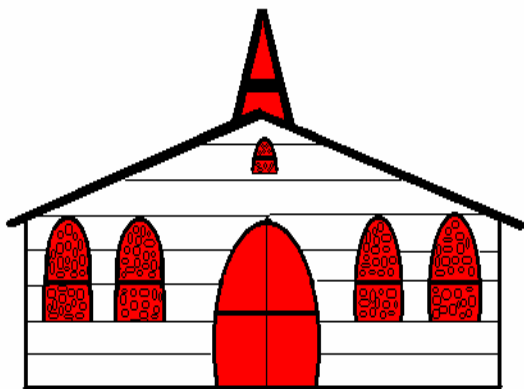


ADULTERY



in the church

Steve Flinchum

Adultery in the Church

By Steve Flinchum

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PREFACE

Desiring the maximum effectiveness and readability for these pages I feel the need for a few lines here for definition and clarity. First of all, in the title I use the term “the church.” I do not refer to any kind of universal church, neither visible nor invisible. A New Testament church is always a local and visible body of born-again and baptized believers with Christ as her head and the Bible as her guide. As we might speak of “the husband” or “the wife” in a generic sense without any allusion to any kind of universal invisible husband or wife, I use the term “the church” in the generic sense in the title.

The picture of a building is employed on the cover as a readily recognizable symbol. Let us remember that the Bible never uses the word “church” to refer to a building but to the congregation.

Given the nature of the subject and title, the use of the scarlet letter “A” in the steeple and windows was irresistible. The use of the steeple in the illustration is not intended as an endorsement of their presence on Baptist meeting-houses. The best we can determine is that the use of steeples or spires on houses of worship originated with their use as objects to attract and please the sex goddesses. If that is so, perhaps it is all the more fitting that it be used as it is in the illustration.

The regard of people for marriage is shaped by their beliefs as to the primary purpose of it. Some have regarded its primary purpose as that of procreation. Many recognize its value to the maintenance of order in society as the primary importance. Others hold the pleasure or security they may be beneficiary of in the highest esteem. In our present day of a pleasure seeking, thrill seeking, throw-away, blame it

on someone else society when we are constantly appealed to with “get the cash you deserve now,” “return it if you don’t like it,” and “tell them you mean business” solicitations, respect for the concept of life-long marriage seems to be at an all-time low. It is only when a right biblical understanding of God’s purpose and intention for marriage is held that marriage can be appreciated with the esteem it is due. God instituted marriage with the intention of using it to teach truths with typology about His chosen nation, about His New Testament churches, about the bride of Christ, and even about salvation. It is hoped that God will use the following pages for the edification of the reader.

“Remove not the ancient landmark,
which thy fathers have set.” Proverbs 22:28

“Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed
thereof.” Job 24:2

“. . . an independent inquirer, prepared to follow the leadings of truth
regardless of consequences. [This is the true Landmark spirit—the
spirit of God’s true men].”

J.R. Graves



CHAPTER ONE

FOLLOWERS OF GOD

As we look at the world around us, ungodliness, immorality, wickedness, and evil greatly abound. That is to be expected, but it should not be so among God's people. With those who have been made a new creature and saved by God's grace (and especially those being taught from God's Word) there should be a clear distinction in the life, actions, and appearance. A seemingly popular attitude among many who do believe that salvation is eternal (and it is) is that a biblical Christian lifestyle is optional or has little importance. Those of us who teach, or believe in and practice, the need of good works and holiness are often assailed with accusations of "legalism," "salvation by works," and other such absurdities.

Proverbs 28:4 says:

They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.

Proverbs 28:9 says:

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.

I believe that the Bible teaches that the true Christian is to practice good works and holiness, not in order to obtain or to keep salvation, but because of salvation and as fruits and evidence of salvation. Good works can never obtain salvation but do give evidence of our love for God who first loved us. 1 John 4:19 says, "**We love Him because**

He first loved us.” The fact that some men have tried to treat their wives well because of a fear of consequences and penalty does not destroy the truth that I should be good and faithful to my wife because I love her. Neither does the fact that some believe in good works for the obtaining or keeping of salvation destroy the truth that I should perform good works as a result of love for God. And, it does not mean that I do so for fear of losing salvation.

The book of Ephesians was written to the saints at Ephesus **“and to the faithful in Christ Jesus”** (Eph.1:1) who are the **“us,” “we,”** and **“ye”** that is referred to in the epistle. Ephesians 1:2-14 says:

- 2 **Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 3 **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:**
- 4 **According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:**
- 5 **Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,**
- 6 **To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.**
- 7 **In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;**

- 8 **Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;**
- 9 **Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:**
- 10 **That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:**
- 11 **In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:**
- 12 **That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.**
- 13 **In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,**
- 14 **Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.**

It is by God's grace and in Christ that we can stand before God justified. Before the world began, God knew all the sins that His elect would commit, both before and after conversion, and Christ died for each of those sins. Christ's death was substitutionary, not merely provisional, but substitutionary. Christ died for every sin (before and after conversion) of every one of God's elect. Acts 15:18 says, **"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning**

of the world.” Some display an attitude of presumption that since all of one’s sins have been paid for, it is alright to be reckless in Christian living. Presumptuous sin is a serious matter upon which God does not look lightly. Jesus’ blood is precious and must not be **“trodden under foot”** and counted as **“an unholy thing”** (Heb. 10:29). Carefully consider what God’s Word says in Hebrews 10:23-31:

- 23 **Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)**
- 24 **And let us consider one another to provoke unto good works:**
- 25 **Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**
- 26 **For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more [*no other besides Christ*] sacrifice for sins,**
- 27 **But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.**
- 28 **He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:**
- 29 **Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and**

hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

- 30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.**
- 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

We who have been saved by God's amazing grace are obligated to appear holy and without blame before men also. In Luke 1:6, speaking of Zacharias and Elisabeth, the Bible says:

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Titus 1:7 tells us that **“a bishop must be blameless.”** I think the meaning here of to **“be blameless”** clearly refers to more than just to possess salvation. Philippians 2:12-15 says:

- 12 . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**
- 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.**
- 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:**
- 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;**

1 Corinthians 7:34 speaks of an unmarried virgin as able to be one who **“careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.”** It should be our desire to be **“holy both in body and spirit.”** 1 Corinthians 6:20 says:

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

We are not our own. The Bible tells those who have been **“bought with a price”** that **“your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.”** Romans 7:12 says:

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

1 Peter 1:13-19 says:

13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass

the time of your sojourning here in fear:

- 18 **Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;**
- 19 **But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:**

2 Peter 3:11 speaks of “**what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.**” In Hebrews 10:24 we are instructed to provoke one another unto good works. James 2:20 says:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

To teach of faith while avoiding or neglecting to teach of holiness is to “**deceive you with vain words.**” The instruction of Ephesians 5:6 to “**the faithful**” (1:1) is to “**Let no man deceive you with vain words.**” Jude 4 warns of “**ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Jesus is both Savior and Lord. To accept Him as Savior but not as Lord is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn’t it so very inconsistent to desire or to profess the righteousness of God while rejecting the holiness of God?

As pointed out before, the book of Ephesians is addressed to “**the faithful in Christ Jesus.**” Ephesians 1:9 says that God has “**made known unto us the mystery of his will.**” Ephesians 2:10 says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 3:9-11 reveals that it is God's intent that by His churches the manifold wisdom of God is known.

Ephesians 3:21 says:

Unto him [*God*] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The next verse, Ephesians 4:1, says:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, . . .

The seventeenth verse of that chapter says:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.

In verses 22-24 we are told that if we have heard Christ and have been taught by Him:

- 22 **That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;**
- 23 **And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;**

**24 And that ye put on the new man,
which after God is created in
righteousness and true holiness.**

Actions can speak louder than words. Members of the Lord's churches are obligated to be ecclesiastically separate from the world's religion and its practices. Members of the Lord's churches are also obligated to be morally separate from the ways of the world. That does not necessarily mean total physical separation from the persons, but separation from the ways, actions, looks, life-styles, and morals of the world.

Following the above verses in Ephesians, the first verse of chapter five says, "**Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.**" Verse 17 says, "**Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.**" 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, "**Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.**" That verse introduces the ones below it that teach many things about how God's people are to behave and look. In those verses we see that there is a God-given divine order of the sexes, with "the man" as "the head of the woman" being symbolic of Christ as head of man. Ephesians 5 leaves no doubt but that the husband and wife and their relationship and behavior towards each other are symbolic of Christ and church. Titus 2:7 teaches that we are to be "**In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works.**" "All things" must surely include our marital behavior.

In considering the previously mentioned instructions from Ephesians 4 to "**walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called**" and to "**henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk,**" we should be very diligent in the way we conduct our lives. We need to examine all things by the standard of God's Word and then, by God's grace, be not

only hearers but doers also. Are we showing a pattern of good works in all things? Do our actions and our looks speak so loudly no one can hear what we say? Times sure have changed but God's Word has not.

Those who persist in an ungodly life give poor evidence of salvation (I John). Professed faith that is without good works and therefore dead (James 2:14-26) gives poor evidence of (Hebrews 11:1), and no biblical reason to expect, a blessed hope. According to Proverbs 28:9 those who reject God's instructions forfeit the blessed privilege of prayer ("**even his prayer shall be abomination**"). Proverbs 28:4 says, "**They that forsake the law praise the wicked...**" When churches tolerate sinful lifestyles in their membership the churches' prayers are hindered and they praise the wicked. Two of the most prevalent and harmful sins in Baptist churches of our day are adulterous marriages and the spiritual fornication with the world's religion of "christianized" paganism. Perhaps they are the most fiercely defended and harbored as well. Often examples of the sins of the nation Israel and God's judgment upon them is preached with warnings that our own country cannot continue to stand as it is without judgment. That is good, but the examples given us of the nation Israel and God's dealings with it are also valuable for instruction and warning to the Lord's churches. The relationship of God and Israel as typological to Jesus and His kind of church is seen throughout the Bible.

Disobedient churches can cease to exist as true churches just as surely as nations can fall. The following pages deal with the subject of divorce and remarriage in a general way at first and more particularly with the obligation of Baptist churches in regard to it in the later pages. To those who have given less thought and study to the subject, I beg your patience and understanding that to limit the scope of this book would be to limit its effect and usefulness and would

necessitate additional volumes. It is my hope that our young folks will be taught the scripture truths of marriage that they may enjoy the blessings of a God-honoring marriage and be spared the heartache of divorce. It is my hope that those considering divorce or re-marriage will stop and consider what God says about it and submit to His way. It is my hope that with a scriptural understanding and sense of value of “what God hath joined” that marriages will be strengthened for our good and God’s glory. It is my sincere heart’s desire and prayer to God that His churches will recognize their obligation to declare the whole counsel of the Bible in its preaching and consistent practice in regard to this subject. If Baptist churches will declare the whole counsel in the matter, marriages will be strengthened, homes will be blessed, and churches will be blessed. After more than a century of compromise and neglect in the matter, churches are now full of the world’s doctrine concerning the matter and the truth seems so foreign that few will even consider it. It is time that true Baptists stop forsaking the law of God’s word and cease their praise of the wicked (Proverbs 28:4) and **“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent”** (Revelation 2:5).

CHAPTER TWO

FROM THE BEGINNING

The first two chapters of our Bible make it clear that the joining of one man and one woman in a life-long union known as marriage is original with God. It is not something that developed or came about over a period of time or through process of civilization. It was God's intent from the beginning and He gave the institution of family, consisting of husband and wife in its simplest form, as the basic and essential building block of all society and civilization. It should be no surprise that as families crumble, so go the churches, the neighborhoods, the schools, and nation. The fact of the family being the basic building block of any civilization is often repeated by historians and anthropologists, whether they believe in God or not. Recognizing such importance, we should place high priority on the maintenance of marriage as God intends it to be. Those who believe the Bible recognize the fact that it was God who instituted the marrying of a man and a woman, and that He did so with the first man and woman on earth. Genesis 2:24 says:

**Therefore shall a man leave his father
and his mother, and shall cleave unto his
wife: and they shall be one flesh.**

Jesus Himself credited God with speaking those words in Matthew 19:4-5. God could have left mankind to multiply like the animals without marriage, but He had a higher standard for the human race. It was God's plan that the marriage of man and woman be an example and type that He would use many times in scripture in revealing truth of Himself and His will to His people. God chose the nation Israel **“to be a special people unto himself, above all**

people that are upon the face of the earth”

(Deuteronomy 7:6-7; 14:2). The Old Testament records many accounts of the acts of that chosen people and God’s relationship and dealings with them. God has written and preserved those accounts to use them in the New Testament to teach us and to reveal truth about Himself and His will for His people and churches. I Corinthians 10:11 says:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Romans 9 uses many examples from the Old Testament to teach of God’s sovereignty and election unto salvation for **“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”** Many are the examples and types in the Old Testament that teach us New Testament church truths. So it is with marriage. In Romans 7 marriage is used as an example to teach us the wonderful truth that by Christ’s death we are freed from the bondage of sin. All throughout the New Testament the institution of marriage, as God intended it, is used as typology to teach us about Jesus and His relationship with His churches and bride to be. Ephesians 5:22-33 is one example. Therefore it is of utmost importance that God’s people, and especially His churches, uphold the truth of marriage that His word be not blasphemed.

CHAPTER THREE

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN BIBLE TIMES

Various wedding customs have developed in different times and places and many seem to have been derived from Bible examples. In all cases there are two elements that must be considered essential in constituting a marriage. There must be the vowing of vows and then the consummation or coming together of husband and wife. In order to properly understand the teachings of Jesus about marriage it is highly profitable to consider what the marriage customs were in the time He spoke and to discern who His immediate recipients of those words were. All we really need to know about the manners and customs of the time can be gleaned from the Bible itself. Among the Jewish people of Bible times the selection or matching of bride and groom was often made by the parents. It was Abraham that selected a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:3-4). The father of Rebekah consented (v.51) and she accepted the proposal (v.58). God, the Father of Adam and Eve, chose them for each other (Genesis 2:22-25) and pronounced them husband and wife. Genesis 38:6 tells us that **“Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.”** Exodus 2:21 tells us that Zipporah’s father **“gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.”** In Genesis 28 Isaac gave his son Jacob some specific instructions about choosing a wife while leaving the choice of the specific woman up to Jacob. In verses 18-20 of chapter 29 we see Jacob’s choice of Rachel and the consent of Laban. Often the actual choice of the particular mate might have been made by those marrying, much like it is with us today, but the consent and blessing of the parents was to be sought. No doubt the custom today of giving the bride at a wedding originates from these examples.

A good example of some of the marriage customs of the Jewish people of the time Jesus was born is found in Matthew 1:18-25. After the prospective bride and groom had been selected they would become espoused to each other. There would be a meeting of the prospective bride and groom with their parents or family when vows would be made and contracts signed. From that time the two were legally bound, “**espoused,**” as husband and wife (v. 19-20). The marriage was usually not consummated at that time and typically might be as much as a year later. During that time the two were legally bound as husband and wife. The wife would spend that time making herself ready for the wedding, maybe not knowing the exact time of the wedding. Before Jesus ascended He espoused Himself to His kind of churches and His churches are spoken of as His wife throughout the New Testament. The wedding of Christ, the Bridegroom, to His bride is yet to be as seen in Revelation 19:7:

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

The members of the Lord’s churches are to be making themselves ready for the wedding and His imminent return. It was during the time that “**Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together**” that “**she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.**” As a result, “**Joseph her husband . . . was minded to put her away.**” Joseph was considering divorce because it seemed to him that his wife had been unfaithful to him. If Mary’s being found with child had not been of the Holy Ghost, or of himself, he would have had scriptural grounds for divorce and would then be free from any obligation to her. The marriage had not yet been consummated. It is needful that the members

of Jesus' churches be mindful that the wedding of the Lamb and His bride has not yet taken place and that those who participate with false religion are in danger of being "put away" for their unfaithfulness. This is not to say that their salvation is lost but that they will not be part of the bride. All the saved will be there and will rejoice at the marriage but some will be guests, not bride (Revelation 19:6-7). They may be saved yet so as by fire, having their works burned up and suffering loss of reward.

After the espousal the groom would usually return to his father's house and prepare a place for his wife. When the time for the marriage came the groom would go for his bride who was to be ready at any time (Matthew 25:1-13). The groom, the bride, and the whole party would then go to the house of the groom's father for a feast as in Matthew 22:2-3 and John 2:1-11. The bride and groom would then go into their own room and the marriage would be consummated. From that moment on the two were become one flesh until separated by death. It was in accord with these terms and conditions that Jesus spoke when He taught on the subject to the Jewish people. The marital customs and manners of the time and place were foreordained of God so they might be used as a figure to teach New Testament truths.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT JESUS PREACHED

The first of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce is found in the middle of His "Sermon on the Mount" recorded in Matthew 5:31-32. In those verses Jesus said:

31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 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.

On that occasion the majority, if not the entirety, of Jesus' audience were Jewish people. It is to be expected that the terms and definitions Jesus used there were those familiar to the hearers and in accord with the laws, manners, and customs of the Jews. Matthew was a Jew writing to Jewish readers. With this perspective, and remembering the things we learned from Matthew chapter 1, written by the same Matthew, let us consider the truths taught by our Lord. Let the scriptures interpret the scriptures. By ignoring the fact that after a couple was "**espoused**" they were considered and called "**husband**" and "**wife**" (Matthew 18-20) even though the wedding had not yet taken place, many teachers and commentators have hypnotized their followers into the wishful thinking that the words "**fornication**" and "**adultery**" are used interchangeably and synonymously in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9. The fact that both words are used in the same sentence on both occasions shows

there is a difference. The words in the Greek New Testament had definitions different from the other and the words today in English have the same distinction. Mark 7:21, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and Galatians 5:19 all use both words in a way that shows there to be an obvious difference. Properly used, fornication refers to what is committed by an unmarried person and adultery refers to that committed by a married person. Those are the common meanings of the words even today until someone tries to find some loophole out of an unhappy marriage. Some have argued that the word fornication in the Greek (*porneia*) could be used for all manner of sexual uncleanness and therefore include adultery, and so an exception is given in Matthew whereby one can divorce, remarry, and go on his merry way in innocence. The fact that a word *can* mean something does not mean that that meaning should be forced upon a verse when the normal meaning makes more sense and certainly not if it would set the statement in contradiction to the rest of the Bible. From the perspective that Jesus spoke and that Matthew wrote, the only time that a “**wife**” could be guilty of “**fornication**” is either before espousal or that period of time between when she and her “**husband**” were “**espoused**” but “**before they came together**” after marriage. According to Jesus’ teaching, once the vows had been said and the couple espoused, the only way out of the marriage wherein one would be free to marry another was when the spouse had been found guilty of fornication before the marriage was consummated. If the transgression occurred after the couple was living together, it was called adultery. The two would have then become one in such a way that they could never again be twain. One could become one again if parted from the other by death but they could never be two separate persons without obligation one to the other. There is no allowance for divorce in the Bible (for adultery or otherwise) in the sense that the union can be dissolved after

the marriage has been consummated. Marriage is “for better or for worse” and sometimes it is “worse.” Sometimes it may be so bad that divorce will come regardless of ones resistance or opposition to it, but that does not dissolve the union. The “**writing of divorcement**” Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:31 was apparently in reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-2 which says:

1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.

Those verses may deal with some discovery that is made just prior to, or at, the consummation of the marriage. Whatever the disfavor and “**uncleanness**” spoken of in that verse was, we can know that it was neither fornication nor adultery because according to chapter 22, verses 20-24, those guilty of either were to be stoned to death. If stoning was the order given in chapter 22 for the purpose of “**so shalt thou put evil away from among you,**” why would the Bible say, on the next page in chapter 24, that “**she may go and be another man’s wife**”? Verses 13-21 of chapter 22 show that “**If any man take a wife, and go in unto her**” (v. 13) she must either be proven to have been unfaithful and in consequence stoned to death, or else “**he may not put her away all his days**” (v. 19).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE AUDIENCE

Even in the day that Jesus taught, the evidence suggests that among the majority of the religious Jews, the only divorce whereby marriage to another was acceptable was divorce occurring during the time between espousal and marriage. Some of the religious leaders of that time seem to have taken some liberty in re-interpreting and application of the laws of divorce to suit their own adulterous hearts. It should be no surprise that the Sadducees would be in error on the subject since, as Acts 23:8 tells us, **“the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.”** Josephus, who lived from A.D. 37-c.100, explains, “But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies . . .” (The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 1). In The Wars of the Jews, Book 2, chapter 8, Josephus wrote that the Sadducees “suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men’s own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please.” Speaking of the doctrine of the Sadducees in The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 1, Josephus wrote, “. . . but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity; . . . they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.” The beliefs of the Pharisees were more in line with the thought of the common people of the Jewish religion. In the same book and chapter, Josephus wrote briefly about the Pharisees’ belief in resurrection, reward, punishment, and their conscientious conduct and following of the law. He closed with saying:

. . . on account of which doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

Paying more attention to Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees than to the total picture of what the Bible tells us of them has given most of us a distorted image of the Pharisees. The very name "Pharisee" has come to be often used as a synonym for "hypocrite" but that is a distorted image. Some newer dictionaries may give "hypocrite" as a secondary meaning but the original and proper meaning is "*a separatist*" (Strong's #5330). No doubt there were probably subdivisions within the sect with some being less devout but I believe that for the most part the Pharisees were far more in line with the beliefs and practice of the common people of the Jewish religion than they are usually credited with. True it is that there were Pharisees in the mob that arrested Jesus (John 18:3) but are there not religious people today, even some who use the name of Baptist, who would cry for His crucifixion if He were with us now? True it is that Jesus had much sharp rebuke for the Pharisees' hypocrisy and their devotion to tradition more than to God's word, but what if Jesus were to be preaching next Lord's Day in our Independent Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptist Churches? In Luke 12:1 Jesus warned His disciples, "**Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**" That is still good advice for His disciples. What would He have to say about churches letting what "other churches like ours" do dictate practice rather than sincerely seeking God's will? What would He

say to churches campaigning for the posting of the Ten Commandments but filling the restaurants and Wal-Mart stores on the Lord's Day? What would Jesus say about churches condemning the abomination of homosexuality (which they should) while defending the abomination of women dressing like men? (Deuteronomy 22:5) What would Jesus say about adultery in the church?

In Mark 18:9-14 Jesus spoke the parable of the Pharisee who **“prayed thus with himself”** and the publican who prayed, **“God be merciful to me a sinner.”** Verse 9 says that Jesus **“spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”** In Matthew 5:20 Jesus declared:

**For I say unto you, That except your
righteousness shall exceed the
righteousness of the scribes and
Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into
the kingdom of heaven.**

Jesus was recognizing the high standard of holiness of the Pharisees but teaching that it was not good enough for salvation. Only by the imputed righteousness of Christ can anyone be saved. **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”** (Galatians 5:25). Regardless of how religious, sincere, conscientious, and righteous the Pharisees may have been, without salvation that is by grace through faith in Christ, their righteousness was “as filthy rags.” And so it is with you and me. Our salvation does not take away the need for a sincere, conscientious, righteous, religious life. What is said in John 9:16 shows that there were differing opinions of Jesus among the Pharisees:

**Therefore said some of the Pharisees,
This man is not of God, because he
keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said,
How can a man that is a sinner do such
miracles? And there was a division among
them.**

The previously quoted Josephus claimed to be a Pharisee and son of a Pharisee saying that at nineteen years old he “began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees.” His opinion of Jesus was this:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works — a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. (The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 3).

Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews” who came to Jesus in John 3 was a Pharisee (v. 1). He may have been lost at the time but later in John 7:50 we find him defending Jesus and in John 19:38-39 we read that Nicodemus was one of those who buried the body of Jesus.

The point I wish to make here is that although there was the leaven of hypocrisy among the Pharisees (Luke 12:1), there were times when they tried to trick Jesus and even kill Him, and many were without salvation, there were also those who were friendly to Him and were very sincere about following God's law. They were well studied in the law and many had great respect for Jesus' teaching. With these things in mind we can gain a clearer understanding of the things Jesus taught them. Simon, in Luke 7:36-50, was a Pharisee who desired Jesus to be a guest in his home. In Luke 11:37 Jesus was guest in another Pharisee's home. In Luke 13:31 "**certain of the Pharisees**" were trying to protect Jesus and save His life. In Luke 14 Jesus is seen in "**the house of one of the chief Pharisees**" eating, healing, and teaching. We should not allow the hypocrisy that Jesus exposed among the Pharisees discredit their knowledge of the law. It is important to recognize that when the Bible says, "**some**" of them, it means some of them, not all of them. Jesus spoke quite harshly at times to some of the Jews. There were some of the Jews that tried to kill Him. There were also some of the Jews who were His closest friends and followers. Jesus was a Jew Himself and practiced as one. He never renounced being a Jew nor instructed others to. Just as Jesus' criticism of some and many of the Jews does not discredit being a Jew, neither does His criticism of some and many of the Pharisees discredit all who were Pharisees. In Matthew 23:1-3, while teaching His disciples, Jesus put His approval on the Pharisees' teachings saying:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

It is important that our practice be guided by sound doctrine or else our doctrine soon becomes leavened with the lusts of the flesh. In Acts 23:6 Paul unashamedly declared, **“I am a Pharisee.”** Paul did not say that he had only *been* a Pharisee, or merely that he had been raised as one. Paul never renounced being a Pharisee but said, **“I am a Pharisee.”** After hearing Paul’s defense the scribes of the Pharisees announced, **“We find no evil in this man”** (v. 9). In Acts 5:34 a Pharisee named Gamaliel is said to have been **“a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people.”** In Acts 22:3 Paul said he was **“brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.”** After God saved him Paul continued to be as zealous and law abiding as ever. After his conversion his zeal was guided by truth. He did not “throw the baby out with the bath-water.” Knowledge of salvation by grace does not warrant discarding holiness and good works. In Acts 26:4-5 Paul claimed the Pharisees to be **“the most straitest sect”** of the Jewish religion:

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

In Philippians 3:5 Paul claimed to have been **“an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.”** With such a background, we will have to say that Paul was well qualified to, as in Romans 7:1, **“speak to them that know the law.”** Paul wrote some very important things about our

subject of marriage there in Romans 7 that we will look at later.

CHAPTER SIX

MORE OF JESUS' PREACHING

Let us consider Jesus' teaching concerning marriage and divorce as recorded in Matthew 19:3-9:

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

We are told in these verses that the reason for the Pharisees' question was "**tempting him**" (Jesus). The meaning of the word tempting as used here is *testing*. We may sometimes speak of tempting someone with a meaning of causing them to think seriously about doing wrong, or tricking them into trouble but that is not what is meant here. That we are told they were tempting Him implies success—that it was actually being done. Jesus was never caused to consider doing wrong nor ever enticed to evil. Hebrews 4:15 tells us He "**was in all points tempted [tested] like as we are, yet without sin.**" It may be that their motive was as in John 8:6 when some scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery. It is said there that they were "**tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.**" It may also be that the motive in Matthew 19 was merely to test Him for the sincere purpose of discerning whether He was a true prophet or a false prophet. I suspect it was the latter and possibly with the secondary purpose of rebuking the Sadducees and the looser ones of their own sect who had stretched and distorted the truth of the subject. Asking about the lawfulness of "**for every cause**" may hint of that. Either way, it does not change the truth of Jesus' answer. Considering the facts presented here in the previous pages regarding the Pharisees' background and attitude toward the law, it is most reasonable to believe that their questions concerning putting away one's wife were asked in the context of occurring between the espousal and the wedding. They recognized the seriousness of the vows that were made at the time of espousal. Although the Pharisees were

very conscientious about the keeping of the law, there was a strong tendency among some of them to place more importance on the laws as developed through tradition than upon scripture. Thus the follow-up question, **“Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement?”** Jesus corrected that Moses did not command it but that he suffered it. In the account given by Mark (chapter 10) the phrase, “for every cause” is not included in the Pharisees’ question. Also in that account it was Jesus who asked them, “What did Moses command you?” and the Pharisees replied that “Moses suffered” a bill of divorcement. The same location is described in both accounts and by the description of the following events in each case it would seem that both Matthew and Mark wrote of the same day. Perhaps there were two different encounters with different groups of Pharisees that day. That Moses suffered it does not mean that he nor God approved of it. Acts 14:16 speaks of God **“Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.”** That did not make them right or without blame in walking their own ways and their own ways were not without consequence. And, it certainly does not mean that we, today, whom God has saved, taught and given a Bible full of examples, may walk in our own way without consequence. Acts 17:30 says:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 13:18, speaking of God and Israel, says:

And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

Many of their manners in the wilderness that God suffered did not honor God and did not cause them to be blessed. Many were destroyed because of those manners and that for **“ensamples: and they are written for our admonition”** (1 Corinthians 10:1-12). What Moses had suffered was because of the hardness of their hearts. Romans 2:5 warns of what is to be expected for hardness of heart:

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

In Jesus’ New Testament teachings He has called for a higher standard of holiness than ever for His followers. Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19:9 and in Matthew 5:32 is clear that the only exception wherein a man can divorce his wife and either of them be free to marry another is fornication. The only time that a wife can commit fornication is between the time the vows are said, when the two are pronounced husband and wife, and the consummation of the marriage. Before the vows, she would not be a wife. After the consummation, what would have before been fornication would then be adultery. No such exception is given for adultery. In Mark 10:12 we have an additional statement made by Jesus on the subject:

And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

Mark says this was when **“in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter.”** The unique statement of Mark 10:12 (**“if a woman shall put away her husband . . .”**) demonstrates the aspect of the Gospel of Mark being

written from a Christian Roman perspective, addressing Romans, because among the Jews a woman would not be able to put away her husband. There was no need to make the statement to the Pharisees or to the Jews. Similarly, the exception given uniquely in Matthew is written by a Jew from a Jewish perspective to Jewish recipients. The exception refers to an act committed or discovered after espousal but before coming together, therefore being relevant only to Jewish custom. With the absence of any period of espousal in Gentile marriage customs and therefore little likelihood of a divorce occurring between the vows and the consummation, there was no exception given but that by Matthew. According to Jesus' teaching, divorce, even for the cause of adultery, does not dissolve a marriage. A divorce that occurs after marriage is only a legal separation -- those who have been joined together as one can never again be twain. The scriptural reaction for one who has been betrayed by husband or wife is forgiveness and patient pursuit of reconciliation. If we are to forgive a brother or a neighbor who trespasses against us should it not be so much the more for the one we are married to? If we are to love our enemies then so much the more we must love the one whom we have vowed before God and man to love until parted by death. If it is right to help a stranger then it is surely right to try to restore one's marriage partner. Should one not be as longsuffering with an erring husband or wife as with an erring child? All too often the reaction is driven by anger and embarrassment of "feeling like a fool" or fear of "looking like a fool." Hurt, distrust and dissatisfaction are understandable but one can so easily become consumed with the desire to "get even" or "make them sorry" and "just want it to be over," that rational thinking is abandoned. Selfishness, pride, and revenge are not Christian characteristics. Often close friends and family sympathize and share the same feelings, and encourage divorce when it could be avoided. When

divorce cannot be avoided, the only scriptural options are to “**remain unmarried, or be reconciled**” (1Corinthians 7:11). An example of divorce is seen in the relationship of God and the nation Israel. In Isaiah 54:5 God claimed to be a husband to Israel:

For thy maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Exodus 24 tells of that marriage and Ezekiel refers to it in Ezekiel 16:8. After many repeated warnings and pleadings from God through the prophets and years of long suffering God divorced Israel. In Jeremiah 3:7-8 God said:

And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

Apparently the divorce did not end the relationship. The fellowship was broken but reconciliation was still pleaded for. In verse 12 of Jeremiah 3, God said:

Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I

am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.

And in verse 14:

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and will bring you to Zion:

Even after the divorce, God still said, **“I am married unto you.”** That “wife” has experienced many sorrows and persecutions as a result of disobedience and unfaithfulness but restoration is in God’s plan. Some have mistakenly imagined that God has divorced Israel to marry a “Gentile church” but that cannot be. The bride that is to consist of the faithful from among Jesus’ New Testament congregations is to be married to the Lamb, God’s Son. Some have even imagined that God has remarried, joining Himself to America. There certainly is no scriptural support for that. A right understanding of Bible prophecy demonstrates that it has ever been, and continues to be, God’s plan to restore Israel to himself. God has never, and will never, take another “wife.” The nation Israel has never, and will never be at liberty to join herself to another god without being guilty of spiritual adultery. And it would continue to be adultery for the duration of the union. If there has ever been just grounds for divorce, God had it. If there has ever been an “innocent party” it was God. God has set us an example--divorce does not end a marriage.

According to Luke 16:18 divorce and remarriage is adultery. In that verse Jesus said, **“Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”** In Romans

13:8-12 adultery is referred to as one of the “**works of darkness**” that are to be “**cast off.**” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 teaches us that “**neither fornicators . . . nor adulterers . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God.**” Revelation 22:15 says, “**For without are . . . whoremongers. . . .**” Ephesians 5:5-9 says “**no whoremonger . . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.**”

It is clear that Jesus, the first pastor of the first Baptist church, taught that remarriage during the lifetime of the divorced partner is adultery. Nowhere in Jesus’ teaching and nowhere in the New Testament can we find a distinction made between divorce/remarriage and “cheating,” slipping around, shacking up etc. in that one is “black” adultery and the other is “white” adultery. Let us pray that God will grant the courage and love for truth to pastors and churches today to teach the same. Many divorces and the chaos that often follows could be prevented if the Lord’s churches would return to declaring the whole counsel of God. Left without scriptural support, the “innocent party” argument is left largely dependent upon it’s appeal to the emotions and to the flesh. Does innocence give one the right to do what is wrong? The truth is to be found in God’s words, not in human emotions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PREACHING OF JOHN

Let us study what the first Baptist preacher, John the Baptist, had to say in Mark 6:17-18:

17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

A lot is said in those two verses. Speaking of Herod and Herodias, verse 17 says “**he had married her**” but the same verse insists that Herodias was still Herod’s “**brother Philip’s wife.**” John, the Baptist preacher, told Herod, “**It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife**” (verse 18). John was the son of a priest and his mother was a descendant of Aaron, Moses’ brother (Luke 1:5). John’s parents “**were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless**” (Luke 1:6). John “**was a man sent from God**” (John 1:6) to baptize, preparing the members for the first church Jesus organized. John should have known as well as anyone what is lawful, and he said, “**It is not lawful.**” John was aware of the divorce that had taken place and the marriage that had followed but he insisted that Herodias was “**thy brother’s wife.**” Josephus, the historian, made mention of the case in The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 5:

. . Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod [Philip], the son of Herod the Great, who was born of Mariamne, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorce herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod [Antipas], her husband's brother by the father's side; he was tetrarch of Galilee;

Some may argue that Josephus referred only to the divorce being obtained by a woman in his statement that she “took upon her to confound the laws of our country,” but a careful study of the statement shows it is most probable that, just as it sounds, he was referring to both the divorce and the marriage. John's message was not well received by the guilty but they knew he had spoken the truth (Mark 6:20). John did not just say that it was unlawful for Herod to marry Herodias, but now that it has happened we have to accept it. John preached that it was not lawful for him “**to have**” Herodias because it is not just the act of marrying that is adultery but the adultery continues for as long as the marriage continues or until the previous spouse dies. Some today teach that divorce and remarriage is adultery but that it does not continue to be so. They say that adultery is committed by remarriage but refuse to admit that those who remarried live in adultery. I do not think John would agree with them. John believed that it was wrong that Herod had married another man's wife and that it was “**not lawful**” for him “**to have**” her because she was still another man's wife. He would continue “**to have**” her for as long as he had her and it would continue to be “**not lawful**” for as long as he did. If Herod and Herodias had made a profession of faith, would John have then approved of their

union? If time went by and the couple had children, would John have judged differently? If Herod and Herodias had acknowledged their guilt and expressed sorrow that it had happened, would John have been willing to baptize them or would he insist on **“fruits meet for repentance”** (Matthew 3:7-8)? Repentance is not merely an acknowledging of guilt and expression of sorrow. Repentance is a turning from something and requires the discontinuance or forsaking of that which is being repented of. It is clear that John the Baptist believed that those who divorce and remarry live in continual habitual adultery. The truth has not changed but many Baptists have. When did it happen, and why?

CHAPTER EIGHT

A PROTESTANT INVENTION

The beliefs that I have shown to be taught by Jesus and John seem to have been held pretty much universally by all of professing Christendom, both by the true churches and the irregulars and Catholics, up until after the sixteenth century. About the time of the reformation, a Roman Catholic monk named Erasmus theorized a supposed liberty for the innocent party to remarry. Encyclopedia Britannica [1957] describes Erasmus as “the greatest humanist of the Renaissance” and says his “life was spent in vindicating the dignity and liberty of the human spirit.” Erasmus’ theory found very little acceptance within the Catholic Church. Remember that it was in response to the Pope’s refusal to annul the marriage of King Henry VIII so that he could legally marry Anne Boleyn, that the Church of England came to be. There was much inconsistency with them on the subject then as there is now but the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church continues to be that marriage is indissoluble. They may sometimes practice inconsistently such as annulling a marriage with the allegation that it was not a “Christian marriage,” but officially they still refuse to recognize divorce as a way in which a marriage can be dissolved. Notice the following article published by Catholic World News, July 7, 2000:

VATICAN (CWNews.com)—The president of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts has disclosed that the Vatican issued a new statement on the status of Catholics who are divorced and remarried because there is “a great deal of confusion on the subject.”

Archbishop Julian Herranz, whose Council reaffirmed the teaching that divorced and remarried Catholics should not receive the Eucharist, told the Roman news agency I Media that the new statement was required because some Catholics had “badly interpreted” a particular article in Canon Law. He referred to Canon 915, which stipulates that Catholics “who obstinately persist in grave sin, should not be admitted to Holy Communion.”

Because of the widespread confusion over whether or not that law pertained to divorced and remarried Catholics, the archbishop explained, the Pontifical Council concluded that the proper interpretation of the law should be laid out “in juridical terms, according to our competence.”

Archbishop Herranz observed that the confusion over the status of divorced and remarried Catholics included the widespread impression that these people are excommunicated. They are not, he said. He continued: “We must distinguish between those who are outside the Church, because they are excommunicated, and those who—as with those who are divorced and remarried—remain sons of the Church, and are invited to participate at Mass, and to take part in parish activities, even if they cannot receive Communion.” The archbishop said that there are two reasons for the prohibition against Communion for those who are divorced and remarried. The first is the

imperative to preserve the integrity of the Eucharist, by excluding those who are in a state of sin. The second is to uphold the Church's firm teaching that marriage is indissoluble. The Church cannot accept remarriage, he reasoned, without accepting the notion that a first marriage can be dissolved.

“It is not that the Church has no mercy” toward those who are divorced and remarried, Archbishop Herranz declared. Rather, the Church follows the example of Christ, “who pardons the adulterous woman in the Gospel, and tells her, ‘Go and sin no more.’ Christ does not justify adultery, even as he pardons this woman.”

By the same token, the archbishop concluded, the Church cannot justify remarriage for Catholics who are, in the eyes of God and of the Church, already engaged in a Christian marriage to another spouse. Archbishop Herranz cautioned against the belief that “if a majority of people think that the truth does not apply, then that truth no longer exists.” In the end, he said, “But a law that comes from God can not be changed.”

Erasmus' humanistic theology and his loyalty to the Catholic Church put him greatly at odds with the Reformers, but many of them readily endorsed his ideas about divorce and remarriage, and the influence of those ideas have grown along with the Protestant denominations. Many Baptists held strictly to the teachings of Jesus and

John on the subject up through most of the nineteenth century. In the last century they have been greatly infected with Protestant influence in the matter. The Amish and the Mennonites have kept themselves separate from the rest of the world and most of them still hold the same true doctrine of Jesus and John about divorce and remarriage. I have before me a Mennonite “Adult Sunday School Lessons” quarterly, published by Christian Light Publications, Inc. for March, April, and May, 1998. The lesson for May 17 is titled “Marriage and Divorce” and has this to say:

... To interpret the exception [Matthew 19:9] to mean marital unfaithfulness is to make the Scriptures contradict themselves. If marital unfaithfulness was intended, then why did not Jesus use the word *adultery*? Jesus did not use words loosely or carelessly.

... Some have argued that divorce is the same as death. The Bible does not say that. Others have said that once the remarriage has been confessed as adultery and forgiven, the couple can now remain together. That makes adultery only an act and not a continuing sinful relationship. Is marriage only an act and not a continuing right relationship?

It is important to note that Jesus’ words “committeth adultery” are present continuous action verbs in each of the Gospels. This indicates that sin continues so long as the relationship continues. Only once did Jesus use a one-time past-action verb in relation to committing adultery: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed

adultery with her already in his heart”
(Matthew 5:28).

I know of no one who would say, if a man steals a car and gets converted, the car is now his. Nor that a man under the influence of alcohol who gets converted can remain under such influence as a Christian. Yet a difference is made in the case of a man stealing another man’s wife. Is such handling of Scripture not under God’s judgment?

One myth that has been propagated by the Protestant theologians is that when adultery or desertion is committed by a spouse it is evidence of their being spiritually dead and thus the innocent party is free. Such a belief requires much imaginative twisting of the Bible to try to support it. Some have taught that when one breaks the marriage vow by committing adultery that the marriage, being a covenant, is broken, thus causing the innocent party to be no longer bound to the covenant. That may sound soothing to the flesh, but it requires total disregard for what the Bible says as well as common sense. If it were true that the breaking of the marriage covenant dissolves the marriage, then what if one’s spouse commits adultery without one being aware of it? Is there not a great danger that the “innocent party” may be guilty of committing adultery, unknowingly, with the one they thought they were married to? What if the innocent party wishes to forgive, must the couple remarry if they are to continue as husband and wife? If the rule does not apply in every case, then how do we know when it does and does not? Of course the Bible does not give any guidelines for such a situation because it is a false presumption that is totally inconsistent with the clear teaching of the Bible. Various other interpretations have been made of the teachings of Jesus and of John, but if they

are inconsistent with the rest of the New Testament they must be considered false. We must let scripture interpret scripture and “**let God be true**” even if it makes “**every man a liar**” (Romans 3:4).

CHAPTER NINE

WHAT PAUL PREACHED

Paul wrote a lot about marriage in the New Testament. Paul wrote more than half the New Testament. What he wrote cannot be merely discounted as one man's opinion because what Paul wrote was the very words of God written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Remember Paul's knowledge of the law. In Acts 22:3 he spoke of having been "**taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.**" In Acts 26:4-5 Paul noted that his manner of life from his youth had been "**after the most straitest sect of our religion.**" In Romans 7 Paul made some very clear and strong statements about marriage, using it as an example and illustration in regard to salvation. Paul, being well educated in the law, said, "**I speak to them that know the law**" (v. 1). Romans 7:1-4 says:

1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.

3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that

she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

According to these verses the divorced and remarried woman “**shall be called an adulteress**” for as long as she “**be married to another man**” and her first husband is still living. This totally agrees with John’s response to Herod’s adulterous marriage with Philip’s wife. John declared that it was “**not lawful**” for Herod “**to have**” the woman he had married because she was still “**Philip’s wife**” and she would be Philip’s wife for as long as Philip lived. These verses in Romans 7 totally agree with Jesus’ teachings as I have presented them here in previous pages. To interpret what Jesus taught in any other way sets His words in conflict with these verses. If there were any exceptions to be allowed for, Paul would not have dared use the example he did in Romans 7, nor would God have allowed him to. When the exceptions and situation ethics appended by man are allowed to be mixed with these teachings of the Bible, God’s word is blasphemed. “Let God be true.” In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul again writes concerning marriage:

10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

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 instruction of these verses is given, not as an option or suggestion of the ideal, but as a clear command of the Lord. If one is divorced, it is a command of the Lord that the person either “**remain unmarried, or be reconciled.**” The command is the same regardless of guilt or innocence. Evidently, the things Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7 was in response to questions that had been asked. Thus, his remark in verse 1, “**Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me.**” Probably some had recognized the difficulty, hindrance, and distraction from spiritual things, presented by marriage to an unbeliever and were prompted to ask about it. Verses 12-13 say:

12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

Some have taken occasion with Paul’s comment here, “**to the rest speak I, not the Lord,**” to set these verses aside as having no authority. We cannot do that. While these verses are not direct commands from the mouth of Jesus in the sense that the two previous verses were, they are still the inspired words of God and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). Believers already married to an unbeliever are to stay together if at all possible. They are as obligated in their marriage as if they were married to a believer. Verses 2-5 still apply. Due

benevolence is to be rendered and love, respect, and submission are still in order. Verse 14 says:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

The unbeliever shares in the blessings of the believer. Health, wealth, or whatever blessings God pours out upon the believer will benefit the unbelieving spouse. The unbeliever is more likely to be exposed to the teachings of the Bible while married to the believer. The believer may pray many a prayer for him or her. The unbeliever's body may be controlled, to his/her own good, by the believing spouse, as taught in verse 4. The subject continues in verse 15:

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

The so-called “Pauline Privilege” that some imagine in this verse is a lie. If the unbelieving depart—If the believer cannot prevent the departure, he/she is no longer in bondage to render benevolence, to defraud not, or to be in subjection, as one would otherwise be. The statement that “**a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases**” does not mean that the one deserted is now free to remarry. The deserted believer is free from obligation to the one who departed but not free to marry another. Verse 39 makes that perfectly clear:

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.

Three verses in 1 Corinthians 7 are commonly taken out of context to, in effect, neutralize, contradict, or compromise the plain teaching of the rest of the chapter. Those are verses 17, 20, and 24. Those verses within their context say:

17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

Verse 17 may have application to those verses preceding it in that when God saves a person who is married to an unbeliever, that person is to continue in that relationship. Some good Baptist pastors will agree that divorce and remarriage is continual adultery but then use verses 17, 20, and 24 to say that since it has already happened it is okay, just don't do it again. That is bad advice. To presume such interpretation of those verses by taking them out of the context is blasphemy of God's word. God does not call persons to continue in sin. God calls us out of darkness into light. These verses do not mean that it is okay to continue in adultery if one is living in adultery when God calls him any more than they excuse continuing in fornication, thievery, drunkenness, prostitution, or lewdness. What if someone claims that God has saved him/her, but the person's way of making a living or supporting his/her family is striptease, prostitution, or theft? Shall we quote the scripture, "**as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk**" and say that it is acceptable? What about when a "same sex marriage" couple makes a profession of faith and presents themselves for baptism and membership in our church? Shall we say, "**As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk**"? Let us be consistent! James 1:8 says, "**A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.**" God does not call anyone to live in sin. 1 Peter 2:9 says:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the

praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

When God calls a person to salvation He calls him “**out of darkness**” not to abide in darkness, nor to walk in darkness. Ephesians 2:10 says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

There is to be a visible difference in those who are “**created in Christ Jesus unto good works.**” Read Ephesians 4:17-30:

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

After salvation, we are to “**henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk**” (v. 17). The laws of the land may say it is

legal to divorce and remarry but, in the Bible, Jesus, John, and Paul have declared that **“it is not lawful.”** **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). In Luke 16:17-18 Jesus said:

17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, commiteth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

We are to **“put off concerning the former conversation the old man”** and **“put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”** (Ephesians 4:22-24). **“Let him that stole steal no more”** (Ephesians 4:28). Let her that lived in adultery live in adultery no more. It must surely grieve the Holy Spirit of God (v. 30) for persons professing salvation to live and walk in the darkness of adultery. How much more grievous it must surely be that the Lord’s churches and pastors partake of the evil deed and rather than rebuke it, excuse it with **“Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.”** In Matthew 5:19, in the same “Sermon on the Mount” wherein Jesus also preached on divorce/remarriage/adultery, He said:

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Clearly, it is against Jesus' command for a divorced person to remarry or to **"be married to another"** (Mark 10:12) while the previous spouse is alive. I know that there is much ignorance about what the Bible says about this subject in the world today, but those of us who know the truth have a great responsibility that our teaching and practice be consistent with truth. **"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required"** (Luke 12:48). In John 14:23 Jesus said, **"If a man love me, he will keep my words."** Having said so much about what 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, and 24 does not mean, let us go back and consider what the verses do mean. When we look at those verses in context we can easily see that what is being talked about is **"circumcision"** and **"uncircumcision"** and being a **"servant"** or **"freeman."** Those are things a New Testament Christian is at liberty to **"wherein he is called, therein abide with God."** As verse 19 says, circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing, but **"the keeping of the commandments of God"** is something. It is something serious and a child of God is never at liberty to not keep the commandments of God.

Some have pointed to the divorces commanded in Ezra 9 and 10 as justification for divorcing an unbeliever so they might marry another with the excuse that they can better serve God in a happy marriage with a believer. Such presumption ignores two obvious facts. First, in that case divorce was commanded but remarriage was not. It is wrong to assume that remarriage was permitted. Secondly, the presumption contradicts the clear teachings of 1 Corinthians 7:10-13 as well as the many others we have discussed. No one can serve God better by disobedience.

CHAPTER TEN

GO AND SIN NO MORE

In John 8:1-11, a woman guilty of adultery was brought to Jesus. He instructed her, **“Go and sin no more.”** Simple as that! That is good instruction for any new convert. The woman in John 8 did not seek Jesus. It was not her idea to go to Him. She was brought to Him. Her accusers brought her to Jesus quoting the law of Moses. In this we see a picture of **“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”** (Galatians 3:24). Jesus who came not to condemn but to save (John 3:17) said **“neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.”** It is obvious that if the woman taken in adultery was obedient to Jesus after her conversion, she did not continue to commit that sin. Jesus has commissioned His churches to teach those He saves **“to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”** (Matthew 28:20). Churches that neglect the obligation to declare the whole counsel of God are disobedient to our Lord and neglect a duty upon which their perpetuity is conditioned. Those who are taught the Lord’s commands and choose not to follow are guilty of presumptuous sin. With His own blood, Jesus paid for the sins of His people. **“If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth,”** presuming upon Christ’s sacrifice for our sins, we tread under foot the Son of God, count His blood an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:26-31). A modern notion has evolved wherein it is thought that if we can get someone to “come to the front” claiming to be sorry for his or her sins or submit to baptism that that is repentance. Repentance is not just admitting guilt and expressing sorrow over one’s sins. Teaching men so, or allowing them to think it, is deceitful. Repentance involves turning from that which is repented of and going in a different direction. Just seeking

a fire escape from hell is not repentance. Repentance is not a plea bargain agreement. When a thief repents of stealing, he quits stealing. When a fornicator repents of fornication, she quits fornicating. When one repents of living in continual adultery because of being twice married, he discontinues the adulterous marriage. Repentance is not something a person does to “get saved,” it is something that God causes to happen because of salvation. I have been told that if a person comes up front and professes that God has saved him, none of us can judge whether the person has truly repented. It is a terrible pity if we can’t! John required “**fruits meet for repentance**” before he would administer baptism (Matthew 3:8). A church has the obligation of judging in certain matters among the members. How can we be so blind as to think that just because God saved someone that sin is no longer sin? The adultery of divorce/remarriage is just as sinful for the saved person as it is for the lost. Sin does not cease to be sin just because someone has been saved. There are lost sinners and there are saved sinners. Sin is as wrong for me now as it was before I was saved. There are certain ways of life that are to accompany salvation. There are certain ways of life that are to be cast off because we are called out of darkness and into light. I do not know of any example in the Bible of Jesus instructing anyone to follow Him or serve Him in disobedience, regardless of circumstance. If Jesus is not first in our life we cannot be His disciples. In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus said:

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

When God saves a person, that person's repentance must surely involve a desire and intention to forsake all known sin. One's baptism is, in part, a declaration of dying to sin and rising to walk in newness of life (Romans 6). Through teaching and learning a born-again believer will grow in grace and knowledge. In this process of maturing the disciple of Christ will learn of sin that yet exists in his life. It is as important that those newly revealed sins be confessed and forsaken as were those when we first began to follow Christ. The Bible has nothing good to say about those who start out to follow the Lord and then turn back. One does not continue to follow the Lord if he does not continue following where He leads. We cannot take another trail and catch up with Him farther along the way. Those who **"resist the truth . . . they shall proceed no further"** (2 Timothy 3:8-9).

In regard to the subject of divorce and remarriage being adultery, the question has been asked, "What about one who was sexually involved with someone else before marriage and later married someone else? Are they living in adultery?" The simple answer is this: Fornication does not constitute adultery. The confusion manifest in this question probably results in part from the teachings of those who blur the distinction between adultery and fornication, attempting to justify an "innocent party" exception. There is a joining of two when fornication is committed, but it is not such a joining as is marriage. Marriage is instituted by God and is honorable. Fornication is forbidden by God and the Bible instructs us to **"Flee fornication."** Scriptural marriage is what **"God hath joined together."** Of fornication, or being **"joined to an**

harlot,” the Bible says, **“God forbid.”** Of scriptural marriage, **“let not man put asunder”** (Matthew 19:6). Of fornication, we are commanded to **“flee”** (1 Corinthians 6:18) and **“abstain from”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20:

15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Fornication is a sin that, because it perverts the natural use of a body, pollutes and defiles it, dishonors it, and may result in many physical and emotional consequences (verse 18). God did not create mankind to live as animals. He

instituted marriage for humans. Fornication is never honorable and is not lawful in God's sight. The Bible never advises one to walk therein. God did not create mankind to divorce and remarry either, and it is not lawful in God's sight. It is a perversion of what God intended. Proverbs 28:13 says:

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Repentance includes both confessing and forsaking. When a saved person confesses and forsakes the sin of fornication, God will forgive him or her and we should too. Such a one can be lawfully married.

Marriage, by its very nature, is conceived in the vowing of vows. However formal or informal an act we may be willing to recognize as marriage it will have been wrought with the making of vows. The seriousness of making a vow is seen in Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21, and Ecclesiastes 5:4-6. Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 says:

4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

In Judges 11:30-35 the account of Jephthah and his daughter demonstrates the seriousness of a vow. Jonah recognized the necessity of honoring a vow (Jonah 2:9). In Acts 5:1-10 the account of Ananias and Sapphira provides us with a New Testament example of the importance of keeping a vow. When one makes a vow before God and man “until death do we part” it is a very serious matter. Romans 1:31-32 lists “**covenantbreakers**” as “**worthy of death.**”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A CHURCH

We recognize the nation Israel, God's chosen nation, to be a typological picture of Jesus' churches. God made it clear that His chosen nation, Israel, was to be different from the other nations. He gave them the responsibility of enforcing His laws and so we read His instructions to them such as the often-repeated phrases like "**ye shall stone them with stones that they die**" and "**so shalt thou put evil away from among you.**" Jesus has given His churches the responsibility of enforcing His laws (not in a national or civil capacity, but within its own body) and thus we have such New Testament instructions as "**Purge out therefore the old leaven**" (1 Corinthians 5:7) and "**put away from among yourselves that wicked person**" (1 Corinthians 5:13). The nation Israel was to be different from the rest of the world and Baptist churches are to be different from the rest of the world. Read 1 Corinthians 5:

1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an

idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

This chapter (1 Corinthians 5) deals with the penal or judiciary aspect of church discipline. There are personal offenses which are to be dealt with according to Matthew 18, and public offenses that are to be dealt with as here in 1 Corinthians 5, something that is “**reported commonly**” (verse 5). Discipline, rightly defined, firstly involves the teaching and instructing of what is right and wrong. Human nature, being what it is, makes it necessary that there be consequences prescribed and dispensed when that which is taught is not obeyed. The giving of a commission to the Lord’s churches to teach those they baptize implies the giving of the authority and responsibility to judge and correctively discipline its members. Many undesirable situations could be avoided if Baptist church members were being washed by the word. Ephesians 5:25-27 says:

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

But, you can't get washed if you don't get around the water. Forsaking the assembling of ourselves together regularly to study God's word is a serious offense. When church members only attend at some interval they have learned they can get by with and still retain membership, they mock and dishonor God, and the churches that allow it are even more guilty. It is the churches that have been charged with the responsibility to teach them.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, **"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you."** In verse 9 Paul said, **"I wrote to you in an epistle not to company with fornicators."** That instruction had been ignored, and now look what it led to! They had become puffed up in their supposed "love" while rejecting the obligation to practice according to truth. As a result they now had a case of **"such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles."** That church had neglected its duty to judge itself and now it was being judged by the world. When a church neglects its duty to **"judge them that are within"** (v. 12) it invites the criticism of the world and dishonors our Lord. All churches I have been in that practiced scriptural corrective discipline rightly referred to 1 Corinthians 5 as instruction toward corrective discipline in cases of public offense. The first part of the chapter deals with a particular case but the rest of the chapter lists other offenses that are to be dealt with in like manner. The same principles apply in the other offenses. It is generally agreed that the teachings of the chapter apply to cases of adultery as well as the listed offenses of fornication, covetousness, extortion, idolatry,

railing, and drunkenness. Theft is not listed there but common sense should tell us that it should be dealt with as seriously as covetousness. Surely adultery should be dealt with as seriously as with fornication. The instructions to **“purge out,” “not to company with,” “with such an one no not to eat,”** and **“put away from among yourselves that wicked person”** clearly are in reference to church membership and the Lord’s Supper. Verses 10 and 12 show that to be the case.

The world’s churches often regard church discipline as “mean spirited” or unloving, but such is not the case. Generally, those who practice discipline, and always those who practice scriptural church discipline, will be found to be the most loving, most holy, and most spiritual. Its purpose is not vengeance. **“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”** (Romans 12:19). Our first reason for the practice of scriptural church discipline is that we might give glory to God. When His churches neglect to judge themselves and are judged by the world, God is dishonored. Secondly, it is for the purification of the church as a body. A true church is a body of believers espoused to Jesus as His bride to be. Will Jesus marry an adulterous bride? A church is not a building and it is not a denomination. A true church consists of scripturally baptized believers and when something exists in the lives of those members it exists in that church. If there is adultery in the lives of the members there is adultery in the church. Verses 10 and 11 of 1 Corinthians 5 also include idolatry. If there is idolatry in the lives of the members there is idolatry in the church. Participation in the pagan “religious holidays” is idolatry and for those espoused to be in Christ’s bride it is spiritual fornication. When those who know better condone the sin of the weaker members by allowing it to continue, they share in the guilt. I do not believe Jesus will marry a physically adulterous nor

spiritually fornicating bride. Thirdly, corrective church discipline is for the teaching and edification of all the members. 1 Timothy 5: 20-22 says:

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

Those that sin are to be rebuked “**before all, that others also may fear.**” The instruction to “**Lay hands suddenly on no man**” is commonly understood as referring to the ordination of a brother to preach, pastor, or be a deacon. If it has any connection to the two previous verses it seems probable that it applies both to approval and to censure. I believe verse 22 has even broader application. It must surely apply, at least in principle, to the acceptance and censure, or rejection, of any Baptist church member. “**Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.**” At the conclusion of the chapter titled “Church Discipline” in the book Definitions of Doctrine, vol. III, C.D. Cole wrote:

And as members of the same body of Christ we are tied together and belong to each other and are responsible for one another. What I do, not only as your pastor, but as a member, is of importance to every one of you. And

we should not see one another sin and do nothing about it.

Fourthly, it is for the good of the one in error. 1 Corinthians 5:5 shows that the goal is “**that the spirit may be saved.**” How can we claim to love someone and yet neglect to do that which God tells us is for his spiritual good? Excuse is sometimes made for the neglect of church discipline or teaching all the truth on the pretense of love. Love can be of the wrong kind and for the wrong reasons. It is often advertised that, “friends don’t let friends drive drunk.” Should it not also be said that a church practicing godly love will not allow fellow members to continue in a life-style with which the Bible says, “**they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God**”? A “love” that causes us to teach someone the ways of darkness rather than truth is more akin to the “love” of a rapist for his victim than to a love that is of God.

It is important that church discipline be practiced impartially and consistently. Any decent church would exclude me for adultery if I were known to be unfaithful to my wife and failed to confess and forsake that sin. It has been shown that the entire New Testament consistently declares that divorce and remarriage while a previous spouse is still living is adultery and continues to be adultery until the previous marriage ends in death. Do we have any justification for considering one adultery “black” and the other “white” as some may try to differentiate between a “little white lie” and a “big black lie”? It is neither impartial nor consistent to rebuke one and harbor the other. Divorce and remarriage is just as much adultery as abortion is murder. We were instructed in 1 Corinthians 5, “**with such an one no not to eat.**” In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 the following is said about the observance of the Lord’s Supper:

27 Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Those who presumptuously partake of the Lord's Supper refusing or neglecting to repent of (confess and forsake) their works of darkness **“eateth and drinketh unworthily.”** He that does so **“eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.”** Churches that refuse or neglect to examine and judge themselves and purge out the leaven eat and drink damnation (judgment) to their church. When a church is aware of gross public sin such as adultery or fornication among its membership the matter must be dealt with in a scriptural manner and resolved before it observes the Lord's Supper. If it does not it eats and drinks

damnation to itself, not discerning the Lord's body. It causes the church to be judged by the world and it will be judged by God.

Is the adultery of divorce and remarriage a sin that is somehow exempt from the instructions of 1 Corinthians 5 and 11? I do not think so. If it is, then upon what authority is it? Many who will agree that divorce and remarriage is continual adultery insist that those who are guilty of it can still serve God in one of His churches as long as they do not teach, preach, or serve as deacon. Where does the Bible give us any ground for such a policy? Some have argued that since the Bible, in 1 Timothy 3 requires that a bishop or a deacon be **“the husband of one wife”** and Titus 1 requires an elder or bishop to be **“the husband of one wife”** it is inferred that there may be persons in the church that are the husband of more than one wife. The error of such thought can be seen by looking at some of the other qualifications that are listed for those same offices in the same chapters. Titus 1:6 gives the requirement of **“the husband of one wife”** for a bishop but there are other qualifications listed there too. Verse 7 requires **“not given to wine.”** Does that statement imply that it is acceptable for there to be members in the church that are **“given to wine”** as long as they don't teach, preach, or serve as deacon? Titus 2:3 requires that the **“aged women”** be **“not given to much wine.”** Does that imply that it is acceptable or permissible for the younger women or the men to be **“given to much wine”**? Although Titus 2 lists qualities to be found in the **“aged men,”** the **“young women,”** and the **“young men,”** it says nothing about their being or not being given to wine. Does the mention of it for the **“aged women”** imply the allowance of it for the others? The phrase **“given to wine”** in Titus 1:7 is translated from the Greek word numbered 3943 in Strong's Concordance and is defined as **“Staying near wine, to tope or tiple”**

(Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament).

Webster's Dictionary defines tope as "to drink hard or to excess" and tipple as "to drink frequently or excessively." I do not know of any sound church that would permit drunkenness among the aged men, young men, and young women in the membership, even with the stipulation that they not be allowed to teach, preach, serve as deacon, nor become aged women. Let us be consistent.

In regard to my belief and stand on the subject of divorce, I have been advised, "You have to be careful how you treat it; it could happen in your family." I have a wife and three children and I am well aware that according to statistics, as many as two out of every three marriages are now expected to end in divorce. Sin will always be sin regardless of what may happen in my family. Since when should Baptist church practice be dictated by what might happen in one's family? Shall we not just as well say the same about any other sin that may happen in our family? My beliefs about the life-long permanence of marriage caused me to be very careful in choosing a wife and it has caused me to place a high value and priority on my marriage. I have a great responsibility to teach those convictions and values to others and especially to those of my own household. It is my hope and prayer that true Baptists will recognize our responsibility and obey God's word.

It has been argued that it is wrong to "show partiality" or "respect of persons" by denying church membership to those who live in a continual state of adultery as a result of divorce and remarriage. "**Such were some of you**" is quoted from 1 Corinthians 6:11 as justification for overlooking the continual habitual adultery, if they make a profession of faith. Such were some of the Corinthians but that does not mean that they still were. In order to be consistent with the use of 1 Corinthians 6:11 for that

argument, we would have to say that it is alright for persons to continue as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, as long as we can get them to come before the church (verses 9-10). Verse 11 says:

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

That does not mean that the said persons who used to be described by all those bad names in the two previous verses were still living the same way but it was somehow acceptable now that they were saved. It does not mean that their sin had been washed, sanctified, and justified, but that they had. It was said that such were some of them, not that such are some of them. To use the verse in such a way is blasphemy of God's word. It may be done in ignorance or without having thought the matter through but it is a fatal error that teaches false doctrine and is destroying God's churches, as well as contributing to the destruction of home and nation. Repentance involves confessing and forsaking.

I have heard "**whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart**" (Matthew 5:28) coupled with "**he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone**" (John 8:7) used in an effort to neutralize or discredit what I have said on this subject. If the argument were valid, would it not apply in any case of adultery? Shall we not just as well use what Jesus said about "**whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause**" in Matthew 5:21-22 to defend murder?

It has been argued that the man referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 is the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was guilty of fornication with his father's wife and that since Paul instructed the church at Corinth to **“forgive him, and comfort him”** that we are to forgive and extend church membership to those who have divorced and are remarried. I do not know that it is the same man referred to in both cases, but assuming it is, let me ask: Do you think the man was continuing to commit fornication with his father's wife when Paul advised the church to forgive and comfort him? The argument depends upon a presumption that if a person has made a profession of faith, made a “rededication,” moved his membership, requested prayer, started tithing, or whatever since the wedding, that that is evidence of repentance. I must say again, “repenting is confessing and forsaking the sin that is repented of.” It should not take much thought to see that with such an attitude and perverted notion of repentance churches have polluted, corrupted, and perverted the very gospel message we are commissioned to preach. It is no wonder there is such a lack of spirituality in the churches. Let us **“repent, and do the first works”** (Revelation 2:5).

The fact that repentance and faith are inseparable graces means that one will not exist apart from the other. Both repentance and faith are fruits and evidence that the new birth has taken place. Sure, a lost sinner must receive salvation just as he is but he cannot remain just as he is. If faith is professed with an unwillingness to forsake all known sin a flawed faith and lack of a new birth is indicated. The same evidences should continue to be manifest as a child of God learns and grows in grace and knowledge. As a born-again child of God learns of sin in his life he must be as willing to forsake his sin as when salvation first came. In John 10:27 Jesus said:

**My sheep hear my voice, and I know
them, and they follow me:**

There seems to be much reluctance today to call sin “sin.” It is no wonder that almost anyone you talk to thinks himself to be a Christian. Sin is not exposed and condemned as it should be. Romans 3:20 says, “**by the law is the knowledge of sin.**” Paul said, “**I had not known sin, but by the law**” (Romans 7:7). When sin is exposed and its consequences are warned of the need for a Savior becomes apparent. More and more we see a lack of fear of God in our world but that is greatly due to the lack of a fear of God in the churches that the world observes. The lack of fear of God in the younger generation is often lamented but it is greatly due to the lack of the fear of God they have observed in the older generation.

“**Marriage is honourable in all**” has been quoted from Hebrews 13:4 to argue, “If a couple is legally married, even if they have been married before, that marriage is to be treated with respect.” The statement that “**the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband**” from 1 Corinthians 7:14 is given as supposed support for the argument, but it has nothing at all to do with the matter. The verse is talking about one who has become a believer remaining in an honorable marriage to an unbeliever. The verse is NOT talking about someone living in adultery. If a church feels so obligated to approve a marriage on the basis of it having been declared legal by the courts or legislators it may as well get ready to respect the “same sex marriages” we are hearing so much about these days. Since when are true Baptists to base their practice on what the world’s government allows? “**We ought to obey God rather than men**” (Acts 5:29). Romans 6:16 says, “**to whom ye yield**

yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey.”

Accepting the truth that those who are divorced and remarried live in continual adultery for as long as the marriage continues (and previous spouses live), some have wondered about the propriety of breaking the vows of the adulterous marriage. Clearly the making of a vow is a very serious matter. We considered the seriousness of a vow in an earlier chapter. Obeying and honoring God is also a very serious matter. In the case of divorce and remarriage two sets of vows will have been made. The first, the Bible declares to be honorable. God has forbidden the latter. The divorced person had no right (in God’s eyes) to make those second vows. According to Numbers 30 a vow made by a wife or a daughter was invalid and not binding unless it had the approval of the husband or the father. We have no right to vow to do what our God has specifically prohibited. In Matthew 21:28-31 Jesus told of a man who told his two sons to go work in his vineyard. One of them said, “I will not,” but afterward repented and did go work. The other said he would go but did not. Which did the will of the father? Ezra 10:2-3 describes the action that was taken by some people who had engaged in marriages that were forbidden by God for those people at that time. That was a unique prescription for a unique situation and should not be construed as a condemnation of Gentile marriages of mixed skin colors. God did not want His chosen nation of people to lose their identity nor national distinction by intermarriage with people of the heathen nations. It was to their lineage that Jesus was to be born. Ezra 9:1 shows the problem that because of the marriages of the people of Israel to the people of the heathen nations, they were **“doing according to their abominations.”** Those who feel bound by the vows God has forbidden them to make

are faced with a two-horned dilemma. Are they not still obligated by the vows of the first marriage?

We may not have the answers and solutions for all of everyone's problems but that does not change a church's obligation to keep itself pure and to defend the truth. It is with deepest sympathy (especially where children are involved) that I consider the dilemma and the many implications presented by the truth in adulterous marriage situations. The best thing a person can do for himself, his children, or anyone else is to teach by word and example to fear God and keep His commandments. God said:

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deuteronomy 5:29)

The problems of divorce and remarriage have been likened to scrambled eggs that cannot be unscrambled. As churches it is not our place to dictate how people manage their lives nor can we unscramble the eggs. We must leave it as a matter between God and those involved. However, it is very much a church's obligation and duty to refuse to allow such things as adultery to remain within its membership. It is the obligation and duty of a church to faithfully teach all the truths of the Bible including those of home, family, and morality. The mad cycle of generation after generation of divorce and remarriage must stop somewhere. Baptist churches owe it to the next generation to take responsibility and begin to uphold the abandoned truths that have fallen to the ground. A common attitude has developed that sees church membership as a right instead of a privilege. It is a blessed privilege that many have never had. It is not necessary that everyone be made a

church member. Candidates for membership must be examined and if they are not morally qualified they need to be taught for a while. Many seem to think that if you can get someone down the aisle you have to make them a member. Or is there a fear of scaring them away? If it is God's will that one be added to a church He will add him when He is ready to. We should welcome the opportunity to teach any who are doubly married and desire to learn. We should be ever mindful of the fact that except for the grace of God we could be in the same situation. One will learn far more being instructed as a non-member of a church that is obedient to our Lord than he will in a church that will forsake the law and praise the wicked by making him a member. There is no place for a "don't ask, don't tell" policy in examining candidates for church membership. Most churches have delegated the job of examining candidates to the pastor, but if he is neglectful the church still has the obligation and responsibility.

Probably, the most common objection given is, "Who else believes like that?" If it is according to truth, it is our duty to stand, even if we must stand alone. It is never right to do what is wrong regardless of how many are wrong and how few are right. There seems to be a trend toward blindly following churches rather than following God's instructions. The most common objections I hear in regard to my convictions about a church's obligation in matters of divorce and remarriage revolve around what "other churches like ours" teach or do. We should never follow others when it involves transgressing the commandment of God. In Matthew 15:3 Jesus rebuked some scribes and Pharisees with the question, "**Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?**" He then called them hypocrites and in verses 8 and 9 quoted from Isaiah 29:13 saying:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

In Colossians 2:8 we are taught to:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Those words are instructions for New Testament churches and it is just as wrong for us to substitute the tradition of men for the commandment of God today as it was for the scribes and Pharisees. It is high time the Lord's churches wake up and begin measuring themselves by the word of God instead of each other. 2 Corinthians 10:12 says that **“they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”**

This is not about showing partiality or respect of persons. It is not about being so strict you can't find other churches to fellowship with nor is it a matter of trying to find a perfect church. It is not about being self-righteous and despising others. It is not being unloving, nor being sour. These accusations and more have been offered in resistance to the things set forth here but that does not change what God has said or what He will require.

After a couple of generations of Baptists relying too heavily upon Protestant commentaries and emotions and too little upon the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the truths of marriage have been abandoned by most

and hearts are too hardened to consider the truth. It is encouraging that there are a few churches that preach and practice consistent with the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage. I thank God that He has mercifully preserved those few and pray that He will bless with more but whether there be more or none truth will always be truth and those who oppose will be in error. I have several times been advised that if you can't find a preacher or church that believes what you believe, you need to recheck what you believe. I have rechecked, and double rechecked and waited patiently for correction. I am more convinced than ever before that the continual habitual adultery of divorce and remarriage is as black as any other adultery and that churches, having the obligation to teach all that Jesus commanded, must preach the truth about it and practice church discipline consistently with it. Some may wish to excuse their disobedience by likening the situation to scrambled eggs that cannot be unscrambled, but the truth is that we must either line up with God in the matter or be at opposition with Him. This subject has been referred to as "a little thing that can tear a church up." It is not "a little thing." It is a moral issue. Divorce and remarriage is either okay and we should say nothing against it or else it is what the Bible says it is and we must regard it as gross immorality. If a church is to be one of the Lord's churches it must "**Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent.**" There are only two choices. Jesus said, "**or else I will come quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent**" (Revelation 2:5).

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOW DID THINGS GET THIS WAY?

Evidence of the practice of divorce and remarriage can be found in about any society and time period in history. Yet, in most times and places it has been a rare exception reserved for leaders either political or religious, or those wealthy enough to influence them. Even then, what was in substance a divorce was usually camouflaged as an annulment, manufacturing some technicality whereby they might claim it was an illegitimate marriage to start with. When and where there is little or no fear of God, the popularity of putting away and marrying another should not be surprising. According to the questions that were asked of Jesus and the answers He gave in regard to putting away and marrying another, it is evident that such practice was in existence then. The Jewish people were influenced with the false religion, paganism and idolatry of the other nations they had contact with and naturally some were influenced in matters of morality including attitudes toward marriage. Even so, any acceptance of putting away and marrying another among the religious Jews was probably limited to that occurring during the espousal period before the wedding. Those whose religion revolved more around tradition and regarded the law as having been given by Moses were the more liberal and likely to twist the law to suit their own lust. Those who loved and feared God and regarded the law as having been given by God recognized the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. To them the teachings of Jesus on the subject were nothing new nor controversial. The people like Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary, Joseph, John, Anna, and Simeon knew the truth of the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. They let God's word be God's word.

In previous chapters we have studied what Jesus, John Baptist, and Apostle Paul taught on this subject. It seems that Paul was able to teach it without controversy among the churches we read of in the New Testament. For the first few hundred years among professing Christendom, there were only the true churches that remained faithful to the teachings of our Lord and the irregular churches which evolved into the Roman Catholic denomination. All the many denominations of today did not exist at that time. The Roman Catholics continued to, in word, hold to the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. As I pointed out earlier, it is still their official stand. The Lord's true churches continued to recognize the indissolubility of marriage and regarded putting away and marrying another as continual habitual adultery.

Socrates Scholasticus (305-439 AD) wrote in The Ecclesiastical History (Book V, chapter XXII), "The Novatians in Phrygia do not admit such as have twice married." In The History of the Christian Church, first published in 1812, William Jones wrote of the Novatians, "Some of them are said to have disapproved of second marriages, regarding them as sinful; but in this they erred in common with Tertullian and many other eminent persons."

For about 1500 years after Jesus taught it, it was pretty much universally accepted among professing Christendom that marriage can only be put asunder by death and that one whom is divorced and married to another lives in continual adultery. As history shows, a few who chose to do as they pleased and were rich or influential enough to do so twisted things so as to call their divorce an annulment, but few if any dared dispute what was generally regarded as the plain teaching of the Bible that only death could dissolve a marriage. In most all places and times of professing Christendom in history where it can be found that divorces

were granted they were given in the sense of being a separation for the purpose of safety and legal protection but not in the sense of allowing one to marry another. I use such terms as “pretty much”, “generally” and “most” realizing that while it is an accurate assessment it is a generalization. If one looks hard enough exceptions may be found. For example as Roderick Phillips wrote in Putting Asunder (p.33):

Diversity in marriage practices in medieval Europe was influenced by social level and geography. Although the Catholic church was nominally universal, its doctrines and legislation respecting matrimonial matters were only weakly felt by some of its more distant faithful. Iceland is an example.

At the beginning of the 16th century the humanist Roman Catholic monk, Erasmus, that I mentioned in chapter 8, rationalized and theorized certain conditions and situations where marriage could be dissolved other than by death, giving liberty for the “innocent” to marry another. By publishing his ideas, Erasmus planted seeds of doubt that had the effect of “undermining unquestioning acceptance of the church’s doctrine of divorce, while drawing back from an outright statement of belief.” [Putting Asunder, Roderick Phillips, p. 36] Erasmus’ ideas did not receive the acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent in 1563 dealt with the matter of the permanence of marriage and stated in Canon VII:

If any one saith, that the Church has erred, in that she hath taught, and doth teach, in accordance with the evangelical and apostolical doctrine, that the bond of matrimony cannot be dissolved on account

of the adultery of one of the married parties; and that both, or even the innocent one who gave not occasion to the adultery, cannot contract another marriage, during the lifetime of the other, and that he is guilty of adultery, who, having put away the adulteress, shall take another wife, also she, who having put away the adulterer, shall take another husband; let him be anathema. [Phillips, pp. 35-36]

While Erasmus' ideas were rejected by the Roman Catholic Church the leaders of the Reformation soon adopted them. Protestant leaders regarded the Roman Catholic corruptions to be a result of their inconsistencies in marital doctrine and practice. The Protestant leaders did not immediately forsake the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage but it was not long until they did. The people in general among the Protestants did not forsake the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage for some time more but eventually they followed their leaders. In Putting Asunder Phillips wrote:

The Protestant Reformers were neither ambiguous nor subtle and called for the Catholic church not merely to reconsider its matrimonial doctrines but to abandon them forthwith as socially pernicious and contrary to divine law. This challenge, an integral part of the reformation of religious and social doctrines in the sixteenth century, turned the history of divorce in the West in a quite different direction from that which it had followed up to that time. [p. 39]

On page 41 Phillips wrote:

Protestant doctrines of divorce did not long remain at the abstract level but were quickly institutionalized in divorce legislation throughout much of Europe. In some cases the Reformers were directly responsible for the implementation of divorce laws: This was so of Calvin in Geneva, Zwingli in Zurich, and Luther in Wurttemberg. Indirectly, Calvin influenced the shape of divorce legislation in the Netherlands and Scotland, whereas Luther's influence was felt in many parts of Germany and throughout the Nordic countries.

As when Satan planted seeds of doubt with the question, "Yea, hath God said?" with the ideas of Erasmus and their reception and cultivation by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others, doubt of the Bible teachings of the indissolubility of marriage were born. The false doctrine of a supposed "Pauline Privilege" supported by a false interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15 was manufactured [see page 52]. Those teachers turned a blind eye to the Jewish marriage custom and the common and accepted definitions of common words so that they might see the words *fornication* and *adultery* in Matthew 19:9 as synonymous even though both words are used in the same verse in a way that shows distinction between them. Some spiritualized the words of the Bible rather than accept the clear and literal meanings that had been understood for 1500 years, so that they might make adultery (by spiritualization) synonymous with death of the offending party. Many saw divorce as a workable substitute for the death penalty prescribed in the Old Testament.

Although the establishing of the Church of England was occasioned by the dispute of King Henry VIII with the Roman Catholic Church regarding his desire to get rid of his wife Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn, the Church of England continued (in word) to hold to the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage. While most everyone would agree that what Henry sought was in substance a divorce, he insisted that it was an annulment. In Putting Asunder (p.71), Phillips wrote:

England was unique in the sixteenth century as the only country where an established or dominant reformed church did not break with the Roman Catholic doctrine of marital indissolubility. This was an irony given that the catalyst for the Anglican church's break with Rome was the attempt by King Henry VIII to rid himself of his wife, Catherine of Aragon. Henry's action was not a divorce, however; what he sought was an annulment on the ground that his marriage was invalid because of a preexisting impediment. Despite this, it deserves some consideration here because Henry's "divorce" throws light on the state of thinking about marriage and divorce in the early Reformation, both in England and on the Continent.

On page 77 Phillips wrote:

In a sense Henry's matrimonial cases can be seen as setting the tone for the development of divorce law in England. Henry broke with Rome in order to obtain the annulment to which he believed he was entitled. He might subsequently have broken with the

Catholic doctrine of marital indissolubility; there were, after all, precedents on the Continent by the early 1530s. In fact, the Church of England remained faithful to this aspect of Catholic marriage doctrine, even though it abandoned other elements such as clerical celibacy. But such was the tenacity with which the Anglican church held to indissolubility, and such was the influence of the church, that no divorce legislation was passed in England until the middle of the nineteenth century.

As it had been with the Protestants of the Reformation, so it was with many of the English nearly a century later. My old “World History” textbook from high school, Story of Nations, by Rogers, Adams, and Brown (p. 272), says:

Many Englishmen still felt that the Church of England was too much like the Roman Catholic Church. They were called Puritans, because they wanted Parliament to pass laws to “purify” the Church. By purifying, they meant that the Church service should be made simpler and that the use of altars and statues should be discontinued. When James opposed any change in the English Church, many Puritans left England. As you know, some of them came to America.

One of the protests of the Puritans was the continued stand of the Church of England for the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage. The Puritans recognized the truth that marriage is the basic building block of society and that it is essential to good order and government. Many of them saw single and separated men and women, or even

unhappily married men and women as more at risk and vulnerable to the temptations that a happy marriage might prevent. They, in common with many of the other Protestants, reasoned that happy marriages made possible by divorce and remarriage would improve the total morality and that the implications of the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage (no allowance for remarriage) was the cause of much immorality and disorder. Concerning the debate in seventeenth-century England, Phillips observed, “What is interesting, though, is their [those defending the indissolubility of marriage] almost complete reliance on scriptural interpretation. They contrasted strongly with works by the advocates of divorce, which relied for much of their force on social arguments” (p.110). I have found that to be so in most every time and place and never more true than now. It is usually much the same anytime truth is debated. Whether it be the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace, church doctrine, separation (from worldliness), the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, or any other Bible doctrine, those defending the truth will depend upon the scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit for their defense but those opposing are left to the ideas and opinions of man accompanied by emotionalism and sympathy for the force of their argument.

On page 134 Phillips comments on the introduction of divorce to America:

European divorce policies and legislation arrived in North America in the mid-seventeenth century in the baggage of the Puritan settlers. As we have seen, acceptance of divorce was not peculiar to Puritan Anglicans, nor was it acceptable to all of them, and we cannot explain the legalization of divorce in the New England

colonies simply by appeal to Puritanism, without some qualification. It is likely, however, that those Puritans who migrated to America were those men and women most discontented with the early seventeenth-century settlement in England. Although we do not know the religious doctrines of all those who set the tone of New England's moral and social climate, it is reasonable to suggest that their attitudes to issues such as divorce were more likely to be at odds with those of the Anglicans than were those of the Puritans who did not emigrate. Significantly, the group of Puritans who first landed at Plymouth in 1621 to found Plymouth Colony had left England in 1607 for Holland. Clearly they expected that the Dutch Calvinist society, where divorce had been legalized, would be more congenial than their own country under what they considered its inadequately reformed church. In short, the American Puritans were more likely to occupy the prodivorce end of the spectrum of attitudes than they were to span it completely, as did the English Puritans as a whole. But we must also avoid the temptation to create an alternative, but equally misleading, homogeneity for Puritanism in America, for there were clear dissensions within the New England Puritan community over issues relating to the family, marriage, and divorce.

I have now spent quite a few pages about the Roman Catholics, the Church of England, and Protestants in relation to marriage and divorce doctrine, but let us

remember that during all those years there continued to exist true churches that had never affiliated with nor followed either the Catholics or the Protestants. The Baptists in early America recognized the Bible truth that marriage can only be ended by death. There were Baptists in America from early in the seventeenth century with the first Baptist church in America being organized at Newport, Rhode Island in 1638 and having Dr. John Clarke as its pastor (The First Baptist Church in America, by Graves and Adlam). The minutes of the September 20, 1748 meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania shows what the Baptists in America still believed more than a hundred years later:

A query from the church of Bethlehem:
Whether a man who hath two wives living
may be received into communion on his
profession of faith. Answer. By no means.
Matt. v. 32; xix. 9.

Although that query and answer was referenced as “communion with polygamists” in the table of contents when the minutes of that association were gathered and published as a book in 1851, there is no question as to what was meant by them because of the scripture references they included: Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9. Those Baptists knew that Jesus taught that marriage could only be ended with death and that one who had put away a wife and married another was living in adultery because he had two wives living. Those Baptists knew that faith without works is dead and so if a profession of faith is to be considered valid it must be accompanied with repentance that consists of confessing *and* forsaking. They recognized the requirement (as all true Baptists must) of a regenerate membership, thus their answer, “By no means.” They did not think that the man’s having two living wives was

allowable as long as he was not permitted to preach. They were consistent. They knew that a man having two living wives is adultery – preacher or not. It is extremely important that we continuously guard and uphold all truth because it can slip away so quickly and easily. Just thirty-nine years later (1787) in that same association, with another generation, a similar query was presented:

In answer to the query from the church at Goshen, we reply: If a man and wife should separate, be it for what cause it may, if either of the parties be innocent in the matter, and should apply for baptism, such may be admitted; but may not marry to another without a legal divorce.

It is very important that the Lord's churches carefully guard and defend truth, and practice according to it. Churches have a responsibility to be a positive influence upon those around us but most of the time it is the churches that are being influenced by the world. Political thought, however good it may be, should not be allowed to shape doctrine nor practice in the Lord's churches. Romans 6:16 says:

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

I believe that those Pennsylvania area Baptists were negatively influenced by the Puritans in matters of marital doctrine. I also believe that Revolutionary political thought in general of that time and place affected the New England and Pennsylvania Baptists in marital doctrine. In The

Divorce Culture (p. 15), Barbara Dafoe Whitehead observed:

Five years after the Revolutionary War a pamphlet entitled *An Essay on Marriage, or the Lawfulness of Divorce* argued that the freedom to divorce was an expression of republican liberty. Announcing itself as the first pamphlet on the subject to appear in the new Republic, it describes the suicide of a wife “on account of some infelicity in marriage.” The pamphleteer, reflecting on the “misery of marriage in those who are unsuitably united,” invokes the spirit and lessons of republicanism: In America, a nation “famous for her love of liberty,” should not “that same spirit of indulgence” extend to “those united together in the worst bondage?”

There is an abundance of evidence of “politics in the pulpit” of that era as well as most others. It ought not to be. It may be well to address political thought from time to time in the pulpit but it needs to be examined in light of the Bible rather than letting it interpret the Bible. Man’s declaration that “When in the course of human events . . . any Form of Government becomes destructive . . . of . . . Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness . . . it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government” does not change what God has decreed concerning marriage. Furthermore, regardless of what the courts, lawmakers, polls, or talk-show hosts may endorse, “**We ought to obey God rather than men**” (Acts 5:29). Those new false divorce doctrines did not much affect the South until quite a bit later. Being insulated to a great extent from the Puritan influence and being settled more

from the southern colonies that were led by men who were more in agreement with the Church of England's opposition to divorce, the South was much more cautious and conservative in accepting the strange new marital doctrines. It was not until a good while after the Civil War that any significant change in attitude was seen in that regard. Many churches continued on the old path through the nineteenth century and some in rural areas even into much of the twentieth century. In a 1982 history of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Sunny Brook, Wayne County, KY, by Irene Atwood Byrer, John B. Boles is quoted from Religion in Antebellum Kentucky:

Religion in . . . [early] Kentucky extended from the churches into all other aspects of life. This permeation constituted the religious culture and it was religious discipline that impressed religious values throughout the culture. . . . The three dominant churches in Kentucky and in the South as a whole – Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian – had careful institutional machinery for watching over their members and correcting or punishing those who did wrong. Church discipline occupied an enormous amount of time and energy, but the result was a religious life that extended far beyond the formal sermons and actual church structures into every corner of personal life. . . . Both sexes, both races, all classes were called to the bar of moral justice. Hardly any aspect of life was left unwatched . . .

Immediately following, Byrer reported, “Here is a list of charges (the way they appeared in the church minutes) for

which members of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church were excluded after they had been charged, tried, and found guilty:”. Listed among those charges are, “For marrying a man that was married once before & his first wife yet a live. (excluded her – his name not given)”. Later another was charged with “Marrying & wife yet alive – both excluded”. Did that church act erroneously in those cases or did it act in those cases in obedience to the commission Jesus gave for His churches to go **“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”**? Have Baptist churches changed? Have they changed for the better or worse? There are a few churches even today that remain faithful to the Lord and the Bible in marital doctrine. One Baptist church in another state faithfully defends the sanctity of life-long marriage and maintains practice and discipline that is consistent with it and all it implies. That church has faithfully and courageously defended those truths in its printing ministry. The pastor and members have been a great encouragement to me. I have also visited another Baptist church in a neighboring state that remains faithful to Bible doctrine and scriptural practice in regard to the indissolubility of marriage. A brief statement of that church’s stand is:

Resolved, That we take the strongest stand possible against divorce – God hates it according to Mal. 2:16 and so should we. Accordingly, any person who has been divorced and *remarried* (in the eyes of the civil law) either before or after “salvation” is living in the habitual act of adultery before God’s eyes and consequently disqualified for membership in this church. What should they do? They should separate from that adulterous relationship and live a life of sexual purity and deny their fleshly lusts.

They should not seek another divorce. However, it is acknowledged that this may lead to their partner seeking a civil divorce. Such as return to a life of purity may be considered for membership. It is acknowledged that since God never intended divorce, as we know of it today, the Holy Scriptures do not give us specific verses to deal with these matters.

Anyone who has been divorced but has *not remarried* may seek membership in this church. The admonition for that person is:

- a. They are not to remarry, and
- b. They are to live a life of sexual purity, and
- c. They are to seek, with all sincerity, to be reconciled to their wife or husband.

No divorced person will be allowed to hold any church office.

[Standing Resolution of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, New Carlisle, OH]

There may be more churches like these, but if there were none, we would be just as responsible to follow God's instructions. I praise God that He has preserved the truth in a few of His churches and pray He will give us more churches faithful to these truths. I pray that those who have fallen into error will recognize the truth from whence they have fallen and repent. True Baptists have reset several "landmarks" of scriptural doctrine and practice, but there are yet some old landmarks that must still be reset. The most urgent and important involve the tolerance and even

encouragement of the paganism (Roman holidays) and adultery that has crept into Baptist churches. One is idolatry and the other is gross immorality. If these sins exist in the lives of the members, they exist in the church. The reason they exist is because churches allow them to. The very perpetuity of those churches depends upon repenting and turning from these wicked ways. Jesus' churches must humble themselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14). Then and only then will those churches experience the healing that is so desperately needed. Churches can eat and drink damnation unto themselves just as surely as the individual members can (1Corinthians 11:27-34).

I am aware of the intense hatred that many have for these truths, but these pages have been written in love and it is hoped they will be received as such. With confidence in Jesus' claim in John 10:27 that His sheep hear and follow, this work is humbly offered with the prayer and sincere desire that God be glorified in His churches by Christ Jesus throughout all ages.

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