:4*). This life - begetting function He assigned to the married couple alone, and He jealously guards this restriction with warnings of dire consequences to offenders, (*I Cor. 6 : 18 - 20; Rev. 25: 15; Heb 13:4*). Both the giving and taking of life are His sacred prerogative, and the delegation of these responsibilities are strictly assigned by Him. Thus within the marriage relationship, God carries out His further creative process in a fellowship with men. It is altogether fitting and consistent with God's creative work that this life - begetting experience should be of joy. Didn't all the angels of God shout and sing at His first creation (*Job 38: 4 - 7*)? The forming of a new personality in God's image is an artistic creation of the highest order, as David said, "We are wonderfully made" (*Ps. 139*). But it is a divine privilege delegated

by God to a married couple and should be solemnly recognized as such. In this they are workers together with God as He furthers His creation. I guess the reason for fornicators and adulterers' guilty conscience is caused by the fact that they are violating God's law of human creation-it will be the responsibility carried out by legally wedded couples and continued under a monogamous setting, and denouncing extra-marital relations.

- **Promoting personality growth and grace**

The marriage relation, however is not just a medium of God to propagate the race. He could have done that through other means as with the angels. The more immediate purpose is concerned with the couple themselves; that purpose is to develop and mature two different personalities in a relationship of mutual fellowship and responsibilities. This is by no means to suggest the 'myth' of their marrying and living 'happily ever after' without a conflict. That happens only in story book fantasies. The real life marriage of the Bible doesn't necessarily promise a rose garden here on earth. Marriage is rather the joining together of two individuals of opposite sexes who vow to live, love and work together through rain and sunshine, sickness and health or come what may throughout life. They are partners in shaping and maturing each other for eternity.

To this marriage union, each comes with a unique personality. Each has a complex of problems or hang - ups and an endowment of gifts or talents in varying degrees of development. No two people have the same tastes or habits. After the honeymoon, it is sometimes traumatically discovered that the gears don't all mesh without squeaking, one zigs when the other zags, and the anticipated harmony and heaven on earth don't seem to materialise. It is easy for two well-intentioned lovers to experience creeping disenchantment after the cosmetics begin to rub off and the eyeball meets the personality reality of the other party. The feeling may gradually develop that '*We were not really meant for each other*', '*Asizange safanelana*'- we were incompatible. Popular though this excuse may be today, it really is a genuine cop - out. Marriage partners are not custom made. This disenchantment of a couple with each other can be traced to a wrong conception of the purpose of marriage. There is a price to pay in terms of personal desires and peculiarities. Regardless how identical their background or make up, no couple will automatically blend immediately in perfect symphonic harmony. Especially not today, with all the pressures and irritations that confront a couple as they face and toughout life together. The purpose of life, including marriage, is not just frolic in the sun and experience monotonous bliss in a life devoid

of hardships, adjustments and problems. Christ never promised that for the Christian life, and the marriage experience is no exception. The more primary purpose of marriage is that of growth and personality development. And growth comes through struggle. It should be recognized that every individual created by God is a diamond in the rough. Diamonds, however need grinding and polishing to develop their beauty. For this purpose God instituted the marriage relation as one of central workshops in which that grinding and polishing process takes place. The dust and sparks may have to fly a bit in the workshop, but the two need each other in the refining process just as the diamond needs the grindstone. And the submitting of each partner to this polishing operation is the key to both marriage harmony and their individual development in the plan of God. This is what Paul had in mind in Eph. 5 : 21 as he counselled both husbands and wives: ‘ be subject to one another in the fear of Christ’. Though each has specific gifts and responsibilities, neither is to be adamant and unsubmitive in responding to the other.

3. Fulfilling man’s God given passions

A third purpose for marriage needs to be noted as indicated by both Christ and Paul. That is the purpose of fulfilling the legitimate sexual passions which God has built into man. This purpose is related to the previously noted one of propagating the race, but is certainly not limited to that. The passions do not automatically subside when child bearing for a couple is ended. Paul recognized this fact in *I Corinthians* 7:5 by exhorting: ‘Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self control’.

It should be noted further that Paul saw the possession of such sexual drives as one of the divine reasons for which God has instituted the marriage relationship. To prevent an improper expression of these passions, the Apostle commanded, ‘ let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband’ (*I Cor.* 7: 2). Although this chapter in *Corinthians* is often thought of as Paul’s great treatise on greater benefit of being single, it is here also that he solemnly commands marriage for many and shows why it is physically necessary. That reason is that the couple might give proper expression of their God given sexual needs (*I Cor* 7: 2,9). This possession or non possession of sexual passions, Paul declares to be the individuals ‘gifts’ from God (*I Cor* 7:7). He recognized that all people do not have the same personal endowments in this regard and that it is to be subjectively determined by each person individually. In the discussion, he extols the virtues of the single state, in as much as he himself was single, however, this should be seen in the light of the historic setting in which Paul wrote. The Jews traditionally saw

marriage as both a responsibility and a necessity in order to secure God's blessing in life. To not have children often was considered a curse, and to have children one obviously had to be married. It should also be noted that, in the previous chapter, Paul had denounced sexual immorality and its relation to heathen worship in Corinth. Therefore, in chapter 7 the Apostle makes a strong defense for the state of being single and living a life of non sexual activity. In so doing, he acknowledges the propriety of marriage, but seeks to show that the single state is also a most legitimate and desirable state (*verse 7*). The emphasis of Paul throughout this discussion, in I Cor 7, however, should not be missed among the many details of marital instructions. That basic emphasis is two fold:

1. Whether single or married, the goal of pleasing the Lord should always be uppermost (II Cor. 5:9).
2. Pleasing the Lord should be pursued by seeking the happiness and spiritual effectiveness of each believer, e.g. verses 17, 32, 34 and 35. This was obviously his supreme concern. The secondary emphasis, however, also should not be overlooked, for it contributes to the first. This emphasis on the happiness of the believer, married or single, is noted in many places (e.g vv 7, 26, 28, 32, 37 and 40). He considers their different degrees of self control, their freedom from trouble, their profit, and their personal happiness. Thus their decision of whether a person should marry or not Paul leaves with the individuals' personal judgement. Each must determine his/her own 'gift' as to whether he or she has sexual needs that cry out for expression. The Apostle put it this way: 'but if they do not have self control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn' with passions (I Cor 7 : 9). He saw no necessary piety in either lack of passions or the gift of passions. Neither the married state or the single state, as such, are either Godly or ungodly. Rather than establishing some divine order of preference, Paul simply stressed the happiness of the individual or couple in serving the Lord.

This clarification by Paul helps us also to understand Christ's point in Matthew 19, on the question of whether or not one should marry. In answer to the disciples' question clearly as to whether the single state that might be the better course (to avoid the problems of marital unfaithfulness), Jesus declared that the decision is strictly an individual one. It depends on ones gift from God (Mat.19:1-12). While celibacy is not generally advisable, there are three exceptions which may make it the better course in the will of God. One is the exception of being born a 'Eunuch', making marriage inadvisable. The second is the case where surgery might have been performed, changing the persons sexual needs abilities. Third, one may have received the gift of

self control to better promote the kingdom of God (Matt 19 :12). Such was apparently the case of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas, who gave up the right to matrimony in order to better conduct their missionary work (I Cor 9:5).

(iv) Typifying Christ's Marriage To The Church

A final purpose of marriage is suggested in Paul's counsel to the Church in Ephesus

As he there gives instruction to husbands and wives, he also declares that the marriage relationship is really a type or picture of the coming union of Christ with His Church. In at least six ways Paul relates the marriage of husband and wife to that of Christ's relation to His Church family (*Eph 5: 22 - 32*). In fact, he speaks of the first marriage in Eden as being a prefiguring of this divine - human relationship. The mystery of two lovers becoming 'one flesh' in marriage; he describes as being especially fulfilled in Christ's coming marriage with the Church. This cosmic and divine relationship gives marriage a whole new perspective. It puts it on the highest plane imaginable. It declares that God is specifically using the institution of marriage to portray that external union of Christ, the Son of God, with His people, the Church. No event in all the divine calendar is as important as this coming event in which the Father will consummate the union of His Son with His 'glorious bride' (*Eph.5:27*). Although the human relations are temporal and preparatory, the divine human relation will be permanent and completely fulfilling. And the people that make up that bride are those whom God is seeking today as He builds His Church. They will forever be His closest companions as He reigns over the universe and institutes the high adventures of His eternal enterprises and delights.

No wonder then that the high ideals of faithfulness, purity and love are strictly enjoined on the marriage relationship. They portray Christ's relationship with His eternal bride, a relationship of the highest order. That's why we are to love each other in spite of differences, for we dimly portray Christ's love for the Church. Paul strongly implies that this is one of the principal purposes of marriage in the divine program. Even the purpose of propating the race is really subsidiary to this divine portrayal of Christ's eternal relationship with His people. Thus the ostensible name of the game is 'marriage; but it's purpose is often misunderstood. If you don't believe it, try asking a couple why they got married, and prepare yourself for a shock. (Try it on yourself first). The real purpose of marriage is to reflect, in a typical way, the love relation between God and His people and to implement and perfect that love in human personalities.

N.B: Marriage is God's workshop or garden in which He is growing and maturing personalities for eternity. This purpose should be recognized by every Christian couple so that the 'ups and downs' of their marriage experience can be taken in proper stride. The anticipated 'rose garden' can materialise only as God is recognized as the gardener and the pruning and praising processes are properly appreciated. The fragrance and beauty of the relationship are brought out by their mutual discipline and delights in the plan of God.

3. What Does God's Word Say When The Marriage Breaks?

Having established the truth that the marriage relation enjoys God's special ordination and promises as the height of human bliss, we are now to see the challenges that stand before this blessed and godly institution. We have seen an alarming prevalence of marriage break ups in many societies of the world today, and the questions that begin to take shape in ones mind are as follows:

- Why does God allow such a godly institution to disintegrate?
- Are people today less informed about marriage? Or they know but wouldn't care less about His word
- Are people most of the time marrying for wrong reasons or ulterior motives?
- Are preachers and pastors failing to teach and shepherd their flock by way of premarital counselling or marriage enrichment teachings today?
- Are we fast producing a permissive and I don't care offspring?
- Are people today excessively charged with sexual drives?

Taking into account that believers are by no means immune to this cancerous disease that has reached the vicera of the human race, we will by no means try to respond to the previously mentioned questions. It would be interesting to discuss the causes or remedies propounded; but time and space won't permit that. We propose rather to simply gather together the basic principles of the Bible on the issue so that the believer might have a clear understanding of his/her responsibilities concerning marriage and divorce. Again we have another set of questions directed to the Bible.

- Is the Bible concerned with the issue of marriage breaking up on the practical level or does it merely whitewash the question with statements of idealism?
- Does it realistically recognize divorce?
- How permanent is marriage in the eyes of God?
- If divorce is allowed, what are the proper grounds?
- When it does occur, what is the believers' first responsibility?
- What are the Churches responsibilities?
- Is the option of remarriage legitimate to consider?

- And when is one ‘ living in sin?
- What is the redemptive hope for marriage failures and how extensive is it?
- Are the teachings of the Old and New Testaments contradictory or consistent on the subject?
- What are the abiding principles?

In this chapter we will put together the various passages that deal with the subject and notice the principles taught.

In pursuing these Biblical principles, it is helpful to look at them in what appears to be their most logical order. The areas to be discussed then will be:

1. The achieving of peace and reconciliation in marriage.
2. The recourse when unfaithfulness occurs.
3. The Biblical options open to divorced people.
4. The propriety of remarriage.
5. The place of Christian service for those who have had marriage failures. The first two are closely related and will be considered together in this chapter.

(a) The Principle Of Communication And Reconciliation

Every marriage, be it Christian or non Christian, will experience conflicts and if these are not adequately dealt with, they will push a marriage to a crisis and if a crisis is not meticulously and prayerfully handled, it will ultimately push a marriage to death or divorce.

So, when a marriage begins to sour and the early stages of disenchantment set in, it is especially important that a couple recognises their God given responsibilities and resources. Fortunately a marriage doesn't just fall apart, in the morning, it goes through certain stages before it crumbles. It is therefore of vital importance to work on it while the going is still not too bad. A couple may do the following:

(i) Self evaluation

As already alluded to previously, no marriage is without its problems (fortunately problems come and go) in terms of personality clashes and adjustments. This follows from both the sinful rascality of all men and the individual peculiarities of even the best of Christian men and women. Tailor made mates who fulfill all one's matrimonial dreams are just not on the makert; on top of that our differences and tastes may become unavoidable challenges in our well intended marriages. Therefore,

adjustments in give and take compromises are to be expected in a well ordered relationship. Recognizing the need for such adjustments, is half the battle. And to refuse to recognise it, is the beginning of another battle, a disastrous one.

The place for each marriage partner to begin these adjustments is with herself/himself, not with his/her spouse. The Bible instructs the husband to attend to his own responsibility of loving his wife, not to be a dean of education for her instruction. He is not told to require submission of his wife, nor is the wife told to demand his love (*Eph 5 : 21 ff*). Each is to evaluate his/her own responsibilities and fulfill them, recognizing that this is designed to evoke a similar evaluation and response on the part of his/her partner. Admittedly this is easier said than done because we have a propensity of not being fair to ourselves; we always think we are absolute angels, right and even cleverer than others. Hence Christ and Paul both warned against the general sin of censoring spirit, suggesting this as tantamount to playing God to your neighbour (*Matt 7 : 1; Rom 14 : 4, 13*). We all have an uncanny ability to see our faults in other people, and the 'speck' in their eye often turns out to be a 'Log' in our own (*Matt 7 : 3*). The wise Solomon made pretty salty illustrations. In speaking of a 'back biting tongue' he said, "*It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman (Prov 25: 23, 24)*". In *Proverbs 27: 15* he portrays this contention as a 'constant dripping on a day of steady rain'. The picture is one of incessant nagging which drives the partner either out of the house (if not out of his mind) or to the remotest den of refuge in the cellar. This sound chauvinistic but men are not less adept at the game than women.

The point to be noted is that anyone who practices fault finding toward her/his partner usually has developed a blind spot to his/her defects (*John 8: 7*).

Self evaluation then is the first solid plank in the building of a platform of good marital relations

ii) Spouse Evaluation

Evaluation of ones self, however, is not the whole story, and one would be remiss to stop there. Introspection by itself breeds neuroses. We are also, in a sense, our brothers keeper; and our marital partner as well. While Jesus instructed us not to judge our neighbour with a 'log' in our eye, He did not deny us the responsibility of helping him with his problems. After attending to self judgement, Jesus said, you can then 'see clearly enough to take the speck out of our brother's eye' (*Matt 7: 5*). In other words, be sure the failure you see in your neighbour is real, not just imagined or a projection of your own. The same goes for marital relation.

In evaluating one's spouse, his or her strengths and weaknesses are to be fully appreciated and recognised. Everyone has his/her led idiosyncrasies which are native to his/her personality, and everyone has his/her special gifts. Apostle Peter admonished husbands to dwell with their wives '*according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel*', (*I Peter 3: 7*). Their natural abilities and limitations are to be taken into account, which includes their varying tastes and backgrounds. Christian couples also have different levels of spiritual maturity which should be recognised. It is immature and naive on the part of one partner to demand spiritual maturity on the part of the other. It denigrates the ego by dragging rather than leading and produces only superficial compliances. Personality growth and spiritual development must come from within. Character - has a future, in life; life of work, marriage and bussiness.

iii) **The Divine Resource**

Living together is an art as well as science. But the Christian couple has a definite edge in practicing the art in that they are provided with some special spiritual resources. One is that of daily exposure to the Word of God as they read and study together. In those sessions around the scriptures, Christ is recognised as Lord of the home and His instruction speaks to each one individually. They are reminded together of God's will for their lives and of the resources and power He makes available for building a Christian home together.

iv) **The Second Resource** for Christian partners in dealing with problems they see in each other is the example technique of **holy behaviour**. We see this in *I Peter*, where Peter refers to it as a dynamic incentive to promote both peace and spiritual progress in the home. He even suggests that Sarah (with all her questionable ideas) made a contribution to Abraham's spiritual development. Abraham's faith wasn't perfected by himself. The point is that, the effect of a quiet and consistent life before ones partner is a living translation of God's Word, bound to be read.

v) **The Third And Most Important Resource** available is that of prayer. This avenue is pointed to many times in the Bible, but is especially cogent as John relates it in *I John 5 : 16*. Here he declares that, '*if any one sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give life to those who commit sin not leading to death*'. Aside from the interpretive problem of the, '*sin unto death*', the passage strongly reminds us of our first responsibility when we note a defect in our neighbour or spouse. That responsibility is to pray. The usual response is to ridicule, rebuke, carp or tell him what he should do or where he should go. All this is only ego destroying and makes for defensive reactions. It shows that we are on the same spiritual level as he is, only with different defects. We rebuke a person for using the same fleshly resources that we use, only less effectively. In our impatience we forget

that our real resource is spiritual. God gave us prayer to move men as well as mountains. Without it our other efforts are useless.

Furthermore, the results of using the resource of prayer, John declares to be certain (*I John 5: 16*). The Lord will assuredly give correction to an erring neighbour or partner if we make the petition, for it is always His will to correct and mature His people.

Prayer then makes unlimited the possibilities of Christian partners build each other up. It is an enterprise in which we can be workers together with God. As we observe areas of need, immaturity, or sin in our partners, our immediate resource is to God who knows all the circumstances and who is able to mysteriously work from within. This removes the unwholesome atmosphere of judgemental attitudes and avoids the depressive problem of ego breakdown or defensiveness which is always a barrier to personality growth. It tends to foster an atmosphere of grace and dependence on the Lord which both husband and wife can appreciate as the marital problems are resolved. Even through difficult problems we can have that peace to which God has called marriage partners. *'Oh what peace we often forfeit.....what needless pain we bear!'*

4. When Unfaithfulness Occurs

As with many other human experiences, however, we tend to play the marriage game by ear, rather than the directions of Biblical principles. When all else fails, we frantically look for the directions, often too late. Because the Biblical principles of peace, growth, and reconciliation are not observed, a breakdown in communication and affections often occur. In our modern society - especially, this easily leads to unfaithfulness in a resort to other relationships. Infidelity in the marriage bond often results. For whatever cause it happens, it is a mounting problem, and we should know what the Bible says about it. Although both parties inevitably contribute to the defection, the sin of adultery usually begins with one partner being guilty of the actual offence. It is a cop out for the adulterous party to use the lame excuse that *'he (or she) drove me to it'*, and thus both are guilty. The Bible knows of no such jurisprudence, though other failures may obviously have aggravated the immortal act. The Bible holds the participating pair themselves to be the guilty ones. The question then arises as to what the 'innocent party' should do when he or she discovers the unfaithfulness of the partner. What are the legitimate options that the Bible allows?

a) Divorce Be Necessary

The very thought of divorce is abhorrent to all believers. To those personally involved, it often is worse than death itself. (This often is true

also for unbelievers). What realistic approach does the Bible give to this problem?

We should first of all recognise that it does not present it (divorce) as an option, but as a last resort, if not a last rite. Adultery called for death under the Mosaic legislation. While the Old Testament allowed divorce for certain, limited reasons, it was because of the hardness or the inflexibility of the partners to be reconciled. Malachi stoutly declared that the Lord hates divorce (*Mal 2: 16*). Furthermore, Christ in *Matthew 19: 4 - 6* affirmed the divine intention that marriage was to be a lifelong relationship. “*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate*”. We then are driven to ask whether divorce is ever a legitimate Christian option or is even recognised by God. When the civil courts grant a couple a divorce, does God grant it, or does He see the couple as still married? To see the full Biblical perspective we need to consider both the Old Testament foundations and the New Testament clarifications. The key Old Testament passage on this issue is Deuteronomy 24, and it is also to which the New Testament refers as the problem is confronted. In that passage Moses gave Israel its regulations concerning the place and limitations of divorce. Far from revising God’s original intention for permanent marriage ties, He rather set limitations on a rampant practice of divorce that was developing. This He did by restricting its use to an exceptional moral cause and by requiring a written document to make it a legal action. It also served to remind the husband that he would lose her forever when he got a divorce in that culture. Even though her next husband should die, the former husband could never remarry her, for God regarded that as an abomination (*Deut 24: 4; Jer 3: 1*).

From this Old Testament legislation, it is to be noted that God did recognise divorce when it took place in Israel’s courts, even though the union was designated to be permanent. Moses spoke of the woman becoming ‘*another man’s wife*’ and of her first husband as being her ‘*former husband*’ (*Deut 24 : 2 , 3*). And if God recognised divorce as serving a relationship in the Old Testament, there is no indication that He denies that it may happen in the New Testament. Christ, in fact, they questioned Him on the subject (*Mark 10: 2, 3*). Although God saw sin to be the cause of marriage dissolution, He did recognise the possibility of it occurring.

b) The legitimate cause of divorce

If God recognises that certain sins may indeed bring about divorce, as noted by Moses and Jesus, we should then identify what those sins are. What does the Bible recognise as legitimate grounds for a believer to seek a divorce? We note first that Jesus’ statement in *Mark 10* does not elaborate on this, for that was the focus of Mark’s point there. In *Matthew 19*, however, the discussion is given in more detail where the specific question of the proper grounds for divorce is asked. That ground,

Jesus explained, was the infidelity or adultery of the other partner. He had previously alluded to this in the sermon on the mount (*Matt 5 : 32*), and here further elucidates it in response to a specific question. This, by the way, was not some interim ethics, as some would suggest, for Jesus was now on His way to the cross and had already announced His plan to build His Church (*Matt 16: 18*).

There are many who have called into question the authenticity of this passage in Matthew, since it gives some details not given by Mark or Luke. The ground for questioning it, however, is purely subjective, for it has the strongest manuscript support in the Greek texts. Though many ingenious ways have been used to void it, the passage has been overwhelmingly acknowledged as authentic by the great textual scholars of history. If we recognise that God is the author of all Gospel accounts and that they supplement each other in their various details, the variation difficulty disappears. Whereas Mark and Luke give summary accounts of Jesus' teaching on the subject, Matthew gives a detailed account, noting also the specific question asked and the more specific answer given by Jesus. This is characteristic of Matthew in recording Jesus' teachings as evident in the sermon on the mount and the Olivet discourse. His additional details on the divorce issue, they are totally reliable and entirely consistent with the shorter accounts.

The unique addition supplied by Matthew here is the 'exception clause' which is given in both *Matthew 5: 32* and *19: 9*. It will help to recite both passages to get their full impact. *Matthew 5: 32* says '.....but I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery'. *Matthew 19:9* says, 'and I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery'.

In the first instance Jesus declares that a man becomes guilty of two counts of adultery when he divorces his wife; he makes both her and the one she later marries commit adultery in the act of their marrying. In the second instance, He asserts that a man commits adultery personally when he divorces his wife and marries another woman. This warning of the sin of committing adultery by divorce is obviously the main thrust of Jesus' two statements on the subject. *Mark 10: 12* adds the fact that the woman also might initiate the divorce and thus commit adultery. The solemnity of Jesus' words in these warnings is crystal clear and must not be watered down by deceptive rationalizations. They are definitive statements and are as binding and enduring as *John 3: 16*. Divorce is definitely not God's way of resolving marriage problems.

But the exception which Jesus included in both statements is just as binding and must not be overlooked. That the exception is where one or both of the partners have been involved in 'pornea' fornication, immorality, unchastity, etc. What does the term mean? In the Old

Testament the equivalent term, 'Zanah', almost universally meant adultery. In the New Testament the term is used twenty six times, referring to all types of illicit sexual intercourse (Arnot and Gingrichs Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament). It is broader term than 'adultery' (*Moicheia*), but often includes it. Jesus evidently used the term 'porneia' here, rather than 'moicheia', to show the disastrous effect of any illicit sexual relations on the marriage relationship.

Adultery then has the effect of arbiting or dissolving a marriage union in the eyes of God. Though the marriage was designed by God to be permanent or lifelong, the act of adultery breaks the one flesh union of husband and wife in defiance of the will of God. As Paul said, 'the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her' (*I Cor 6:16*). This being true, the other partner is not guilty of adultery when getting a divorce. Adultery in that case has already been committed, and has severed the union by the breach of faithfulness and a new physical union.

The conclusion that Jesus saw adultery as the one legitimate ground for a couple being divorced thus is almost unavoidable. This view, of course, was similar to the position taken by the school of Shammai in Jesus' time, though it is more specific in naming the sin of pornea. (The school of Hillel, it will be recalled, allowed divorce by the man for almost any cause or point of irritation). With respect to the law of Moses, there is little evidence that Jesus altered the Old Testament legislation concerning God's view of divorce. He explicitly said that He came not to destroy Moses' law or the prophets, but to 'fill it out' in regard to its principles (*Matt 5:17, 18*). The Jews had for centuries debated the exact meaning of the 'some indecency' which Moses delineated as ground for divorce in *Deut. 24:1*. Though it may not have been actual adultery (which required the death penalty, according to *Deut. 22:22*), it evidently involved some type of illicit sex coupled with deception. (Not all sex crimes were punishable by death as noted in *Exod 22:16,17; Deut 22: 25 -29*). Jesus, however, did not need to annul the death penalty for sex crime, for that was already voided when Israel lost her theocratic status in 605 BC and the 'times of the gentiles' began. Their gentile overloads did not require death for adultery and the Jews were divinely subjected to their civil laws *Rom 13: 1*. Jesus' point, then, was simply to reiterate the disastrous effect that a fornicatory relation imposes on ones marriage. It constitutes its death knell, as it also did in Old Testament times.

This clarification by Jesus, however, should not be seen as allowing laxity in granting loopholes for divorce. It was rather intended to emphasize the devastating effect of extramarital sex. In God's eyes such a relation breaks the one - flesh union which He established. Jesus warned that the sin of adultery has the effect of destroying a marriage and a home.

c) **The Will Of God For Reconciliation**

Since adultery is pronounced so devastating by Jesus, we are driven to inquire more carefully into the legitimacy of divorce. Is it ever proper for a Christian to seek divorce? We should first of all recognise that, although ' God hates divorce (Mal 2 : 16), there is something he hates even more. That something is the cause for which He allows divorce, which is, an adulterous relation. This He considers intolerable. The divorced woman of Deuteronomy 24, for instance, was not to go back to her husband after marrying another, under any circumstances. In other words, she was not to be passed back and forth in a dual relationship as in a barnyard situation. That constituted abomination in the sight of God (*Deut 24:4*).

N.B: The lesson to be drawn from both Moses and the warning of Jesus, then, is that there may be times when divorce (or at least separation) is the will of God for an innocent party. If one's marriage partner is playing the harlot or the tomcat with someone else, it is more of a sin to continue to live with that one than to separate. To be submissive to such an arrangement by condoning it is to be a party to it. One should lay down the law to the erring partner and refuse to continue the union. The sinning partner needs to be severely jolted and reminded of the enormity of his or her crime. God doesn't condone such behaviour, and He holds us responsible not to tolerate it either. To be timid here is to promote the abomination that God hates more than divorce.

In taking this action, however, it should be recognised that reconciliation is the primary desire of God. Though divorce or separation may be required to call back a harlot from an abominable situation of dual sex, the case may not be entirely lost. Admitting from the evidence of Jesus' words that divorce is permissible and may be necessary when a partner is unfaithful, the believer who has tasted of God's forgiving grace, may want to extend that grace to the partner who has sinned against him or her as well as against God. He may want to go the second mile in overlooking a fault to fill a need by extending unmerited forgiveness. Such forgiveness, of course, should be only on the basis of proper repentance to both God and to all involved. It should be repentance which vows a new couples' faithfulness to each other in the marriage relationship. Anything less would be a mockery and an invitation to rewrite the odious chapter in another extramarital relationship. The believer, furthermore, should never conceive of reconciliation as an impossibility, unless the other party has remarried or is living in a common law situation. This is a lesson the Lord impressed on Hosea, the prophet, who had a wife that became a harlot. Though having every right to divorce and completely renounce her according to the law of Moses, he was counseled by God to extend grace instead of judgement in an unprecedented way. And the evidence, in the analogy of the Book,

indicates that grace shown by Hosea paid off in a new and beautiful relationship. Grace always pays high dividends sooner or later; with God nothing is impossible (*Luke 1: 37*).

(d) What about desertion?

We must further ask whether adultery is the only Biblical ground for divorce. It has been widely held by many protestants that the desertion of one partner also constitutes proper ground for divorce by the other. This was the position of most of the reformers, and most denominations and pastors recognise it also today. It should be recognized that the crime of desertion can admittedly be given more serious and debilitating to a home than adultery. The deprivations it incurs are often like that of death itself as far as the family is concerned.

Summation

The principle that God hates divorce is emphasised equally in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. That divine principle has never changed, for such a break up aborts the basic purpose for which God has put man and woman together in intimate relations. However, when the basic physical relationship has been violated by sexual unfaithfulness; the one flesh union is *de facto* dead.

When a divorce does take place because of a partner's unfaithfulness, re-marriage should not be the immediate resource of the believer. Those who have tasted the grace of God in salvation should first be concerned with the restoration of their fallen partner. This is the first concern of God and should also be of the partner sinned against. The sin of unfaithfulness, after all, was primarily against God. To effect such reconciliation, God has provided an adequate array of spiritual resources which are to be appropriated. The situation, however, may have gone beyond the point of reconciliation. When such reconciliation has been made impossible because of a new marriage union by the departing spouse, the former union is then to be recognised as completely dissolved. Though divorce is contrary to the will of God, when it is perpetrated by a self willed individual, the Almighty acknowledges the dissolution just as He also recognises other sins and their consequences. The consequences must then be faced by both parties, and that brings us to an inevitable question in the aftermath. That question concerns the forth coming subject of the propriety of remarriage after divorce.

5. CASE STUDY ON ILLUSTRATED TYPICAL CASES

All born again Christians believe that the Bible is our fundamental and absolute source for matrimonial principles. However, the application of these principles is not always illustrated in live situations. Very little, for instance is said of the Apostle's wives and families and rarely do the writers detail specific marital problems in the early Church. Since illustrations make principles live, one would have loved to see or read about them. Let us, however, review the principles in their order of sequence and see how they apply to some common situations of marital problems today.

(a) The matrimonial principles summarised for considering marriage:

- (i) God instituted marriage and is normally His will for most people.
- (ii) Being single is also God's will for many, and the decision of whether or not a person should marry is an individual judgement for each as he or she evaluates the gifts God has given (with respect to passions).
- (iii) In this regard marriage must be recognised as instituted by God for the personal growth and spiritual development of each. It is not an automatic state of bliss. Differences and incompatibilities that arise should not be seen as insurmountable obstacles, but challenges to spiritual growth as divine guidance is sought.

(b) Principles for considering divorce:

- (i) When problems arise, divorce should not be considered as an option, for that was ruled out in the marriage vows. Resource should rather be prayer, self examination, tactful communication, and patient trust.
- (ii) When marriage break-up does occur, reconciliation should always be seen as God's primary desire. A separated couple with spiritual resources should never despair of this happening. Reconciliation should be pursued by the avenue of prayer, with a spirit of humility and forgiveness and with trust in a God who does the impossible.
- (iii) If unfaithfulness has occurred on the part of one or both, however, the option of divorce is open, especially if that

infidelity continues. In the spirit of grace, the innocent party may opt to simply separate if the sinning partner persists, not seeking divorce while reconciliation is still a possibility.

- (iv) When divorce has occurred and the former spouse has married, the situation is completely altered as far as reconciliation is concerned. A new world has to be faced. It is then essential to cultivate a spirit of forgiveness and acceptance of the new circumstance. Bitterness and regrets must be set aside and a fresh reliance on God's will for the future sought. Quick remarriage on the rebound is always dangerous, for it is usually dictated by reactionary impulse; one must guard against a sentimental transfer of affections as the effects of the vacuum are left.
- (c) Principles for considering remarriage
- (i) Re-marriage following divorce may be God's will. This should take place only when it is evident that reconciliation with the former partner is no longer possible. It should also follow a time of self-evaluation to learn the lessons of the failure, repentance before God concerning the tragedy, and a period of rededication to God's will.
 - (ii) Special care should be given that, this second marriage be only God's will. That is, to one who is a Christian and also dedicated to doing God's will. One should be aware of uniting with someone who merely satisfies unfulfilled psychological needs in the wake of the past failure.
 - (iii) When remarriage in God's will is entered, however, it should be with all thrill and expectation of a new beginning. It should not be regarded as a second-class experience that God refuses to bless. God's forgiveness is not half-hearted and neither should our acceptance of it be, but we should fully expect His choice blessing on the new union.

(d) Principles for Christian Service after marriage failure

- (i) Marriage failure inevitably interrupts Christian service. Regardless of who was primarily to blame, the failure carries with it a blot on one's character and testimony which calls for fresh, personal introspection and a re-evaluation of one's relation to God and

others. The duration of that interruption depends on the part of the individual played in the break-up, the spirit of penitence and humility shown and the new spirit of dedication to God's service evinced. The quality of a "one-wife" man or "one husband" woman must be established. This character quality of marital stability is essential to those in Christian service and it is not developed or re-established overnight.

- (ii) As all believers are called to fulfil the great commission in line with their spiritual gifts, the responsibility extends to those who have suffered marriage failure as well. The type of service depends on their spiritual gifts and the recognition or approval of God's people. Their effectiveness depends on their spiritual, moral and academic preparation, as God leads each, regardless of their background.
- (iii) The attitude of the Church towards the fallen and declaimed is all-important. The Church is a rehabilitation centre, not an incrimination centre. A spiritual church will cultivate a spirit of grace towards all its members, whether single, married, divorced, widowed or re-married. Leadership qualifications should not be determined primarily by one's past history, but by one's present character. In choosing leaders the concern should be for established character, spiritual gifts and the evidence of one's dedication to the Lord's service.
- (iv) While the Lord does not tolerate moral looseness, He has shown a remarkable readiness to mend and use broken vessels. It is essential for the whole church that this balance be understood and practised.

6. THE MATRIMONIAL PRINCIPLES ILLUSTRATED BY CASE HISTORIES

- (a) Is re-marriage "living in adultery"? This question is a common one which concerns the attitude of God towards re-married people. If one or both partners were previously married and divorced, does God see this new relation as an "adulterous" one? If so, should they separate and return to their former partner(s)? Or how should they resolve the dilemma so that it would be in God's will?

It should first be recognised that the Bible forbids returning to a former mate after re-marriage to another has taken place. To do so would incur a second divorce and a second case of adultery. It would

be an abomination in the sight of God and would only compound the personal problems of each. “Living in adultery” is not marriage but living in unfaithfulness to one’s marriage partner. When marriage takes place, any previous marriage is ended forever. It is a point of no return, as far as the previous unions are concerned. The one course of action for a remarried couple is to “pick up the pieces” where they are and move on with an untroubled conscience concerning the past. This is done by acknowledging their past sins and failures, repenting towards God, forgiving all the parties involved and resolving to build the new home for God. Any pent up bitterness must be removed to enable the full flow of God’s grace. They should then trust God to put His full blessing on the new union. Tragically, many have been haunted by this “living in adultery” decision after re-marriage and have been deprived of God’s peace and blessing throughout life because of an ill-informed, haunting conscience.

- (b) Should a partner tolerate unfaithfulness? A young couple was married and in the course of time he was unfaithful to her. Later she became a Christian, but he continued his life of sin and his affairs with other women. In as much as he refused to be counselled or to give up, his illicit activities, she sought counsel as to what action she should properly take. Should a Christian partner meekly sit back and tolerate such promiscuity on the part of a mate?

Biblically speaking, that young fellow had repeatedly broken the marriage bond by fornicating and was living in an adulterous union. This was real case of living in adultery”. Such triangular affairs, of course are an abomination to God. Besides prayer and seeking counsel, the young wife’s first responsibility was to extricate herself from the adulterous situation as best as she could and refuse to live with a sexual “cassanova.” God does not tolerate such illicit beastly living, and neither should His people. Any further affection she might show him would only tend to approve his actions, not arrest them. That young man solely needed a shock treatment, and it was her solemn duty to administer it with any help she could get. Their home was already destroyed in God’s eyes, and the sooner he was informed, the better. The unrepentant have no claim to God’s grace, and it is futile to extend it when God denies it. We are not to tolerate what God abominates. The derelict husband was certainly her mission field, but she was desperately in need of a furlough.

This, by the way, is an increasingly common situation today in many homes outside the Church (and increasingly so inside the Church – sadly). Some wives are forced to condone it to prevent a break-up and loss of livelihood. Our purpose here is not to serve as a world’s counsellors, but the Bible’s advice in this regard could well be taken by them as well. Over the long haul, the convenience of board and room with its amenities is not so dear as to be purchased at the price of allowing infidelity to go unchecked.

- (c) **Should a divorced mother with children re-marry?** This question could be enlarged to include all marriages, but the dilemma is especially acute where children are involved. Let us generalise it. When a mother or father is left with several children after divorce or death of the spouse, does the Bible require that he or she raise them alone rather than marry? Does the Bible principles make it impossible for these innocent victims of the divorcee (death) to have mother or father throughout life? A large proportion of the divorces involving the young today present this gnawing problem.

There is little doubt that the Lord Jesus envisioned this traumatic situation as He gave instruction concerning the divorce problem.

There is little doubt that the Lord Jesus envisioned their traumatic situation as He gave instruction concerning the divorce problem. As instruction noted. He did not disallow re-marriage previously noted. He did not disallow re-marriage when the previous union was broken by infidelity.

Furthermore, the Bible does not give counsel to single parents on how to be both a father and mother, though such might be inferred. God certainly provides grace for many such dilemmas and does help many bereft partners do the impossible. But that is not normative, neither in the Old Testament or New Testament is it required that a home should continue with only half of the essential agents that God appointed for its proper order. It rather emphasizes the children’s need for love and discipline by both a father and mother. It furthermore, emphasizes the personal needs and dangers of the bereft partner who does not have the gift of celibacy. Married people obviously do not have the gift of celibacy, and the God given gift of passions which they do have must be exercised only in a marriage relation. For these various needs to be fulfilled God has provided the

avenue of re-marriage when it is evident that a former union is beyond repair.

From the Biblical stand point, then, no essential purpose is served by requiring the life of singleness after divorce, and intransigent asceticism would insist on it. The tragic results of a break-up are only prolonged and intensified by submitting to a monastic rule that none of the Bible spokesmen require. The tag ends of a divorce need all the help they can get. The Biblical principles free such a bereft partner to seek a godly mate and responsible parent for the children, thus enabling the healing process to take place in a reconstructed home.

Having said all that, the truth remains that there are inevitable challenges that surface when a divorced party with children contract a marriage with another party whether or not he/she has his/her own children. This also remains true for all re-marriages, whether caused by death or runaway partner. God's grace is needed in order to have a smooth life in the home.

- (d) Cohabitation or common-law marriages have multiplied in recent years for various reasons. Such an arrangement allows for physical companionship and sexual gratification without the traditional responsibilities attached. Some even realise tax benefits from it; being a "throw-away" relationship, it seduces by its temporary nature and many are allured by it. When such couples become believers and desire to find God's will for their lives, how should they regard their relation to each other? Are they married, or what is their status? Since Paul says, "one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her". (I Cor. 6:16) - Do they constitute a marriage?

We should first recall what makes a marriage. It is constituted by the exchange of vows, the legal endorsement of society, and the consummation act of physical union. Cohabiting in sexual relations is performing the marriage act in God's eyes, but it is not endorsed by society nor cemented by a public commitment of faithfulness to each other. Without this personal exchange of vows and a proper recognition by society, the relation is only a physical counterfeit of true marriage. It is a form of "living in adultery". Personal commitment to each other is necessary to weld them together spiritually, psychologically and a legal pronouncement is necessary to relate to society and to conform to the laws of the land.

What then should such a couple do to get their marital house in order for God to bless? After confessing their sins, they should make a solemn commitment of faithfulness to each other and comply with the legal statutes of marriage. If they already have children, they might regard their marriage as beginning at the time they started living together to relieve any future embarrassments for the children.

The three previously mentioned elements are essential to a proper marriage relationship to help promote its permanency. They give the marriage stability by relieving the fears and insecurity of a mere convenience union that may terminate at any time. True marriage is a relationship “that relates to God and society as well as to the couple themselves. It is bonded by a solid personal commitment to each other and is made legitimate by the legal endorsement of society. This is the marital union God blesses.

7. HOW TO CORRECT A POLYGAMOUS UNION:

Although polygamy was engaged in during the Old Testament period, it is strongly urged against in the New Testament. The practice of polygamy actually began in the wicked line of Cain and was practiced by the godly when they were out of God’s will. It almost always brought dissension in the home, as seen in the lives of Abraham, Jacob and David. In determining our ethical and moral standards today, however, our recourse must be to the full revelation of the New Testament not the incomplete revelation of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we are instructed that believers are to have a “one-wife” or “one husband” character.

Even the Old Testament prophet, Malachi, declared this as essential to produce a godly line. Paul declared that leaders of the Church are to exemplify this quality for the flock to follow. The fact that Christ is taking the whole church as His bride is not a contradiction of this principle. The Church in those passages, (Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:7), is seen as a single “wife” or “bride” of Christ, not a flock of wives.

The God-ordained example or proper marriage was given in Eden where God joined one man and one woman together in marital union. And this is the union He has chosen to bless.

8. THE PLIGHT OF A PARTNER CONFINED TO A NURSING HOME

The problems of the aged in matrimony sometimes equal those of the young. The loss of physical attractions and abilities in the waning years can be most frustrating. A woman just past middle age became ill and was confined to a nursing home. Her husband attended her quite faithfully, but their physical relations were fairly sundered. As her discipline continued, she changed psychologically and her affections which were once very warm, were almost gone. In the long vigil the husband, yet verile, became enamored with a friend and wondered about the propriety of divorce and re-marriage.

He wondered if he should marry the new companion, while yet supporting his former wife. In as much as the marital relation was practically dead and their affections seemingly gone, he pondered whether there was any point in waiting for death to part them.

While such a divorce and remarriage might seem reasonable and justified by the newly anomared couple, there would be no biblical ground or such an action. The reasons would be selfish. Marriage vows properly read "he is to love, honour and keep her in illness and in health and forsaking all others; you will keep faithfully unto her so long as you both live.

9. WHEN IS DESERTION PROPER GROUND FOR DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE?

A couple was separated but without a legal divorce. He simply left town and she was left with the children and the responsibilities of the home. After a period of time, she was concerned to know what her responsibility was towards him and what her Biblical rights were concerning divorce and possible remarriage. Permanent desertions are nearly as numerous as legal divorces today. The question is, what Biblical principles relate to such bereft partners with respect to divorce and remarriage and their responsibilities to care for the family?

10. PARTNERS WITH RESPECT TO DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE AND THIER RESPONSIBILITES TO CARE FOR THE FAMILY?

We note that Paul's counsel in I Cor. 7 was that couples should not separate, and if one should leave, their one goal should be reconciliation. He recognised, however, that a wilful partner might leave, and under

those conditions he made no demands that the union be continued. Such a couple Paul described as “unmarried” (Agomos I Cor. 7:11). He appears to have assumed divorce in that case. The question is whether he also allowed re-marriage by the partner that had been deserted. That he did not sanction such remarriage by the deserter is obvious, but what about counsel that marrying another after divorce constituted adultery, except where sexual immorality has taken place? If we then assume the harmony of Jesus and Paul in this instruction, it is evident that Paul’s desertion is another ground for re-marriage, but an elucidation of the exception Jesus expressed. Together they emphasized that sexual unfaithfulness is the one proper ground for re-marriage and short of that, reconciliation is to be sought as long there is hope.

The conclusion then is that desertion alone is not a proper ground for divorce and re-marriage.

Reconciliation should first be sought. If, however, adulterous relations have also accompanied the desertion, the circumstance is then changed and the deserted partner is free to divorce and re-marry in God’s will. But what about the partner who is left without any knowledge of the whereabouts or activities of the deserting partner? Is such to remain in that uncertainty and emptiness for life?

It is usually conceded that if a desertion continues for a year or more, the marriage should be regarded as terminated, assuming the partner’s unfaithfulness to the marriage after divorce and Paul’s reference only to restriction for the deserter. I think such a concession is appropriate. The Jewish betrothal period of waiting was also one year. Except in unusual circumstances, the period of a year would certainly show the deserters’ unfaithfulness to the marriage vows and one only assumes sexual unfaithfulness as well. Though some would argue for a shorter time period, one’s future uncertainty would be better allayed by persevering for at least a year to test the deserter’s intentions of fulfilling the marriage vows. Such a period of desertion is generally conceded to indicate a dissolution of the marriage. Admittedly there has been a history of the people who were deserted for quite a long time, but chose not to remarry for some reasons (this might be true with women because they are not in a position to propose love to men).

11. WHAT ABOUT A GUILTY PARTY?

In confronting marital problems, we usually hear from the “innocent” party, but not nearly so often from the so-called “guilty”. This may reflect a reluctance of people to admit their guilt, of course but it may also suggest some of the hopelessness of the guilty who feel unworthy to seek counsel, sympathy and restoration. By the terms innocent and guilty we refer to the sin of illicit sex, not suggesting that the faults are necessarily all one-sided. The Church has traditionally had little time or sympathy for this guilty party, and its counselling manuals reflect this attitude.

What does the Bible require of such a person?

Can he or she remarry in God’s will? Can they hope to develop their character and spiritual gifts with a view to serving in the church? Or is this sin unpardonable in these respects? Although the Bible does not propound a “no-fault” policy on divorce, it does treat both parties of a break-up similarly in the process of restoration. It is not that the guilty is exonerated with a wave of the hand and will not have to pay dearly for causing the marital break-up. That payment will certainly be exacted in God’s sovereign way. Indeed, God is a God of the second chance; the way back to God’s will and blessing is open to all, the innocent and guilty alike. The Lord does not distinguish between them as far as offering forgiveness is concerned. Where there is true repentance and confession, proper restitution is made; God’s forgiveness and grace are fully given.

Therefore, the guilty party would have the same privileges as the innocent following the process of restoration. When a former partner is re-married there is little point in requiring the guilty one to remain unmarried, unless it be to fulfil some punitive rules (discipline for a reasonable time). Not only would it be unrealistic to expect, it would serve no Biblical purpose, in as much as the former marriage would be completely dissolved. Paul taught that an unmarried person with sexual passions, should get married, and the Lord Himself declared in Eden that, “It is not good that the man (or woman) should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Thus to require such a person to remain unmarried would contradict rather than comply with Biblical principles.

The same might also apply to their Christian service. Christian service is not restricted to those with perfect histories, whether marital or otherwise. It is for those who have drunk deeply of the grace of God and

applied that grace and discipline to their lives to develop their character and spiritual gifts for His glory. If one has been guilty of marital unfaithfulness, a dangerous trait of character is obviously indicated. Such an act of passions tends to repeat itself. But to insist that this is always so is to deny the power of God's grace in one's life. It is to deny the transforming power of the gospel. While the Church is to carefully evaluate the lives of the leaders, it is not to disdain God's grace in its ability to salvage sinners, even the guilty party in a marriage break-up.

12. SHOULD PARENTS INTERVENE TO PREVENT "WRONG" MARRIAGES BY THEIR CHILDREN?

The question arises out of a variety of situations. It may relate to early teenage romances, or pregnancy situations, or to unfortunate matches contemplated by children who are beyond the age of parental supervision. At whatever age or stage, the prospects of having one's children unequally joined with ungodly or undesirable mates is a jolting experience. And ironically, it happens even to those who seem to be committed Christians. What counsel does the Bible give for such a dilemma?

We must start with the fundamental Biblical principle that a believer should not marry an unbeliever. To violate this is to invite continual strife and probably compromise spiritual principles. True, such a mismatch may not be entirely lost, but it starts with two strikes against it. Myriads of such cases testify to the despair of well intentioned believers who were deluded into thinking they could evangelize their partners in the aftermath. The cruel fact is that it rarely works that way. But the time to give this instruction is not after the romance has started and their natural attractions have bonded. That is years too late. Once the love bug bites or the romantic flame is lit, it is difficult to snuff it out, even with Biblical principles and clarion warnings. Emotions tend to override rational principles. This of course, is why it is always dangerous for Christian young people to date (fall in love) with unbelievers. A candle close to the flame easily catches fire.

When Christian parents are suddenly faced with this dilemma, they also become torn between emotions and reason. Armed with a knowledge of how wrong the union would be, they often tend to react with shock, shame and anger. This overreaction breeds further hostility and defiance by the young people which destroys good rapport for parental counsel in

the days ahead. How then should Christian parents respond to salvage such a situation?

Rather than scolding or arguing, their primary recourse should be prayer. If a son or daughter makes such a decision against parental wishes, they are probably prepared with arguments to defend it. At the engagement point they are usually ready to fend off all comments against their lover, parents included. Here it is well to remember that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). A firm statement of disapproval should certainly be given, emphasizing the disharmony and strife that such a mismatch will bring (II Cor. 6:14). The stress should be on the young people’s happiness, not on the parents’ outrage. It should be done in gentleness and love, not in anger. The lines of communication must be kept open so that further guidance can be received. Fervent prayer should then be made that the Lord will intervene in His own sovereign way to bring about the salvation of the unsaved lover or the break-up of the engagement.

Such prayer can be prayed with full assurance that one of these is God’s will. The parent should then trust God to accomplish one or the other through pastoral counselling. It can be a growing, though traumatic experience, in which the parent learns to trust God through new commitment and believing prayer.

It is well to remember that at this point mere parental control or prohibition is futile. The need for parental consent to marry is often more legal than actual. If a decision is forced upon the young people, they easily find ways to enforce their own, sometimes with embarrassing consequences. They feel mature, whether they are or not, and usually resent any suggestions to the contrary.

Therefore, they must be reminded that the decision is theirs, not merely one forced on them by their parents. The Lord can use other road blocks to deter them enroute to the altar.

A faithful Pastor, for instance, will remind them that he has no Biblical right to officiate at such a ceremony, giving them further cause to ponder. Rather than pulling the responsibility away from them by parental edict, the parents should place it firmly on them with assurance of their great love and concern for them as they evaluate the decision.

In spite of everything, however, the mismatched couple may go through with the marriage principles and prayer notwithstanding. Their decision then must be accepted by the parents and it is futile for them to fight it. To do that often leads to worse consequences. The parents of a girl who was pregnant wondered how they could properly give their daughter away to an unsaved man with whom she had been living. They had refused them permission to marry and were even now reluctant. They needed to face the obvious fact that the young people were already joined and to deny it now was pure fantasy. To force them to separate would have been the greater error. The parents' responsibility at that point was to help them stabilize the union by their getting faithful to each other. A Pastor faced with this problem, I believe, should have no qualms about performing the ceremony privately, for the marriage was already consummated. His officially "tying the knot" would not be joining them in marriage so much as it would be helping them salvage a bad start in their journey on a difficult road. It would also build a bridge for future counsel. A couple in these circumstances needs positive help, not rejection and scorn. Redemptive forces must be called into play.

This is true of all marriages that are wrongfully made, whether in rebellion or ignorance. When the decision is made and insisted on, it has to be accepted, even though it is contrary to scriptural wisdom. Just as Moses did when confronted with such a situation.

A redemptive strategy then has to be employed by the parents' marital plan "A" for their son or daughter may have to be substituted with a redemptive plan "B". This is not done by de-meaning the union as second-rate, but by building the best relations possible and showing Christian concern.

His Grace is not limited to the normal. Redemptive marriages all around us remind us that we should not underestimate God's redemptive grace, even in the marital arena.

13. CONCLUSION

(a) Although I am not going to slavishly sum up all the discussion points made in this paper for lack of space, however, it suffices to conclude it in a nutshell fashion. Marriage is an institution created by God Himself, it is neither African nor Western nor Eastern. We marry simply because we are human beings. But when a Christian enters

this matrimonial institution, he/she is expected to treat it with dignity and holiness it deserves.

As the title of the paper goes, “Marriage and Divorce”, we have with the help of God’s Word, stated how God, Jesus and Paul looked at the whole picture of marriage. We have also noticed right from both the Old Testament to the New Testament that marriage is sanctioned by God, He says “it is not good for a man/woman to be alone”. Then comes the issue of divorce and re-marriage.

Firstly, we noticed it very glaringly that divorce was a divine concession to human weakness. Therefore, no Christian should aggressively seek the dissolution of his/her marriage bond. Some of the very best things God has to teach His children are learned while working through marital difficulties. Endless stories could be told of how God honoured the perseverance of abused and ignored partners as they refused to give up.

God’s grace is sufficient whenever His children get into boiling waters. But in certain extreme cases, against the wishes and efforts of the committed mate, the marriage bond is destroyed beyond any human ability to restore it. Scripture teaches that God’s divine concession to human weakness is occasionally justified, allowing the Christian divorced person the right and freedom to re-marry in the Lord. There are three such cases set forth in God’s word, each provided by His Grace:

- First, when the marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- Second, when one’s mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner (Mat. 19:9).
- Third, when one of the mates is an unbeliever and wilfully and permanently deserts the believing partner (1 Cor. 7:15).

(b) Warnings to the Church:

Warnings must be sounded in closing.

- (i) Being human, sinful and weak, we are all equipped with a remarkable ability to rationalize. Unless we consciously guard against it, when we experience marital difficulties, we will begin to search for a way out instead of a way through. Given

sufficient time in the crucible, divorce will seem our only option, our long-awaited and much deserved utopia. And we will begin to push in that direction, at times ignoring the inner voice of God's Spirit and at other times violating the written principles of God's word. Either is a grievous act. I sternly warn all of us against such thought and actions. To carry out that carnal procedure is to short-circuit the better plan God has arranged for His people and, worse than that, is to twist the glorious grace of giving us what we have devised instead of accepting what He has designed.

- (ii) It is easy to stand on the pedestal and condemn those who were unfortunate to have been divorced and remarried as people who have done an unpardonable sin. Christians should remember that if God forgives a person He forgets completely; but we humans struggle with the whole theology of forgiveness simply because we are not like God; to forgive we have to use our will; but the stigma we attach to a divorce victim will more often than not be remembered.

Some of the divorcees are actively involved in Church activities that exalt the Church's credibility and image. Yet on the contrary we fail to accept them as persons but only accept what they do and that is a fallacy and unchristian. It is unfair to reject a person's work just because of an ugly history he/she went through before he/she was saved. If we use that yardstick in accepting or rejecting a person's work, many saved pastors who presently minister to us would have been refused preaching to us.

Where God permits divorce and remarriage, humbly let us accept it without fear or guilt. Let us not call "unclean" what He now calls clean; but neither should we let us say what He, infact, has not said, no matter how miserable we may be.

There is something much worse than living with a mate in disharmony. It is good living with God in obedience.

Under normal circumstances marriage is terminated by death – that is the closure; it is over; but with divorce, it is never over.

B. DOES A BELIEVER HAVE A RIGHT TO RE-MARRY

The issue of divorce has already been discussed extensively. Some people accept the truth that God's word allows divorce, but on certain grounds e.g. when a non-Christian divorces a believer, when adultery is involved or permanent desertion has occurred, when warring parties would not reconcile notwithstanding indifatigable efforts to get them reconciled, the other spouse has legally contracted marriage with another spouse etc.

But the issue of divorce is only half the problem in a marriage breakup. Consideration of re-marriage inevitably follows. Our experience is that it is more likely that divorced people in any age group will remarry than it is that those who have never married will marry. According to an open book to the Christian divorcees by Roger H. Crook, P138) one fourth of the people who marry today have been divorced. The urge to merge is somehow not lessened by a bad previous experience. Whatever, may have been the cause of the break-up, divorced people usually try it again with someone else within two or three years. This desire for a retry in a second match is certainly not limited to unbelievers.

The loneliness and trauma of marital separation affects the constitution on any individual. As often testified, to be divorced is to lose a part of yourself, regardless how intolerable the former union was, and the gnawing desire for a fulfilled union is often even more pronounced after divorce. Although, religious convictions may dictate against it, the need and desire are not shrugged off by those convictions. The loss of companionship and the need for sympathetic understanding tend to heighten the desire to give the marriage game a second chance. And with re-marriages more socially acceptable today, believers are increasingly joining those who remarry after divorce.

1. What does the Bible say about re-marriage?

Although many divorced people do re-marry, the haunting question often remains about the right to re-marry. Is re-marriage really a Biblical option for believers or does the second round constitute living in adultery while the previous mate is still alive? Re-cognising that the Bible does see divorce as permissible and at times necessary, our further questions is whether it allows re-marriage after divorce. If it does, can one be sure of God's full blessing on the second venture? This is a gray area for many who have been caught between their passions, family responsibilities and a nagging conscience. Not really sure of what the Bible says on the question, they are forced to play it by ear, so to speak, hoping they will be forgiven for their ignorance.

Many opinions, of course, have been expressed as to the propriety of re-marriage, ranging from the strongly ascetic traditional view to the more liberal, compassionate view that let "your conscience be your guide". With the ever increasing stress on the problem today, the trend is

admittedly towards the redemptive emphasis of liberal compassion, rather than the more stringent traditional position. The gospel's "start over" concept is increasingly being extended to the home as a more realistic approach than the traditional no re-marriage view. Thus an apparent open-mindedness is prevailing with respect to tradition and the conscience in grappling with the issue. Neither tradition nor conscience, however, gives one the solid assurance that is needed for such a **crucial decision**. When the going gets tough in the down-to-earth aftermath of the decision, the remarried or single person is in **need of some divine authority**, rather than mere sentimental opinion. Therefore, it is essential to lay hold of the Biblical passages and the principles that were given for just such hard decisions of life. Let us put together the various passages that deal with the question of re-marriage.

2. The right to remarry

The Bible's allowance for re-marriage. It should first be recognised that remarriage itself is not sin. It was allowance and even required at times under the Mosaic law and was not challenged by Jesus when he was questioned on it (*Matt. 22:23 ff*). We should remember that God designated marriage as an institution for this life, not for the life to come (*Matt. 22:30*). There are no human marriages that carry on into the eternal state. Thus, when one partner dies, the other is perfectly free to re-marry in the will of God (*Rom. 7:2, 3, I Cor. 7:39*). For some, infact, Paul saw it as essential that they re-marry (*I Timothy 5:14*). Thus the view that the second marriage is beneath the ideal and somehow God's second best is more sentimental than spiritual. Each union equally points on to the eternal union of Christ and His Church.

The Biblical ground for re-marriage, however, is not limited to those who have lost a partner by death. The scriptures acknowledge that a marriage partner can be lost in other ways. As previously noted, divorce may do the same thing. The Bible recognises that when divorce does take place it completely separates a man and wife in their marital union. Though certainly not the ideal, it is none the less the real situation. In the Old Testament the divorced person was forbidden to return to his former union, assuming that marriage to another would take place. This was also the assumption in the New Testament when a marriage was preferably broken. Let us notice the words of Jesus and Paul as they touched on the subject of re-marriage.

- (a) A right of re-marriage after divorce (*Matt.5:32*). Although Jesus referred to divorce on several occasions, He did not speak specifically of re-marriage following divorce. The apparent reason is that He simply assumed it when He spoke of divorce. There is no evidence from either the Old Testament or the historical setting of the life of Christ that divorce itself required permanent singlehood for the divided partners. It was generally assumed in that culture that a wife was the "property" of a

husband, and to be released by divorce carried with it also the right to be another man's wife (*Deut. 24:1,2*). This was true in both the Grecian and Roman cultures, as well as that of the Hebrews. The wife could obviously not get an apartment and a secretary's job and single it out on her own, except in most unusual circumstances. She almost had to become the member of another family to survive socially or economically. This usually meant remarriage.

With this in mind, it is easier to understand the omission of the exception clause in Jesus' reference to divorce in Mark and Luke. These accounts simply emphasized His general denunciation of matrimonial breakup which made remarriage necessary. His words were a joining condemnation to that permissive society where divorce and re-marriage were allowed for almost any reason. The wife was at the mercy of the husband's whims, and Jesus denounced this abominable practice of easy divorce. In the Mathew passages, however, the words of Jesus carry with them the strong implication that re-marriage followed a divorce as a matter of fact. This is especially true in *Matthew 5:32* where Jesus declared that everyone who divorces his wife ... makes her commit adultery (NASB). Since adultery involves sexual relations with someone else, it is evident that Jesus assumed the divorced wife would marry another. This is overwhelmingly acknowledged by the commentaries on the passage. Re-marriage was taken for granted in that culture and we must understand Jesus' treatment of this subject in the light of that setting, not our own traditional setting.

It is evident then that the exceptions that Jesus made in *Mathew 5:32* and *19:9* involved both divorce and re-marriage. The statement in *Mathew 19:9* makes sense only if the exception applies to both parts. Divorce by itself was not adultery, but was considered adultery, since re-marriage was assumed as inevitable. If Jesus then acknowledged the propriety of divorce when unfaithfulness took place, He also gave similar acquaintance to the propriety of re-marriage in such a case. Though many have in all good conscience tried to limit the exception to divorce, disallowing re-marriage, the grammar of Mathew does not sustain that view. The re-marriage idea cannot be left out if the logic of His statement is to stand. That pious restriction comes from the ascetism of Church history, not from Jesus.

An objection to this understanding of Jesus' words is sometimes made on the basis of John the Baptist's condemnation of Herod in *Mathew 14:3,4*. In that setting Herod, the Idumean King, had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, which of course, involved her divorce and re-marriage. It should be noted more precisely, however, what John's specific condemnation was. It was not just the divorce and re-marriage. He was certainly not suggesting that Herodias should be given back to Phillip, for that was contrary to the law of Moses (*Deut. 24:1-4*). The law did allow divorce and re-marriage where certain indecencies took place, but did not allow the re-joining of a couple after an intervening marriage.

What John condemned Herod for was rather the sin of marrying his sister – in law, while his brother still lived. This was specifically condemned by the Law as being especially abhorrent to the Lord (*Lev. 18:16; 20:21*); and the courageous John denounced the King for it before the nation. Had there not been this relationship, the condemnation probably would not have been made against Herod. It would just as aptly have fitted the religious leaders, whom were of the school of Hillel which allowed permissive divorce and re-marriage. Thus the words of Jesus are not contradicted as sitting rebuke against the general practice of divorce and re-marriage for any whimsical cause. Jesus specifically distinguished between the proper and improper causes, implying that there are occasions when both divorce and re-marriage are allowed in the will of God at the death of a former union.

3. The right to remarry after desertion (I Cor. 7).

Although Jesus did not speak of remarriage specifically, the Apostle Paul did. In his reference to it, however, the Apostle dealt with desertion, not adultery, expressing himself strongly against re-marriage in such a case (*7:11*). When a separation has taken place by the desertion of one, the other is not automatically free to marry someone else. Marriages do not dissolve so handily. Paul's counsel, which he describes as from the Lord, was rather that they should remain unmarried or be reconciled. The primary point is that reconciliation of a divided couple is always God's will, not the seeking of a more compatible match.

The following words of Paul (*v. 15*), however, have often been used to teach that the desertion of an unbelieving partner constitutes complete divorce, and therefore allows the deserted partner the right to re-marry someone else. As we previously noted, the words "not under bondage" are taken by many to mean complete freedom from the marriage bond including the right to re-marry. They make this divorce of mixed partners to be an exception to Paul's previous counsel to Christian marriage partners. It is thus seen to contravene the previously expressed principles.

To this view, however, we are forced to take strong dissent. It is completely gratuitous, it opens up an enormous loophole, and is suspect for a number of Biblical reasons.

(a) **First:** it contradicts the statement of Jesus that God recognises only one ground for divorce and marriage, that of the disastrous sin of adultery. The Lord did not appeal to an unreachable ideal standard, but spoke God's word for the workday world of reality today. He dealt with real situations. In so doing He did not make an except for the case of mixed marriages of believers and unbelievers, although He addressed the unbelieving Pharisees in *Math. 19*. To have made such

an exception would have opened the sluice gates to permissive divorce and re-marriage.

- (b) **Second**: the view that allows re-marriage for mere desertion would be a contradiction to Paul's own words in the context. In *I Corinthians 7:11-14*. He has just counselled separated partners to remain unmarried and to seek reconciliation. If the seeking of a partner's reconciliation is important, how much more important is the seeking of their salvation, if they are unsaved. That is specifically Paul's point in these verses. The unbelieving partner constitutes the believer's mission field, and he is not to give up on that partner simply because the unbeliever rushes off. If Paul lived today he would call that a cop-out. It certainly runs counter to the teaching of both Jesus and the Apostle on the need for patience, personal sacrifice and dogged persistence in winning the lost. To close the door on their reconciliation by marrying someone else would be to inoculate them against Christianity forever – a self serving move at best.
- (c) A **third** reason for rejecting the view that desertion automatically allows re-marriage is that the grammatical evidence for it is extremely flimsy. Although the terms “let him leave” and “not under bondage” could grammatically suggest the allowance of re-marriage to another spouse, they could also suggest what Paul has just commanded believing partners. That is, do't force an unwilling partner to stay; but if he or she does not leave, remain unmarried to wait and work for a reconciliation, and perhaps also their salvation. This grammatical option is certainly more in line with Paul's context, as well as that of the overall New Testament.

If on the other hand the partner's desertion is accompanied by or results in their extra-marital sexual relations, the case takes on a different complexion. It then falls into the category of adultery and should be treated as such. Though the believer might still want to wait for reconciliation inspite of the deserter's unfaithfulness, they do have the right of re-marriage, as acknowledged by Jesus. To wait for their return and repentance is purely an act of grace which may or may not be accorded. If however, the deserter has remarried or given other evidence that the marriage is beyond reconciliation, that option is out and the privilege of remarriage accompanies the divorce. This view is also in line with Paul's advice in *I Corinthians 7:27-28*. In saying, “but if you should marry, you have not sinned” the Apostle evidently refers to one who has been “released from a wife” (NASB). The term “released” (Lelusiai) suggests a previous separation, as indicated by the context and Paul's only other usage of the term in *Ephesians 2:14*. Re-marriage in itself is not a sin. The release of which he speaks, however, should not be taken as a mere separation or legal divorce only on the grounds of the marital sex which breaks the union. To overturn Jesus' principles on the subject simply because of Paul's silence and assumption of it is to reject a most basic principle of interpretation. The scriptures do not contradict themselves, but are always complementary in their progressive revelations. Paul is here acknowledging the

right to re-marry where a former union is beyond reconciliation. He does not see this re-marriage as a concession to carnality, but a legitimate pursuit in the will of God where those conditions exist.

4. The need to remarry

As previously noted, the option of re-marriage may not be just a right, it may be a responsibility. It may constitute a physical and spiritual necessity. To see it as a mere right which one may or may not claim falls short of the Bible's overall revelation on marriage and the redemption God provides in Christ. Viewing it simply as a right is to acknowledge that one has been wronged and deserves a better break or that one has failed and grace provides a second chance. That simply emphasizes the punitive aspect and suggests something of a concession. It tends to sap the new marriage of its dignity. It makes it second-class just as the *Pharasees* saw the sinners of their day. To view our personal salvation from spiritual despair in that way would be to do despite to the redemption God offers. The provision of the re-marriage must be seen as more than a right to be conceded. It is a positive good to be pursued, when done according to the principles God gave. To see this, we should look again at the basic principles for which God has ordained marriage itself. From these we can relate re-marriage to the proper fulfilling of several basic needs in a normal human being.

The fulfilling of personal needs: we have previously noted that marriage was designed by God to fulfil many personal needs of a physical, psychological and social variety. It also has definite spiritual effects. A man or woman is not fulfilled in solitary living. Each one needs the close companionship of a mate who helps to fill him or her out to the God-ordained capacity the Lord intended for that one. If God pronounced it "not good" for Adam who had not had a mate to be alone, it is not less so for one who has had one. The death of a partner or even the bad experience of a divorce does not remove that need. It often increases it.

This need follows from the fact that God has so constructed every individual that each has different gifts or capabilities. Both Christ and Paul saw celibacy as a gift of God and not necessarily the norm for most (*Matt. 19:11,12, I Cor. 7:1*). Each individual has to determine for himself whether he has this gift by a frank evaluation of his physical and psychological needs. Paul, infact, cited this human need as one of the reasons for which God ordained the marriage relation (*I Cor. 7:2,9*). For this reason he commanded, "let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" v2 (NASB). Not being a sentimental prude, he recognised the necessity for those without the gift of celibacy to fulfil their God-given sexual needs. For this reason the marriage relation was ordained.

Remembering this basic need and how God placed it there helps us to deal more Biblically and realistically with the issue of remarriage. If a person has been married once, it is logical to assume that he or she did not have the gift of celibacy to begin with. Otherwise, he would not have gotten married in the first place. And since he did not have it before, it is pure fantasy to imagine that he suddenly receives this unusual gift of celibacy at the time of divorce (or that he lost the gift of sexual passions). There is no evidence that divorce automatically turns on or off that kind of gift in one's constitutional makeup. It is divinely given and ingrained in the nature of one's being.

This introduces us to a real part of the dilemma in which a divorced person finds him/herself. As recognized throughout the Bible, the passions of any normal person will cry out for expression. Those passions are to be controlled and only exercised in the God-ordained way – in the marriage relationship. Even in the marriage relationship those passionate desires are at times to be suppressed for certain reasons by mutual agreement (*I Cor. 7:5*). Yet, although Paul extolled the single state, he did not advocate it for those without the “gift”. The first basic principle that God expressed concerning man was “it is not good for the man to be alone”, *Gen.2:18* (NASB). The divorced person does not all of a sudden become an exception to this rule. He or she is rather thrust into an inner turmoil and conflict within themselves, as well as into an outer frustration and conflict with others.

Paul recognized this turmoil of passions in individuals and saw it as a vulnerable spot for Satan to strike (*I. Cor. 7:5*). If the adversary works this way in married couples who deprive each other of such fulfilment, how much more would he attack those weakened by the deliberating effect of divorce. The Devil is not known for his grace to the weak and susceptible; he is rather more apt to be merciless in moving in for the kill. And the pathetic irony of it is that he often gets so much help from us believers in our pious lack of understanding. A return to Paul's thinking in this regard would indeed be wholesome; it might even be revolutionary. It would really be a return to the sympathy and concern of Jesus as often described in the gospel. We need to be reminded that the personal needs of a believer in times of disaster are not forgotten by God, and we would do well to take our cue from Him.

- 6. The fulfilling of family needs:** The casualties of a marriage breakup, however, are not limited to the separated pair. Unfortunately, a family is also usually involved. The children of the breakup thus become the truly innocent parties. At the mercy of circumstances not of their own making, they are thrust into a state of suspense and insecurity at an age when that home security is needed the most. The effects of such a breakup are felt by them in one way or another for life.

Does the Bible reflect this concern for the innocent casualties? I believe that it does throughout its pages. In the light of all that it says about a child's need for a solid foundation of parental love and discipline, we cannot regard it as silent on this aspect of re-marriage. The words of Moses and the whole book of Proverbs, as well as those of Christ and the apostles have a bearing on the issue. Children need parental guidance and that need is not lessened when one parent is lost to them by a divorce. To deny the right or need of re-marriage for other reasons of creedal sort hardly makes compensation to these innocent victims of the disaster. Although God's grace is always sufficient and often overwhelms the disaster of sin, it is not to be presumed upon where alternatives have been provided. We are obligated to discern where God has, in fact, provided such alternatives. To deny such with a mere wave of a theological hand is not to be sought and followed. If He did indeed pronounce re-marriage a sin, it would then be wrong for the bereft partner to seek another mother or father for the children, and God would no doubt provide adequately for that missing link in the home. On the other hand, if the Bible does not see re-marriage in such prudish terms, but sometimes necessary under certain conditions, that avenue of forming a new union and home is God's perfect will. God's provision is always adequate to the need.

The conclusion: From this evidence we must then face these challenges. The Bible passages examined show that the Bible does recognize the propriety of re-marriage where a disaster has occurred. God does recognize a dissolution where unfaithfulness is involved, and also a new union where that has taken place in good faith. The involvement of children only serves to emphasize that need and to show the divine provision for the innocent victims of the catastrophe where the former union has been dissolved. God provides for little children, but He does it through a father and mother; I have also advocated that whoever seeks to re-marry after their spouses had passed on, children from the former union must be talked to by the marriage counsellor leading the couple to this new relationship. Otherwise some children become a nuisance in this new relationship. They don't appreciate that there is mom and dad who are making sacrifices for them.

7. RE-MARRIAGE CONSTITUTES A NEW LIFE

It is important that those who are entering a new marriage relationship don't do the mistakes they made in the previous marriage. For an example, if a man had gotten married to a non-Christian, he should make sure he does not repeat the same mistake again.

Re-marriage constitutes a new life. Having repented of the past and learned its lessons, the former union is then to be forgotten in the sense that it is forgiven by God. In the analogy of personal salvation, the old life is to be put away. A distraught couple once confided to a Pastor with the

conviction that they were “living in sin” because one partner had been previously married. They were told that they were now living in adultery.

Their concern was whether they should, according to the Bible, be divorced so that the old marriage could be resumed. Or how were they to right the wrong according to the will of God? A little thought made it obvious that the previous marriage could not be resumed and would even be contrary to Moses’ law if it were (*Deut. 24:1-4*). How were they then to rectify their past and be assured of living in the will of God? The answer is that they should simply recognize the sin that was involved, repent of it towards God, and resolve with God’s help to build a successful Christian home together. Scrambled eggs cannot be unscrambled but the couple that re-marry can be rededicated to God as they are.

Re-marriage then is to be regarded as a new life and redemptive experience. It is not to be lived with compunctions of guilt and haunted conscience of regrets; but to be accepted as a new experience in the perfect will of God. God’s concern after their repentance has taken place is that the new couple pick up the pieces, put them all together with divine help and move on from there. This was doubtless part of the mission of Jesus as He visited the home of the Samaritan woman for two days in *John 4*, for only the one she then lived with could have become her husband. The Lord is in the salvaging business, and the rebuilding of half-destroyed homes is part of that program. It is essential that we recognise this redemptive aspect of re-marriage and never underestimate the grace and power of God in this home-reconstruction business; and if it is His business, it ought to be ours too.

8. Should a Christian do service after divorce

The question here inevitably arises as to how divorced people can properly serve the Lord. Are they castaways as far as Christian service is concerned? Is divorce an indelible blight on their lives as related to the Church and its public service? We have already established the divine truth that divorce is not an unpardonable sin. Having found a new sense of marital fulfilment, the re-married couple is often relegated to inactive grandstands, except for supporting the work with their tithes and offerings. If that policy is to be continued, we should be sure of its Biblical base, for it has a far-reaching implications for the Church today. What are the Biblical limitations for those who have come through the tragedy of marriage break-up?

- (a) We should first of all remember that Christian service for believers is not an option, it is an opportunity given as a command (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). We are saved to serve. We serve to grow and reflect the glory of God so that others will also be drawn to him (Matthew 5:16). God has a job to do in this world and He wants His children to be workers together with Him (I Cor. 3:9). For this reason

He has equipped each one with spiritual gifts and has provided the spiritual power to be effective in their use.

When the believer's work is done, God calls him/her home to heaven. The Bible knows of no retirement for believers before that homeward call, for when we become weak, we really get stronger in His strength (II Cor. 12:10). Though the assignments may change, the responsibility for service continues.

- (b) When considering the problem of divorce and re-marriage, it is important to keep this responsibility of each believer in mind. Several passages of scripture do not touch on the marriage qualifications for church leaders and therefore, the place of divorcees in Christian service has been greatly disputed. The question is, "what are the limitations meant by those passages?". Furthermore, how should they use the gifts God has given them with the assurance of God's blessing, or are their leadership gifts turned off by their past marital problems? Does the tragedy of divorce constitute them "second-class" Church members, disqualified from leadership roles?
- (c) These are some tough but critical questions especially for our day, and they need forthright, scriptural answers. They affect not only an increasingly large group of individuals coming into the Church, but also the effectiveness of the Church as a whole. Since Christian service is a work of faith, we must know the potential of each of our members. To be effective in the work of faith, we also need the assurance of God's blessings on that service without any twinges of doubt as to the propriety of it. David could not have attacked Goliath if he had been unsure of God's presence and power with him. Likewise, we need to allay our doubts on this issue and find the assurance of faith to undergird us. To do this, we are again driven to our one source of authority, the Bible. Reflecting on Church creeds and scholarly opinions certainly is useful, but we cannot build upon them. Faith needs a "thus saith the Lord", on which to stand. Let us then take a fresh look at the pertinent Bible passages and relate them to the principles we have already reviewed.

THE BIBLE'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

God allows anyone to be saved, but only on His conditions. Likewise, He allows every believer to serve, but only on His conditions. We do serve, for example, by exalting ourselves, with selfish motives, or in the energy of the flesh. We serve by the rules of the game He has established. It is His "ball game", to use the idiom of our day.

While this is for all believers, it is especially true for those whom He has appointed as Church leaders. He has a definite standard of qualifications. In assigning these qualifications for leaders, however,

God was not being capricious or unreasonable. He gave them with a logical designing view. Seeing God's rationale in establishing those qualifications will help us to appreciate their purposes and to relate them to the issue at hand.

1. GOD'S RATIONALE IN SETTING STANDARDS FOR LEADERS

The Central passage on the qualifications for church leaders is I Timothy 3.

Titus 1: Also elaborates on the qualifications for elders; but Paul does not there deal with deacons. The qualities of those chosen to serve in Acts 6 should also, be noted, since they were chosen with a view to service and leadership (in the social realm). They were selected "to deacon" (*diakonein*), that is, to serve (Acts 6:2). These constitute our basic scriptural sources.

In examining these various passages and their contexts, we discover the reason certain standards were set up for Church leaders. It was not to form an elite group of "Holy Toms" or to devise a means of rewarding the good boys. Nor was it to organise a corp of clerical "generals" to outrank and command the Church troops.

Certainly, it was not to separate those who served Christ from those who did not. All believers are called to serve. Rather, its purpose was to form a standard for those who would be examples to the flock and good representatives of the church to the world. The church is Christ's instrument in the world today, and He is particular about who leads her. He wants her special representatives to be a good testimony in the world and a proper reflection of His character. He commissions all believers to serve, but not all to lead. Hence His standard of excellence for leaders.

2. THE CENTRAL CHARACTERISTIC OF CHURCH LEADERS

Recognising God's purpose in establishing leadership standards, makes it easier to see His central concern. That central concern in choosing church leaders is spiritual maturity. This is evident in all three passages that discuss these qualifications, especially this is apparent in I Timothy 3, where Paul gives the necessary qualifications for the various groups that serve. The general requirements listed are those of good moral character, good domestic relations, respectable social relations, a proper sense of spiritual priorities, a sober and mature view of life.

For elders or pastors he added the qualities of teaching and leadership abilities. It thus is evident that Paul emphasized the centrality of good character in all the relationships of church leaders.

More especially, that emphasis was on present character or spiritual maturity, rather than on their past. He mentions nothing of their pedigree, past attainments in the business or religious world, nothing of their talents and education. In warning against novices, he does suggest the need for a proving period, but primarily to demonstrate their present godly character. Their spiritual stability is the main issue.

The purpose for this emphasis is given in I Timothy 3:14-16. Paul's concern was that the leaders might be examples of godly character and behaviour in the Church.

They are to lead the flock by their commendable character and Biblical teachings. Thus he detailed these qualifications for leaders so that the Church members should "know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (I Tim.3:15).

In the following verse, Paul then elaborates on this purpose by describing one of the reasons Jesus was manifest in human form; it was to give us a revelation of holy and proper conduct in the world.

The Lord wants His special representatives in the Church to be demonstrations of His character to both in the church and in the world. Their godly character is His central concern.

3. THE MARITAL STATUS OF CHURCH LEADERS

One of the initial qualifications for elders mentioned by Paul in both I Timothy and Titus concerned their marital status. He also included it as one of the final qualifications for deacons in I Timothy 3:12, though it is not mentioned in Acts 6:3-5. Thus the marriage status was considered a major issue in the choice of both elders and deacons. It has a special bearing on their character and testimony. What precisely was that qualification?

The phrase that Paul used in setting this standard was "one-wife-man" or husband (*mias gunaikos anayr*; I Tim. 3:2,12; Titus 1:6). This qualifying term was preceded in the standard for elders by the requirement that they be blameless or above reproach. The condition of a proper marital status thus appears to flow naturally and essentially from the initial qualification of being "blameless". Though these standards were not mentioned in either Jesus' choice of the twelve or the Church's selection of *Matthais* in Acts 1:21ff, they were doubtless assumed in view of the qualifications given by Paul. The question at issue is what is meant by "one-wife-man". Is he one who has been married at least once, to at least one, only once, once at a time or what? Many views have been espounded throughout Church

history for a variety of reasons. Several of these views may be ruled out to begin with as lacking support or being contrary to other scriptures. The Greek Catholic view that marriage is required of leaders can hardly be the point, since Paul himself was unmarried (I. Cor.7 and 9-5), as was the Lord. The exception of the person having the gift of celibacy has already been noted. The Mormon view of “at least one” involves serious grammatical manipulations and is certainly contrary to the rest of the New Testament. The emphasis is not a “wife-man”. But a “one-wife” man.

It is also unlikely that Paul militates against one who has remarried after the death of his first wife. He has already acknowledged the propriety of such a re-marriage for a woman, and doubtless assumes this for a man as well (Rom. 7:2,3; I Cor.7:39). The propriety of this is never questioned throughout the Bible, except on some other basis.

Finally, it is doubtful that Paul merely set the standard of being married to “only one at a time” (A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures, IV, P. 572). Polygamy was generally outlawed in the empire of that time and would hardly be a lofty standard needing insistence by Paul. Bigamy was considered adultery for all believers and would be assumed as a disqualification for leadership without mention. How then should we understand Paul’s requirement that church leaders be “one-wifemen”?

(a) Monogamy as God’s ideal in marriage

We should first of all recognize that Paul wrote with a full understanding of Jesus’ principle that only monogamy is God-ordained. He always built on the principles that Jesus had already laid down never contrary to them. Therefore, we should seek to understand Paul in the light of Jesus and the original principles He stressed from the Old Testament. In this light, the “one-wife-man” is one who has a character of marital stability. He is not necessarily one who has actually been married, for he may have the gift of celibacy. Certainly such a gift does not restrict one from church leadership, as previously noted about Paul. Neither is He one who has a history of being married only once, for a former wife may have died. Rather, he is one who is faithful in his marital relations, not having wandering affections for the opposite sex.

By this qualification Paul is careful to restrict the sexuality unstable from the office of Pastor and Deacon. Such deviants are not a good testimony to the Church or the world of dedication to the will of God. Instability here shows non-control of the passions, and one, who cannot rule himself cannot lead God’s people.

(b) *The question of character or history*

In further evaluating this “one-wife” quality as it relates to the other qualifications given by Paul; it is evident that he is speaking more of one’s character than of his history. Though a person’s history obviously tells much of his character, that is not Paul’s central concern here. One’s past history may not necessarily portray his present character. It is possible to have a good marital history of a single marriage and have “cat-calling” character of wandering affections at the same time.

On the other hand, it is also possible to have a sorrowful marital history of a broken marriage while having a personal character that is above reproach. The tragedy may not have been of his own making, as noted with the prophet Hosea. It is therefore, doubtful that Paul is prescribing in this qualification a merely pharisaic standard of outward conformity to a rigid rule. His concern is rather for character and spiritual maturity as demonstrated in the crucial area of one’s relations with the opposite sex. He must be a person with his sexual passions under control as he tends and leads the flock of God.

We come then to the problem of whether a divorced man should be allowed to serve as Pastor or Deacon. If divorce restricts one from the pastorate, it also restricts one from being a deacon, for the biblical qualification is the same for each. This makes the issue more sensitive, but it forces us to a more balanced and realistic approach from biblical viewpoint.

Before noting the biblical conclusion on the matter, I must confess that I, personally, have usually been less than candid with the Bible data, and probably more swayed by traditional prejudices in my approach to it. And, like myself, many conservatives have felt that divorce is a stigma on one’s life that approaches the character of the cardinal sins, from which there is never release of full Christian service. Many churches, for instance, do not allow a divorced person to be either a deacon or deaconess, regardless of how that divorce came about. In reflecting on this, the implications are staggering. The truth is that God Himself could not be a deacon in most of our churches, let alone the Pastor, without getting a special waiver. The Lord, you will recall, had a divorce. The book of Hosea, as we have noted, outlines the Lord’s court charges against the nation of Israel, indicating His plan to divorce her for unfaithfulness. In Jeremiah 3:8 the southern prophet tells that the Lord went through with that divorce from the northern kingdom. Certainly, He continues to extend His grace to her and will one day win her back in remarriage. As did Hosea with Gomer. But a divorce was incurred because of the unfaithfulness of the chosen nation Israel. That temporary divorce of

Jehovah, was, of course the result of Israel's unfaithfulness, not the Lord's. There was an "innocent party" in that case, whether we would allow it for others or not. It was the Lord who made this analogy, not some commentary. Furthermore, there is also an inevitable inconsistency and arbitrariness in denying leadership roles from those who have experienced the tragedy of divorce. How far should those restrictions on the divorced be carried? If they cannot be a deacon or a teacher, can they be an usher? Would a testimony be allowed? If so, would that testimony be allowed to include the reading of a scripture passage, or would this be preaching? To press it further, would the divorced be permitted to sing in the choir? How about a solo? Or would such performance border too closely to the concept of ministry? Perhaps the distinction might be made that they be permitted to minister with their hands, but not with their voices. I have not heard of any churches that restrict the divorced from contributing to the offering plate. In reflecting on these problems, the inconsistencies begin to abound.

The truth becomes apparent that such restrictions often deny these individuals the service Christ commanded for them in the great commission. They tend to atrophy their God given talents for service and, in fact, restrict the Church itself from developing its full redemptive potential. Though the restrictions are well-meant in the interest of preserving purity and discipline for service, they often turn out to be hamstrings that cripple rather than exercises that strengthen. Severity, it should be remembered, is not necessarily the key to effectiveness, as such, except as it relates to the commands of the word. The Roman Catholic Church's requirement of celibacy for the priesthood is a case in point. In its development, the Fathers argued that if being married only once indicated purity and dedication, not being married at all was stricter still and therefore, more meritorious. This strict celibate view they developed contrary to the analogy of the Old Testament priesthood, as well as the words of Christ and the Apostles. Stranger still, their patron Apostle Peter was the one apostle the gospels single out as being married. By their standard, Peter himself could not be a priest, let alone pope. The point is that severity is not the issue in setting qualifications for Church leaders.

Asceticism is not necessarily holiness. It may represent mere pharisaical pride and will-worship. On the contrary, the key to effectiveness and God's blessing in the ministry is discovering precisely what God declares in the Bible and applying His word and principles to the ministry.

How then should we apply the "one-wife" qualification to our choosing pastors and deacons?" As previously noted, we are obliged to understand Paul's qualifications in line with Jesus' teaching and

principles on the matter of divorce. Jesus clearly acknowledged that, although divorce and remarriage are contrary to God's original plan for man, it can indeed happen through sin. Where a former spouse has been unfaithful and has remarried another, Jesus saw divorce and remarriage as inevitable for the bereft partner (as noted in Matthew 5 and 19). Denouncing this inevitable consequence of the tragedy was not the point of Jesus' condemnation, but the danger of fornication itself. The fact is, that remarriage following such a debacle accompanied with proper repentance is never denounced elsewhere in the New Testament, and it is extremely doubtful that Paul set up a standard above or contrary to that of Jesus. As noted in the previous chapter, God does recognise such a divorce and remarriage where the death of a former union has taken place, which allows for the fulfilling of His will in the personal and family needs of the partner who left. And Paul is not here starting the Nicolaitan heresy by preaching a legal plane of super-virtuosity for the clergy or diaconate, unreachable for the flock they seek to lead. He is rather simply building on Jesus' principles and emphasizing again the need for Church leaders to be chosen in line with Jesus' insistence on marital faithfulness.

This brings us again to Paul's primary emphasis on character and relates the "one-wife" qualification to this emphasis. His concern is for the leaders' present character and moral maturity as related to the opposite sex. Is this then a lowering of standards that opens the doors to lax morals and permissiveness? The opposite of true. It puts the emphasis where Jesus put it, on the heart and present character, rather than on an outward record of a marital history. The emphasis is not so much on what a man once was as it is on what he now is. His previous life of sin before salvation, for instance, should have no bearing to the present for that was another life. The Corinthian believers as Paul declared, were saved out of sexually depraved corruption, but that had no apparent limitations on their service and their gifts of Ministry (I Cor. 6:9-11). The all important point is the leader's personal character.

In dealing with the flock, then, the Church leaders must have a marital stability that is unswerving. Wavering here can be catastrophic. The Pastor must be able to counsel and deal with the women of his flock without being sexually affected by his own uncontrolled passions. This does not mean that he should wear blinders when around the opposite sex or look the other way when the young beauties walk by. If he is sexually distracted in this way, he is not really fit for Christian service. Rather, he should be so single minded in his passions that he can minister to the spiritual concerns of both sexes without becoming sexually involved in either his thoughts or actions. This is the standard Jesus set for every believer (Mathew 5:28), but it is especially essential for those who

lead. The pity is that such a sexual mindset is not sufficiently emphasized as a basic prerequisite for service, and the devil has played enormous havoc in this area. Any Pastor, Deacon, or Church Leader with untamed wandering affections would do the church a favour by leaving his office, rather than remaining in it to feed his ego and passions. Purity comes between pardon and power, and that purity must start with leaders. The Church would go further faster with fewer if this qualification of singleness in marital affections were emphasized as absolutely essential in the thought and character of its leaders.

That was undoubtedly the point of Paul as he insisted that the Church's leaders be "one-wife-men" (men are leaders, hence addressed). This forces us to a revelation of the place of re-married people in the Ministry of the Church. The crucial issue is not their history, but their character, not their past but their present. Their history is indeed important where it reveals impenitence and an unwillingness to acknowledge their failure in a marriage breakup. Such have not learned the lesson of their failure and will only propagate that failure in others. Where such repentance and confession have not occurred accompanied by a change in character and spiritual stability; they definitely are not qualified to represent the church in public service. Where this change has taken place, however, that person's qualifications and character should be evaluated in the light of that change. God is able to use an unfaithful apostle Peter after restoration to reach out with sympathy to other unfaithful people. He delights to salvage broken things and put them into productive service. He did that with murderous Saul of Tarsus, adulterous Augustine, Samson and Mary Magdeline, to mention but a few outstanding examples. Salvaging personalities and homes is His specialty.

It often is conceded that one's marital status before salvation should not be an issue, but only his marital history after being saved. A divorce following salvation, according to this view, restricts one from church leadership positions. We should note, however, that the question is not that cut and dried. Spiritual maturity does not automatically come at the point of conversion, but often is a gradual process. Therefore, to arbitrarily set that as the point from which marital stability must be measured is to fall again into the legalistic trap of merit building by outward conformity. To fail to immediately grow by stumbling in the marital area is thus to cut one's self off forever from the exercise of certain spiritual gifts in the Church. That the Bible sets the probationary period is hard to defend.

The real issue in Paul's qualifications rather concerns one's present moral character and spiritual maturity. And these must be evaluated in the light of how God's redemptive grace has been appropriated as

the individual is now related to God and man. The blessing Jesus promised was to the “pure in heart”, not necessarily the pure in history. It is through such individuals that He pours out His blessing of redemptive grace, and we can ill afford to shut off any such channel through which God has chosen to work. Some of His greatest trophies of grace are the redeemed and reconstituted homes.

The members of which are vibrant and thankful testimonies of that grace. To stifle that testimony at the Church level smacks more of pharaiasm than of the redemptive grace and power of God. The command to serve is given to both redeemed individuals and redeemed homes.

D. SOME HURTFUL TRUTHS ABOUT MARRIAGE

1. God’s ideal marriage is purely monogamous and between male and female (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt 19:4-5). As the Evangelical Church, we unenquivalently uphold this view as stated in our position paper on homosexuality.

We believe Adam and Eve had a perfect marriage in the beginning until the invasion of sin in their family life. When they disobeyed God, a flood gate of atrocities began to take shape and adversely affected their marriage life.

- (i) Their marriage shifted away from the utopian beginning and it never returned to it. The sweet paradise was lost there and then. This lost paradise will be regained when Christ comes back again.
- (ii) When sin struck Adam and Eve’s marriage, for the first time they experienced a family conflict. Adam pointed an accusing finger against his wife, Eve and told God, “I sinned because of the woman You put here with me” (Gen. 3:12). In essence Adam was saying both Eve and God were equally responsible for causing disruption of his relationship with God Himself. He said, she was the one who tricked him into disobeying God. Had God not created the woman, he inferred, he would not have sinned but God of course did not accept that logic since He had ordained Adam as a leader of his family.
- (iii) Then all marriages that were contracted after Adam and Eve’s fall up till now, experienced family conflicts because they are not contracted in “the beginning”.

(iv) Not only was the peace in a monogamous marriage lost, but also the “one-man”, “one-wife” ideal marriage slipped away into polygamous marriages. Cain, Adam’s son, was the first one to have a polygamous marriage and the further the society moved away from the “beginning”, the more marriage complexities multiplied. The situation was so bad that even the godly people like Abraham, David, Solomon etc. succumbed to polygamous propensities – Abraham went into Hagar, and later on had concubines (Gen 25:5-6).

All these saints knew very well what God had said in the beginning. But sin overcame them and they succumbed to sexual moralities just like our present divorce casualties.

(b) When Moses was instructed by God to lead His children, marriage complexities forced him to completely sideline God’s ideal for marriage and gave permission for divorce and remarriage in order to save the situation and lives of God’s people.

(i) Of significant observation is that neither God nor Jesus Christ condemned Moses for allowing divorce and remarriage to occur in the face of God’s ideal (i.e. what God has joined together let no man put asunder).

(ii) The Church of Jesus Christ today, is also in the similar, if not worse, situation than Moses’ era” whereby the institution of marriage is being attacked left right and centre. In fact, Jesus told His disciples in Mathew 4 that one of the most sacred institutions of humankind that would be seriously devastated before His return, would be marriage (Mathew 24:38).

Needless to say, the worst is yet to come.

(iii) **NB:** let us notice that when Moses allowed divorce and re-marriage to occur, he did not quote any verse from scriptures or cited God’s word to support his action. But he used his maturity and leadership wisdom to save the situation of the day, and God did not reprimand him for that. Even the Apostle Paul, when discussing marital problems said, “this is what I say but not the Lord”.

Therefore, our time unavoidably demands more mature and balanced Christian leaders who would be able to solve people’s problems, especially marital problems by employing sharp and godly discernment on what needs to be done, even if there was no obvious point of scriptural reference for the action to be taken.

People are different; and their problems are different; so you cannot accurately regulate their marital challenges by a blanket formula and do it to their utmost satisfaction.

- (c) To prove point b, marriages in our time face the same challenges that Moses faced long time ago. We have, in our churches divorced and remarried people, and some of whom we assisted in their remarriage efforts by advising them to go to the DC's offices and contract their marriages and thereafter we opened our Church doors to them. It is true we should not sit back and relax while Jerusalem is burning; but what exactly should we do to preserve the sanctity of marriage? Should we make more laws and stricter policies for an already weak institution or are we to teach vigorously and wisely about what constitutes a good marriage? Should we go ahead and tenaciously uphold God's ideal without trying to make any kind of policy that we have already failed to comply with. Remember, in the judiciary, if you make a law or policy, you got to stipulate the kind of punishment to be meted out to those law and policy breakers. If indeed we want to make a policy today about marriage and divorce, what are we going to do with a good number of divorcees that already are sitting comfortably and spiritually edified in our local Churches?

Perhaps we need to practice a little bit of honesty with ourselves and with God about the issue of divorce and remarriage. Maybe be it would be all sufficient and embracive for us to say:

- (i) The Evangelical Church upholds a monogamous marriage between male and female.
- (ii) We also believe in permanency of marriage between married parties until death do them apart.
- (iii) Coupled with this conviction, pastors and marriage counsellors are strongly encouraged to teach vigorously about the essence of a Christian marriage in our local churches in order to prevent and or lessen crisis in troubled families.
- (iv) If all else fails, pastors should use their God-given discernment and spiritual maturity in helping out a broken marriage settle down (as it was in Moses, Jesus and Paul's times).

Finally, the Almighty and omniscient God knew, before Moses was born, about the challenges that would befall the "ideal marriage" during Moses' time. He also knew how Moses would deal with it in trying to salvage his people from death. Hence He did not reprimand or condemn him for solving the marriage crisis the way he did. Bear it in mind that God had also issued a command to the effect that adulterers were to be stoned to death; imagine Moses attending

funerals day in and day out simply because people's hearts were hard to keep God's marriage laws.

Now, the most solemn question we have to face is, "Do we, amongst ourselves, have the most learned and spiritually mature person in the calibre of Moses whom God (and Jesus) commended so highly saying "there is no prophet like Moses in the whole of Israel who spoke face to face with God" (Numbers 12:6-8).

If we had such a person, like Moses, we should gladly accord such a one an authority to design for us a new marriage policy that would be superior to that one of Moses.

May God help all of us, saints, improve/cultivate a godly attitude towards repentant sinners, especially those who were unfortunate to have experienced marriage crisis even breakups for various reasons best known to themselves and God will bless us abundantly.

AMEN!

