

**Marriage, Divorce,
&
Remarriage
In Light Of The Scriptures
By Rev. Norman B. Jerome**

The words so solemnly spoken at wedding ceremonies, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" and also, "Till death do us part," are hardly more than "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." ... A few Protestant folds have either outlawed divorce or have done much to discourage it and keep it under rigid control. A few have taken their stand against remarriage, some for the guilty party (who is the one most likely to remarry) and some for both parties. The least that can be said in their behalf is that they have undoubtedly prevented far more divorces than have the others who have taken only a mild stand, if any at all.

We readily admit that to us the Bible does not deal with the subject in as clear and profuse a way as it does with many others. But we are convinced that the Scriptures do give us enough so that we can take our stand in juxtaposition with the needs of this immoral age. Unfortunately the mold of thinking for ministers of this generation was cast some generations back by ministers of the Gospel who wrote down their confessions. Such confessions composed by finite minds were undoubtedly colored by the lesser needs of that contemporary generation, the Scriptures notwithstanding.

What we are trying to say is that there is really an alarming lack of real conviction in the matter right where it ought to be found the most. And we are the very ones who cry the loudest with our lamentations regarding the divorce problem in America. We firmly believe that the Christian Heralds who love the Word and proclaim it and fearlessly speak out against apostasy and sin should by all means work and pray for a united front on divorce. This can be had only from the Scriptures. We offer our own humble, inadequate presentation as a start, hoping that one more able will continue in this, one of the great challenges of the hour.

Matthew 5:31, 32: "It hath been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Here we have one cause for divorce. It is plain that divorce is the subject that Christ is dealing with. The guilty party, if married again would cause her new husband to sin. That is all it says, let's not read more into it!

Please read Matthew 19:3-9. Here we have repeated what was given in Matthew 5 with an added emphasis. This emphasis is however, on marriage and not on divorce. From the beginning God meant marriage to be a final thing, not to be broken by man. Hence, the very strong statement, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." Otherwise He says nothing about remarriage for the innocent party, leaving us with the assumption that the innocent party is still within the confines of what God desired from the beginning, that is, though divorced yet still married in God's sight. The guilty party is, of course, condemned and his condemnation would cause another sin if a contract be entered into. Again, we assert, that is all that is said and all that is meant.

Now read Mark 10:2-12, Here the Saviour does not even mention the cause of adultery for divorce, although it is, of course, admitted that is the cause and the only cause that He Himself did give. Looking at it from an unbiased viewpoint the emphasis that seems to be made in these two verses is that remarriage is not allowed. That seems definitely the point that is being made. Otherwise, the verses preceding have the same emphasis as Matthew's account. Marriage from the beginning is a joining together by God and is not to be put asunder by man.

Read Romans 7:1-4. Here the apostle is simply strong that remarriage is permissible when the marriage contract is consummated by death. He enlarges upon this by saying that to marry again while the original mate is still living is to be guilty of adultery. To be sure, he is not dealing with divorce, but he is dealing with the finality of the marriage contract in God's sight, which is not released until death comes to one of them. Otherwise the remarried person would be married to two persons at once and this is wrong and spiritually impossible as he so beautifully illustrates in verse 4. We have to be dead to the law by the body of Christ (offered for us) that we should be married to another. It does not by any stretch of the imagination allow a divorced person to remarry (while the original mate is still living).

I Corinthians 7:39: "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." It can hardly be established that the apostle is writing about divorce in this passage at all. He speaks of departing and departation. We have heard it argued that a departed or separated one is assumed to be guilty of adultery. This, of course, has no proof and at best is a very weak argument. But for the sake of argument we will accept the assumption as well founded and answer it with the

use of verse 11, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." The emphasis is first to remain together. But if separation is employed they are to remain unmarried so that a reconciliation can possibly be made.

Please read Ephesians 5:22-33. These verses we have quoted only to show the Scriptural emphasis placed on the husband and wife relationship. It is like Christ and His Church. Relative to my relationship with Christ I am happy to accept His Word: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." We are now of one flesh. I am a member of His body. Even so the husband and wife become one flesh. It is unthinkable for the Christian to be married to another while there is still life in the two who became one flesh. However, it being a human relationship (so sacred as to be likened unto the relationship of Christ and His Church) it becomes invalid upon the death of one of the two that were joined to make one flesh.

There are two words that should be given special study as they appear in the verses quoted thus far. The first of these is the word we have translated "asunder." We have it in both Matthew and Mark, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder." In Romans 8:35 we have, "Who shall put us asunder from the love of Christ . . ." Also in verse 39, "... shall be able to put us asunder from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. " Hebrews 7:25, 26 reads, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, put asunder from sinners, and made higher than the heavens: ..

The second word that should have special study is divorce. The root word means put away, separate, draw off, fall away, etc. From this word we have our English words for apostasy and divorce. One derivative of the word means apostasy. The other derivative means divorce. We feel that much hinges on the etymology of the two words, asunder and divorce. Asunder is a much stronger word than divorce. The latter lends the sense of desertion or repudiation. The idea of divorce seems then to be a "bill" or a "deed" to negate a thing for one's convenience. The former is used in such a way as to show that man cannot undo a thing that God has done.

For instance, there is nothing that can put asunder our relationship with Christ once it is in effect. However, the fellowship is often broken because of sin. Our salvation cannot be put asunder from us for it is God's eternal doing, but it can be temporarily broken for fellowship (divorced) by our sinful deeds. It cannot be put asunder, but can be deserted or repudiated by sin. The act of God in the matter is,

however, done and cannot be undone. He will complete it. Of course, if our theology allowed our salvation relationship to be absolutely broken off by sin (contrary to the usage of the word) there would be no more hope. We could have no confidence in the Scriptures if the words of Scripture do not mean what they clearly say and imply.

Divorce is not God's way. It is granted because of the hardness of men's hearts. As a matter of convenience man can draw up a bill of divorcement for the reason of adultery (Mark 10:2-12; Matt. 19:3-9); and otherwise live a life of separation from the unbelieving partner, if that unbelieving one insists on departing (I Cor. 7:15). Further than this the Scriptures do not go. It just isn't clear, as some would say, that I Corinthians 7:15 means that if an unbelieving husband (or wife) departed from a believing wife (or husband) the one remaining would be free to marry again on the grounds of adultery. It can only mean just what it says.

In the light of the context it is the original intention of God for husbands and wives to live together and not separate, but if one is saved, (presumably after marriage, for a believer is not to marry an unbeliever in the first place) and the other isn't and the unsaved one takes the initiative and departs, then the innocent and believing party is not under bondage to run after the departed one to live with him. It is an unequal yoke and not binding for the purpose set forth in v.14.

"What right does the church have to penalize me for a mistake made. Last time I was married by a justice of the peace. This time I want to do it right." This is an argument often faced by the pastor. In the first place, it is not the church that does the penalizing, and in the second place, it isn't the church that can make any marriage a success. It is a lack of relationship to God through a personal, living faith in Jesus Christ that makes penalizing automatic. It is the blessed reality of a right relationship with God through Christ that makes success assured.

Many ministers do not hold and practice so called "rigid views" on divorce. I am not their judge. However, it is only common sense that if the divorce problem is ever to be corrected it will be by ministers refusing to marry divorced people! There is a double social standard on this whole question. One is the world's standard which is utterly contrary to God's standard. It is for unbelievers who walk after the flesh. The other is for believers who walk after the spirit. Even the world system recognizes the evils of divorce else there would be no regulatory laws. The church should have no traffic in the remarriage of divorced people.

True it is that many argue, it is better for a minister to do it than to send couples out for only a civil ceremony. I just don't think that is sound reasoning. It is like the chicken thief who came to the sheriff at midnight and said, "I am going to

steal chickens before morning and I want some decent company along. If you don't come with me, I'll have to get someone else who thinks stealing chickens is all right." So the divorcee says, "What am I to do, not remarry, or go to the Justice of the Peace?" That depends on the standard he chooses to follow. First of all, is the divorcee really saved? Is he born again? If he is a Christian he should be told God's way. We have quoted from the Bible that there is but one cause for divorce which is adultery. There is one basis for remarriage which is when the former mate is dead and when the new mate is a believer in Christ as Saviour. Otherwise he should be counseled to pray for reconciliation. If reconciliation seems impossible he should be content to remain in an unmarried state in accordance with the command of God's Word. He should have some feeling of responsibility, and very possibly guilt. In any case, the divorced person, being guilty or innocent, should see that he is the logical one to do more than any other to stamp out the divorce evil.

By all means the ministers of the Gospel should know the Scriptures and take their stand accordingly on the divorce problem.

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