

Marriage and Divorce¹
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God Speaks on Divorce Theodore H. Epp, Back to the Bible Broadcast by

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Chapter One

GOD ESTABLISHES THE HOME

In this series of message on the home, marriage and divorce we wish first to discuss the sacredness and sanctity of the God-established home. The home was the first institution that God provided for man's benefit. It was inaugurated before the entrance of sin as the record in Genesis 2:18-24 makes clear:

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him....And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

The home is an institution of God, and it is important that we understand how He planned for it and for what purpose He established it; then we shall have no trouble in understanding the teachings throughout the Scripture on this subject. God is unchangeable; He does not alter His ways or principles in order to accommodate man. There appears to be one seeming change-but it is only seeming-that some have used as a loophole for sanctioning divorce. We will deal with that at length later in this series.

THE FIRST INSTITUTION

Let us remember, then, that the home was the first institution God provided for man's benefit. Since the home is God given, and since it was instituted before sin entered the world, naturally it is based upon the holiest precepts of God. Divorce which is so common today, is destroying that which God instituted and pronounced holy.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them male and female in the image of God. The relationship between man and wife in this sinlessly perfect condition was as sacred and holy as the relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity-Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are one. So in marriage, God says, a man and woman are to be one.

Since the principles of the home are based on godliness and absolute holiness, the sinner can hardly comply with them. However, in these messages we wish to speak primarily to those who have through the new birth been united in Christ; for them the principles of the home continue as in the beginning. Jesus stated this over and over again. We find no place in Scripture where God has altered these principles in order to accommodate sinful men.

It must be remembered that any alterations of the basic principles of the operation of the home were made through the permissive will of God because of the hardness of the hearts of men. But Christians, who are born again and have received the Spirit of grace, should not classify themselves with or imitate the hardened Israelite, who lived under the Law and rejected God's means for producing a godly life.

That the home is to remain under the same sacred principles of operation as when it was instituted is also indicated by the comparison made between the relationship of man and wife to that of Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5. there we learn that Christ was united to the Church by an eternal union. This should be reflected in the permanency of marriage.

A SACRED RELATIONSHIP

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Marriage is the tenderest, most sacred relationship of life. "These two shall be one flesh," says God in the second chapter of Genesis. The one is to be the complement and counterpart of the other. One is absolutely incomplete without the other. That is God's principle, God's foundation for the home. "The two shall be one flesh."

God provides the home for man's good. "It is not good for man to be alone," He says, so He made for man a helpmate. In I Corinthians 7:2 we have another statement with reference to this same truth: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." God instituted marriage to repress irregular affection and to support social order, that through well-ordered families truth and holiness might be transmitted from one generation to another. The peace and well-being of a nation depends upon the purity of its homes. "As goes the home, so goes the nation."

SYMBOLIC OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

This union, this oneness of the two people involved in marriage, had been chosen as an emblem of the union of Christ and His Church. Being instituted of God and sanctified by Him, the relationship of husband and wife to each other is to be as sacred as the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Looking again at Ephesians 5 we find this wonderful truth: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (vv. 21-25).

In Genesis 2 we read that Eve was given to Adam. He knew, of course, that she was taken from his side and made (buildd) from one of his ribs; so he said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." The two were one. Eve was not taken from Adam's head, which might mean that she was to dominate him, nor was she taken from his feet, which might suggest that she should be trampled upon by him; but she was taken from his side, near his heart, the seat of affection. Therefore, God has ordered the husband to love his wife, even as he does his own body. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hateth his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (vv. 25-29).

NO PROVISION FOR DIVORCE

God made no provision whatsoever for separation, or divorce, as it is now called, because marriage was instituted before the entrance of sin. There was no cause or reason for separation. Sin alone is the underlying cause of lust, greed, selfishness and hatred, which, in turn, is the cause of divorce, but this is what the Bible teaches.

Twenty-five hundred years after the institution of marriage Moses gave permission for divorce under one condition. It was God's permissive will, only because of the hardness of the hearts of men. But this permission did not change God's original principle-namely, that one man and one woman should be one flesh for as long as they both lived. The marriage union is as closely knit as are the various parts of the body. For men and women who have been married, separation would be like the severing of an arm or a limb from one's body.

In the New Testament we find that Jesus restates the principle of the unity of the home as it was in the beginning. These statements may be found in Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:1-2, and Luke 16:18. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, again reaffirms the same principle of the oneness of man and wife in I Corinthians 7:10-15 and Romans 7:1-4.

Christ restates the principle of oneness by referring to the oneness between Himself and the Church (Eph. 5). While it is true that in the Church many have fallen away from fellowship with Him, it is nevertheless true that we cannot be separated from Him. In John 10:28,29, we read this, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." These are reassuring words from the Lord Himself.

Another strong statement concerning our unbreakable relationship with Him is in Romans 8:35-39: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." We cannot be separated from this love. He will do us good all the rest of our life and throughout all of eternity.

We must keep in mind that the Bible uses this relationship of Christ to the Church as a picture of the permanent relationship of man and wife. The truth concerning Christ's coming again further emphasizes this. For instance, we read in I Thessalonians 4:16,17 that our Lord is coming "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The same truth is stated in John 14: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (vv. 1-3). There is no thought of separation. Our union with Him is eternal. This oneness of Christ and His Church is used to illustrate a oneness in marriage that is not to be broken: God has made no provision for separation.

Man in his weakness, shortsightedness, and rebellion grasps at what seems to be one loophole in this inseparable marriage relationship, so that he can have his lustful way, and yet quiet his conscience. What he is seeking is permission for divorce, as given under Moses' law and seemingly endorsed by Christ. But Moses permitted divorce only because of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites; and since Jesus restates the fact that Moses permitted it, some seem to think that He gives consent to it. By seeking a way out of the marriage or by referring to the permissive will of Moses and of God and the seeming endorsement of Christ, men are committing a great sin.

Would Jesus who is God change the principle laid down at the beginning of the race? God does not change with the changing times and standards of men. Christ's standard for marriage is still what was laid down "in the beginning."

When a born-again man seeks a loophole in God's Word in order to soothe his guilty conscience, so that he can continue in his lustful living, he admits the hardness of his heart, he admits his carnality. In trying to find consent for gratifying the lust of his flesh, in seeking the Bible's permission to sin, he is unwittingly trying to make God a participant in sin. What blasphemy! May God open our eyes to the truth!

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Chapter Two

MIXED MARRIAGES

In I Corinthians 7 we have God's answer to the questions about mixed marriages, that is, marriages where one partner is a Christian and the other is not. Are mixed marriages permitted, or are they forbidden in the Scriptures?

A DIRECT COMMAND

First let us look at II Corinthians 6: 14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" ("Stop forming intimate and inconsistent relations with unbelievers"-Wms.) If nothing else were said, this command should be sufficient.

The word "yoke" does not mean much to some people, because marriage does not seem to them to be a yoke. If they do not like it ,they obtain a divorce. In the United States one out of every three marriages ends in divorce. This is largely among unbelievers, but Christians are not untouched. God's declaration is, "They are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:5,6). You are yoked together when you marry.

Let there be none unequally yoked together, then, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? [A saved person walks in the light, while the unsaved one still walks in the darkness.] And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? [What is there in common between a believer and an unbeliever?] And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (II Cor. 6:14-16). He climaxes his statement with the question; "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

In I Corinthians 6:13-20 Paul plainly states that we are members of the Body of Christ; therefore, we are the temple of the living God, collectively, as a Church, and also as individuals. The Christian's body is the temple of

Christ, what business has he to have as intimate relationship-yoked together-with that which is not the temple of God? "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17,18).

This statement in II Corinthians goes beyond the marriage vow. It goes into the spiritual aspect of being unequally yoked together. This passage stands out definitely as a statement of God that mixed marriages are forbidden. In Galatians 6:7 He says that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That is a law-a principle that we cannot escape.

Some may say that love will answer all questions. But does it? There is more than one kind of love. Christian love is different from human love. Christian love is a God-given love; whereas human love is merely affection. There is a different foundation for each. The two cannot have anything in common any more than a person can love Christ and the flesh at the same time. It is a believer has a better opportunity to understand the unbeliever, and possibly through the love that is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit he is able to love the unbeliever in spite of some of his or her shortcomings and sins.

RESULT OF DISOBEDIENCE

The important thing is that God says that we should not be unequally yoked together. If we do not take His advice, we will suffer the consequences. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Amos, the prophet, asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). The implied answer is in the negative. No happy, godly fellowship is possible unless both parties are agreed at least on the subject of personal faith in Christ. This will also automatically involve agreement on other important spiritual points.

Such a life makes absolute consecration on the part of the believer impossible. How can a believer fulfill Romans 12:1,2 and be completely yielded to the lord if he is united in marriage with one who is not a Christian? If this is your situation, you cannot really give your life to the Lord, because you are living with a person who is an unbeliever. The unbeliever does not care, and he or she hinders you from doing the things that God wants you to do. Therefore, it is impossible for you to be completely consecrated to God.

You cannot agree on vital matters of everyday life. The Bible sets standards for godly living; will your unbelieving spouse accept them? And what about the conduct of the children? The believer looks at life from the spiritual standpoint, while the unbeliever looks at it through the eyes of the flesh. The Christian may say, "As a Christian I cannot do this." But the unbeliever may say, "I see nothing wrong with that." Thus there is conflict. Often Christians lower their standards to where there is little or no difference between them and unbelievers. This should not be, but this may be part of the reason for so many mixed marriages today.

Furthermore, the Christian who marries an unbeliever will constantly be unhappy because of his enlightened conscience. Some have made shipwreck of their faith and seared their conscience because of marrying in disobedience to God. If you are a child of God, unequally yoked with someone, there will be conflict in your soul, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other"(Gal.5:17).

God asks you to present your body to Him as a wholly separated, sanctified body, given completely over to Him. (See Rom. 12:1,2.) How are you going to yield your body to God if you give your body to an unbeliever? It is impossible, because the unbeliever demands certain things, and God demands others. The unbeliever demands that you go to questionable places of entertainment; but the Lord says, "Give Me your time." God will want your hands to work for Him; your eyes to see what is pure; your eyes to hear His truth; and your mouth to speak His praise. But this may not suit your unsaved partner.

The unbeliever may say, "I do not care to go to church. I want you to go somewhere else with me on Sunday." But the Lord says, "Give me your body."

You want to do God's work; but you cannot, because the unbeliever demands that you stay at home. You have little in common.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Can they live together happily as believer and unbeliever? It is impossible on the spiritual level. Only on the earthly level may it be possible. Even denominational differences between husbands and wives have often been the cause of serious trouble.

REGULATING A MIXED MARRIAGE

The 7th chapter of I Corinthians lays down some principles that have to do with the regulating of a mixed marriage which has already been consummated. Separation after such a marriage has been established is thoroughly discouraged, or if the unbelieving spouse wants to separate then there is to be no remarriage for the Christian.

If a believer is married to an unbeliever, regardless of the reason, God does not want the marriage broken up. In God's eyes marriage is permanent. Paul wrote to the Corinthians giving guidelines with respect to mixed marriages: "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away [not leave her]. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." The believer is not to leave the unbeliever if the marriage has already been

consummated. It is highly possible that in the Corinthian situation with which Paul was dealing, marriages had been entered into when both husband and wife were unbelievers, and then one was saved as the result of hearing the gospel. But regardless of the reason for the mixed marriage, this is God's will in the matter.

In verse 12 Paul stated: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord." To some this may seem that Paul was not giving an inspired statement, but such is not the case. His meaning is that there was no direct command given by the Lord Jesus Christ on this subject. However Paul wrote by apostolic authority under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus what he wrote had the authority of God back of it. The Christian member of the family was to do everything possible to hold the marriage together.

On the other hand, if the demand for separation were to come from the non-Christian member of the family, here are the instructions: "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." This simply means that the believing husband or wife (the "brother or sister" in this case) was not to seek separation; but if the unbelieving partner wanted to depart, the believer should not stand in the way. In this way fighting between them would be avoided and peace would be maintained. It also meant that the Christian was not under bondage to deny his or her faith in order to avoid a broken home. This is not the same situation as when husband and wife are both believers. Consequently there is no support in this verse for divorce between Christians.

To the Christian partner in the marriage the Apostle wrote: "Let not the [believing] wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, [if the union is dissolved by the unbeliever], let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the [believing] husband put away [depart from] his wife" (vv. 10,11). If you are a Christian, God forbids you to leave the unbeliever or to marry again, even though the unbeliever left you.

If the unbeliever wants to leave you, you can do nothing about it. You will have to let him or her leave. But you are not free to marry again. That being God's Word, the matter is settled.

Paul also gave instructions as to what to do if the unbeliever does not desire to leave. The Scripture says, "If he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him" (v. 13). He also said that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. "Sanctified" means "set apart" for blessings of God-dedicated or consecrated by being joined to a believer. The same thing is also true of the children who are born as a result of this union. It is possible that the unbeliever may eventually be saved. "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

But the fact that a mixed marriage may result in the salvation of the unbeliever does not give one license to disobey God's injunction intentionally and enter into such a marriage. In other words, if you are engaged and unsaved, you have no right to marry that person, hoping that he or she will later believe. There is nothing in this passage that can be strained to imply license to contract marriage with unbelievers. Only those already married are being dealt with here. The unequal yoke is expressly forbidden according to II Corinthians 6:14 and I Corinthians 7:39.

The Scriptures say, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). This injunction concerning marriage is given only for those who have already (possibly ignorantly) entered into such a relationship.

In verse 17 we have God's will expressed for those who are involved in a mixed marriage. "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called everyone, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches." This passage is still dealing with the subject of mixed marriages. God wants permanency in marriage. So far as the context in this chapter is concerned, the subject does not change until verse 25.

If a believer has been married in this way ignorantly and is now living with an unsaved husband or wife, the Christian is not to depart. If the unbeliever departs, the believer cannot help it; but he or she is to remain unmarried. If the unbeliever remains in the home, he or she is under blessing and possibly will be saved.

Chapter Three

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Let us consider again the first passage given in the Scriptures concerning marriage. It is Genesis 2:23,24: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

ORIGINALLY NO DIVORCE

God's original principle concerning marriage is laid down in the above verses. You will notice that divorce has no place in God's program. When He instituted marriage, He did not provide for divorce in case the marriage did not turn out right. We emphasize again the fact that God did not institute divorce along with marriage.

God is unchangeable. Having stated His principles, He will not change them.

Look carefully at a few Scriptures which establish once and for all that God, having laid down a principle or given a statement, is not changeable. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent ["repent" means "change"]: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew

unto the heirs of promise the immutability [unchangeability] of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Heb. 6:17). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb.13:8). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

Psalm 33:11 says concerning His Word: "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Or as Psalm 119:89 says, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." That means His Word is unchangeable. If He changed one thing He could another. He could change His plan of salvation or His plans concerning things to come. So I repeat again, God's Word does not change. He has given it; that settles it.

Christ Himself, some four thousand years after the first marriage, restated the principle of marriage found in Genesis 2:23,24. "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6). God instituted marriage for life-that is, as long as both persons are living. The contracting parties of a marriage should remain married. They should not seek a termination of the sacred relationship.

Divorce is not mentioned in the Scriptures until 2500 years after marriage was instituted by God. And this only after the Law was given. In the basic Law, the Ten Commandments which God gave Moses, there was no mention of divorce. In fact, two of these commandments, the seventh and tenth indirectly forbid it.

In Exodus 20:14 we read: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is an indirect command against divorce. The tenth commandment is in verse 17: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's."

There were no other laws supplemental to the Decalogue which were given by inspiration and by commission from God. However, among the laws given by permission through Moses, laws not reflecting the direct will of God, was the law of divorce. Let us examine it in its proper category, not as a direct law but as a permissive one.

Jesus referred to it in Matthew 19:7,8, and He told why it was given. The Pharisees well understood that there was no reason for divorce when God first instituted marriage, because they asked the question, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" They meant, "Why did Moses do that, if there was no such thing as divorce in the beginning?" Jesus answered the question by saying, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

In restating the issue as we have already seen it, we might say that from the beginning divorce was not in the directive will of God, but because of the hardness of the Israelites' hearts, it was permitted or tolerated. The Law allowed for divorce but did not justify it.

DOES GOD PERMIT DIVORCE TODAY?

I have many good friends who are fundamental in doctrine but with whom I cannot agree on the principle that they have laid down concerning the matter of divorce. God permitted it during the time of the Law. But it was permitted to those in Israel who were uncircumcised of heart. They were circumcised in the flesh but not in heart; they were backslidden. That which was permitted for the uncircumcised in heart in Israel should not serve as a rule for those in whom the love of God has operated through the Holy Spirit.

I want you to see that as far as God's principles are concerned, there is no provision for divorce. He did, however, give permission for divorce to the hardhearted, uncircumcised at heart in Israel, but not to the fundamental, Bible-believing, spiritual Christian. The latter is not to take what God permitted because of a rule to His nation for the Church, which is governed by the law of Christ (which operates in us by the Holy Spirit) and not by the permissive law of Moses.

Does Christ subscribe to the original principle of God, by which there is only marriage and no divorce, or does He re-establish the permissive law under Moses? The Pharisees asked: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" And their reason was they "came to him, tempting him" (Matt. 19:3). What did Jesus answer? "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh? What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt 19:4-6).

Jesus restated God's original principle in answer to the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? The second question, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (Matt.19:7), He answered by saying, "Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of your hearts." God permitted this because of the hardness of those who were uncircumcised in heart. Thus we realize that permission by Moses was given, but for only one reason. Moreover he "suffered," that is he permitted divorce, but did not command it. Nowhere do we read that God endorsed it. God could not be God and change His standards or principles.

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 we find the complete statement of the case where Moses permitted a man to have a divorce, and the conditions under which he permitted it. The passage reads: "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 the house. [What the "uncleanness" is we are not told.] And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord; and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance." The only reason for allowing the bill of divorcement at all was the hardness of the Israelites' hearts. There was no other reason.

Now, if the husband found that his wife had been immoral before their marriage, that is, if she had committed the sin of fornication, he could return her to her father with a divorcement paper. But in this case the result was death if the accusation was substantiated. We read in Deuteronomy 22:13,14: "If a man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid [virgin]." Verses 15-19 tell how this charge was to be put to the test and what the punishment was to be given the man if the charge were false. Then the record continues: "But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you" (vv.20,21).

This is the commandment concerning the law of divorcement in the Old Testament. Some people want a part of it, but they do not want all of it. Is this so that they might gratify their flesh? In this day of increasing immorality Christians should read this chapter to see how God abhors sexual sins.

In Deuteronomy 22:22 it is said that if a man or his wife had illicit relations with another person after marriage, the guilty ones were to be stoned to death-not divorced. Through Moses God permitted divorce for the sin (called fornication) before marriage but the woman was to die for her sin. But if the sin (called adultery) was committed after marriage, both guilty persons were condemned to death.

ADULTERY AND FORNICATION

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus said, quoting the law not endorsing it: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery." Let us analyze the words "fornication" and "adultery" as they are used in the Scriptures. Do they have the same meaning? A study of these words reveals the following: Adultery refers only to the immoral act after marriage; fornication refers primarily to the act before marriage, with a secondary meaning of adultery. We shall examine a few passages of Scripture to show how God used the word in other places in the Old Testament and also in the New Testament.

In Hosea 4:13 we find both words used. "Therefore your daughters [unmarried ones] shall commit whoredom [play the harlot-fornication], and your spouses [married ones] shall commit adultery." The first of the two words is used in I Corinthians 7. Paul was speaking to unmarried persons when he said, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (I Cor. 7:2). In John 8:41 the Pharisees, in speaking to Jesus, said, "We be not born of fornication." They were mocking at what is precious to us-namely, the virgin birth of Jesus-indirectly claiming that His mother had committed fornication and Jesus was her bastard son. They used the word "fornication" to refer to an act of sin before marriage.

Both words are used alongside each other in such a passage as Galatians 5:19: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest...Adultery, fornication..." From this we conclude that Paul was referring to two phases of the sin in this passage.

In popular usage the word "fornication" covers both cases. The scriptural usage, however, is different; and it was the scriptural method that Jesus followed in His discussion. Even though someone might be contentious about the usage of these two words, the principle is so clearly stated that no one can successfully argue about it.

The Israelites were permitted divorce in case the sin of fornication had been committed before the marriage because of the hardness of their hearts. The sin committed after marriage, however, was called adultery. In either case the punishment was death.

This conclusion may sound a bit severe. To all who hide behind the Old Testament law we must say that adultery does not give license for divorce; on the contrary, it condemns the guilty party to death by stoning.

If we are going to follow the first aspect of the (permissive) law of divorce, then we are obligated to follow the second aspect of it also. This is inescapable. For instance, Galatians 3:10 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law." We read in James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of it all." So if we put ourselves under the law, we are obligated to keep all of it. If a person wants to get a divorce on the basis of the permissive law, then he or she is under the law to keep all of it. If you want to see the severity of this law in operation, I suggest you turn to Ezra and read the 9th and 10th chapters.

Divorce itself was permitted in the case of fornication as we explained above, but the law is of none effect now because we are living under grace. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Chapter Four

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (continued.)

A brief review of what the Bible teaches on divorce will provide a fit introduction to other matters directly related to it. The Lord Jesus made it clear in Matthew 19:7,8 that Moses permitted divorce only because of the hardness of men's hearts. Divorce was allowed or tolerated or permitted but never endorsed as part of God's plan for marriage.

In the King James Version we are told that when a man had taken a wife and 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." Divorce, then, was not a God-endorsed statute added to the original principle concerning marriage. It was a permissive regulation designed to help check a vicious practice common in pagan nations and which could have destroyed family life in Israel had it been allowed to go unhindered.

This was the background for the regulations concerning divorce in Deuteronomy 24. Should we in whom the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit regulate our married lives on such a basis? If we try to hide behind this Mosaic permission, we appeal to a situation incompatible with our relationship to God. It looks as though some are trying to see how far they can stretch the longsuffering of God in this matter.

When the Pharisee tried to trip up the Saviour with regard to the subject of divorce, He reminded His critics of the original principle laid down in the beginning with regard to marriage. He referred them to the second chapter of Genesis, reminding them that a husband and wife were one flesh and whom God had joined no man was to put asunder. In actuality, the Lord Jesus reminded the Pharisees of the principles He Himself had laid down when the human race began. Here is what Colossians 1:15-19 says about Him: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."

Our Lord could not have been God had He bowed to the degrading standards concerning marriage fallen man had substituted for God's standards.

In discussing what Moses had written concerning divorce, the Lord Jesus used the word "fornication" rather than the word "adultery." This, as we have seen, was the sin of immorality committed before marriage and was sufficient grounds for the husband to return the wife to her father. The law stipulated, however, that if the charge against the woman was sustained after examination, then she was to be put to death. A man and woman guilty of adultery, which is illicit relations after marriage, were likewise to be put to death. Popular usage of the word "fornication" includes both meanings today. Scripture usage is as we have previously indicated and is the reason why the Lord Jesus used the word "fornication."

We can take our choice. We can fit ourselves into the original purpose of God as laid down in the Book of Genesis or we can go the hardness-of heart route, the way apparently preferred by most of the Pharisees. But if we follow this latter road, we will suffer the consequences as Israel had to suffer them.

Israel's divorce laws had degenerated a great deal between the time of Moses and Christ. The legal authorities began to allow divorce for almost any excuse, and the penalty for the sin of adultery was practically abolished. The majority of people in Israel paid little attention to Moses' regulations so that a man was able to divorce his wife for almost any cause. Israel became as "modern" as we are today.

This is the background for the questions asked of Jesus by the Pharisees. And just how far afield some of them had gone in this respect is indicated by one of the questions; "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt. 19:3). The implication is that the marriage bond was held lightly and divorce could be obtained for a great variety of reasons. Our Lord's answer was to take these men back to what was "in the beginning."

Matthew 19 is not the only passage in the Gospels where our Savior dealt with the subject of divorce. We read in Mark 10:2 how the Pharisees came to Jesus testing Him on this subject, and this is the form of their question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" This lays the emphasis on the question of divorce itself. And this our Saviour answered as subsequent verses in Mark make clear. Our Lord answered their question by asking them what Moses had instructed on the matter. When they answered that Moses had allowed or permitted a bill of divorcement under certain conditions, our Saviour answered them that it was for the hardness of their hearts that Moses made this concession. Then the Lord pointed out that from "the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:5-9).

Included in this is a remarkable statement by our Lord which is so often overlooked by Bible students in our day. Instead of repeating the permissive law under Moses, the Lord Jesus restated the original principle and gave it added force by the emphatic statement: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

According to verse 10 in this section in Mark the conversation with the Pharisees had taken place out of doors. Following that, He and His disciples had entered the house and they asked Him again concerning divorce. He said to them, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (vv.11,12).

This was all that Jesus said. He gave neither His disciples nor the Pharisees permission for divorce. He reiterated the foundation principle as it was given in the beginning without amending it or adding to it.

THE PRINCIPLES RESTATED

This was not a new method which Jesus used. On several occasions, according to the gospel records, the Lord used the phrase: "You have heard that it was said," referring to something that was permitted under the Law because of the hardness of men's hearts. Then He would add, "in the beginning it was not so." In that way He restated the principle as it was laid down in the beginning. This was done especially for His disciples because they were the ones who were to lay the foundation for the Church. He correctly instructed them in these various essential matters.

According to Matthew's account, when the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus about divorce, the question was not worded as in Mark 10. There was enough difference so that the answer had to be different also. In Matthew 19:3 we learn that the Pharisees came to Him tempting Him and the question was, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" As we have pointed out, the laws concerning divorce had so degenerated in Israel that divorce was granted for almost any excuse. At first, our Lord did not comment on the words "for every cause" but restated the original principle of marriage and added a strong injunction: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (vv. 4-6).

Then it was that the Pharisees came up with their counter question: "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (v.7). It is important that we consider every word of His answer. "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives [but before He completes the answer to their question, He repeats His injunction] : but from the beginning it was not so" (v.8).

Then in verse 9 Jesus answers the original question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" In replying to that He restated what Moses said; "And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Moses permission was not an endorsement of divorce. And in His reply our Saviour did not endorse divorce but merely repeated what Moses had said.

The question in Matthew 19 went beyond the subject of the legality of divorce itself and brought up the subject of reasons for divorce. Our Lord's answer was designed to show that if these men were going to lean on Moses for their standards on marriage, then they should consider all that Moses had said which included the penalties of a broken law. They knew well what the Old Testament taught concerning the sin of fornication.

METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

At this point I wish to make two very important statements with reference to Bible interpretation. First, a true and faithful Bible student will search the Scriptures to arrive at a conclusive answer as to the fundamental principle of any difficulties or seeming contradictions to this principle, he will seek to understand them in the light of the basic principle. This method has not been followed by many of our Bible students when it comes to the question of divorce; on the other hand, the two seemingly difficult or contradictory passages in Matthew (which refer to divorce) are accepted by many as the basic principle, and all of the other teachings on the subject are disregarded. This is dishonest and is bad Bible study; therefore, it is sinful and should never be accepted by Bible students.

Second, fundamental, Bible-believing students recognize that in the dispensation of grace we are not under the Law but that the Law was from Moses unto Christ (Gal. 3:16-22), and that "through the law" we are "dead to the law" (Gal. 2:19). Yet many of the same Bible students who recognize that we are no more under the Law but under grace turn to the permissive Law of Moses with reference to divorce, and in their shortsightedness they accept it as the basic principle with reference to marriage and divorce. They completely ignore the fact that we are not under the law but under the principles of grace. This is not right. We read in Galatians 3:12,13: "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." We are not freed from the law to be lawless but to give the "law of Christ" opportunity to operate in us. This is clear from I Corinthians 9:21: "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law."

The basic principles of marriage and divorce under the period of grace are clearly given in the beginning and restated in such passages as Mark 10:4-12, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2,3, I Corinthians 7:39 and Matthew 19:3-12.

When the Lord Jesus restated what Moses said concerning divorce, He did not give His consent to it but simply answered the questions of the Pharisees. God has not changed and cannot change and still be God.

On the subject of the unchangeableness or immutability of God the following paragraphs from a book by the late Dr. A. W. Tozer have been of great help to me:

"In this world where men forget us, change their attitude toward us as their private interests dictate, and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, is it not a source of wondrous strength to know that the God with whom we have to do changes not? That His attitude toward us now is the same as it was in eternity past and will be in eternity to come?"

"God never changes moods or cools off in His affections or loses enthusiasm. His attitude toward sin is now the same as it was when He drove out the sinful man from the eastward garden, and His attitude toward the sinner the same as when He stretched forth His hands and cried, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"God will not compromise and He need not be coaxed. He cannot be persuaded to alter His Word nor talked into answering selfish prayer. In all our efforts to find God, to please Him, to commune with Him, we should remember that all change must be on our part. "I am the Lord, I change not." We have but to meet His clearly stated terms, bring our lives into accord with His revealed will, and His infinite power will become instantly operative toward us in the manner set forth through the gospel in the Scriptures of truth."

In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Dr. Tozer wrote: "Similarly, His immutability presupposes His faithfulness. If He is unchanging, it follows that He could not be unfaithful, since that would require Him to change. Any failure within the divine character would argue imperfection; and since God is perfect, it could not occur.

All of God's acts are consistent with all of His attributes."

"God, being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and must remain faithful. Men become unfaithful out of desire, fear, weakness, loss of interest, or because of some strong influence from without. Obviously none of these forces can affect God in any way."

So we would emphasize that since God is unchangeable He will not change with reference to the principle of marriage and divorce. Divorce is as much a sin today as when it was first introduced by men. What was permitted to the uncircumcised of heart in Israel should never become the rule of the child of God who lives under the law of Christ which is the law of love. The law of Christ is "Christ in us" living His life in and through us.

ADDITIONAL NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Throughout the Epistles we are told that there is no provision for divorce. Let us examine two or three of these passages In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, for instance, he wrote: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth [This wording is not found in the Mosaic Law so must logically refer to the original law of marriage given in Genesis 2:24.] ; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. 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 [original law of marriage] ; so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man" (Rom. 7:2,3). How can we ignore this clear declaration?

The Holy Spirit carried this principle into I Corinthians 7, the passage which we have been studying. In verse 39 we find that "the wife is bound by the law [original law of marriage] 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." This teaching is found throughout the rest of the New Testament.

I say again that the only place in the New Testament in which the permissive divorce law was mentioned was the time when Jesus restated Moses' law in speaking to the hardened Pharisees. But even there Jesus quickly explained that in the beginning it was not so and that what God had joined together, man should not put asunder.

SEPARATION

How shall we interpret chapter 7 of I Corinthians? Does God not permit separation there? I do not see anything about divorce for the Christian in the seventh chapter. There is something about separation (by the unbeliever) in verses 12 and 13, as was mentioned before. It is made very clear that the believer should not leave the unbeliever. But if the unbeliever wishes to depart, the believer should let him or her go. In that case the believer is not under bondage or obligation to deny his or her faith in order to avoid having a broken marriage. In other words who wants to leave you, you do not have to deny your faith in order to remain with that one.

In verses 10 and 11 Paul advises the wife not to depart from her husband; but if she departs (Alford defines this word as "be separated" and followed by formal divorce or otherwise) she should not marry again. (Again, according to Alford, the actual sin of remarriage must not be committed but the breach healed as soon as possible.) These in I Corinthians 7 are God's words, and they settle the questions that are before us. There is no allowance whatsoever for divorce or remarriage in God's planning and arrangements for the Christian. Only during a period of 1500 years, when the hearts of the people of Israel were hardened, and the people were being tested, did God suffer this outrage against His holy principles of marriage.

Chapter Five

THE BINDING MARRIAGE

Should a person who has been married, divorced, and married again and then comes into the knowledge of God's truth concerning divorce (or if previously unsaved comes into salvation), leave his or her present mate and live alone or be reconciled to the first mate? I believe that the divorcing of the present mate would just add another sin, and it cannot undo the wrong that has already been done. There seems to be no direct Bible statements on this subject, but there are several passages of Scripture that indicate such persons should remain in the same marriage relationships they were in when the Lord found them.

This would also indicate that God will forgive the past and consider the present marriage tie as the binding one. It must be remembered, however, that Christians who know to do right but think they can presume against God and go into sin, will have to deal with God on the basis of their presumptuous sin.

We learn in I Corinthians 7:17,20,24 that a person is to remain in the condition of life in which the Lord found him. This would apply first to the situation of a mixed marriage. For example, verse 17 says, "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk." The word "but" indicates what is said here connects with something that has gone before. The context has been dealing with mixed marriages, so what is said in verse 17 is a continuation of that same general subject. In verse 20 the matter is stated in the following words: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." Then follows several illustrations: "Art thou called being a servant [a slave]? care not for it." Then in verse 24 the matter is summed up in these words: "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

The Apostle warns that a believer is not to enter into a mixed marriage as a believer. On the other hand, when he is involved in such a marriage and is found by God in it, he is not to make the mixed marriage a ground for separation. He is to seek to preserve the marriage. The Lord illustrates this principle by referring to the subjects of circumcision and slavery. Both were matters of great concern and significance in that day. They indicate that being a Christian did not free one from certain responsibilities in society. If a person was circumcised he was not to seek to have the mark removed. And if he were not circumcised, he was not to seek circumcision. If he were a slave, he was to remain such unless freedom were offered him.

This principle applied also to marriage and divorce. If a person were found by God when that person was involved in a mixed marriage, or divorced and remarried then the marriage was to stand. This would be true in the case of a backslider or in the case of an unbeliever when found by God. It is apparent that God expects the past to be put under the blood and that He Himself will consider the present marriage to be the legal one. It should be understood, of course, that the sins of the past must be thoroughly judged and that there may be, and very likely will be, certain reaping in the flesh.

Where there has been a marriage and divorce and that remarriage consummated, one will have to deal with God with respect to his own situation based on the above orders given for mixed marriages. God wants men and women to be saved and to live by His mercy and grace.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

We need not despair when we properly deal with sins of the kind that have occupied our attention in these chapters. There is a remedy, and we learn about it in the first chapter of I John: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (v. 7). Then in the ninth verse we learn that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

David is an example of what a man will do when he gets away from God, and how gracious God is to a man whose heart is broken before Him. David was first guilty of committing adultery, then murder to hide the adultery. He was also guilty of taking another man's wife when he had his own.

God was very much displeased with what David did and made it clear that he would reap what he had sown.

David's reaping was three-fold. He first of all reaped in that the sword did not depart from him and his house as long as he lived. The remainder of his reign was marked by war. In the second place disgrace was brought upon his family through the rebellion and immorality of Absalom. The third reaping was that of death. The child born as a result of David's sin died.

When David was confronted with his sin by Nathan the prophet, the king confessed: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan replied by saying, "And the Lord hath put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die." This is in line with what we read in I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How do we confess our sin and how do we repent of it? David's experience will provide an answer, but first let us see exactly what took place at this time in David's life. He had a right to expect God to strike him dead or to be stoned to death by the Israelites, for this was the penalty for the broken law of adultery. David, however, had confessed his sin and God had put it away.

The consequences of that sin were not all removed, however. Through David did not die, his child did. A man reaps what he sows in one way or another. Yet in this we see how God's mercy is greater than His wrath for He spared the sinner, in this case, David, when he truly repented.

God's mercy and grace were extended to David in another way. Though his first child by Bathsheba died, the second child Solomon, later became king. When God forgave David his sin, God cleansed him and set aside the serious consequences because David had come clean with him. God does not tolerate sin but He does forgive and restore the sinner to complete fellowship when the sinner's repentance is genuine. When God forgives a sin, it is thoroughly forgiven.

In the New Testament we see how God's mercy was illustrated in the case of the fallen woman. She was caught in the very act of sin and brought before Jesus by the Pharisees. But our Lord forgave her because she humbled herself and confessed her sin. He sent her home commanding her to forsake her sin once and for all (John 8).

Relating these principles of confession and forgiveness to the subject of divorce, the question is often asked, "When a person has been divorced and married again, is he not continuing in sin by living with his present mate?" Let us see how this incident in David's life illustrates the command given in I Corinthians 7.

God expects the remarried divorced person to remain married to his or her present mate. Separation from the last marriage partner would only cause more grief and would not remove the former sin.

According to I Corinthians 7:20 believers are to remain in the condition in which they were when the light came to them. Applying this principle to David would mean that he was obligated to remain a husband to Bathsheba. In His mercy God blots out the past and recognizes the present marriage as the legal one. This is true, however, only after there has been true repentance and confession and a broken heart. This David saw when he said in Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." This is the Psalm in which David poured out his heart in true repentance and confession for his great sin.

God did not overlook or ignore sin then nor will He now. If we should think for a moment that it would be all right to go ahead and sin because God will forgive us, we commit the sin of presumption; and it is well to remember in this connection that there is a sin unto death.

God calls for a judgement of sin in our lives by us. Let us turn to Psalm 51 and note David's true heart repentance. David judged his sin before God when he said, "Have mercy upon me O God." He did not call for justice but for mercy saying, "According to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." David saw his sin to be a terrible sin and judged himself before God saying, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." No wonder he wanted to be washed thoroughly, that is, cleansed completely.

Sometimes a housewife will take her laundry out of the washing machine and find it still soiled, so she puts it back a second time or even a third time until it is spotless. David expressed a similar desire before God. He was crushed by his terrible sin and said in effect: "You have a right to judge me. You have a right to slay me. But I acknowledge my sin. Wash me and cleanse me. I was shapen in sin and in iniquity did my mother conceive me. He did not say these things as an excuse. This was real contrition on his part. It is the desire of God that His people should have an open heart and enough honesty and frankness to admit their sin. It does not impress God when we try to excuse ourselves, blaming our sins to circumstances or the Devil. It is when we willingly admit our sin that God can cleanse us.

We read in Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." David said in Psalm 51: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The inward washing by the blood of Jesus Christ for salvation and the outward cleansing by the Word of God for fellowship are both included in this particular verse. So it was after his confession and repentance that David sought restoration. He had been out of fellowship with God and could not be used by God until he was restored in heart.

David pleaded that God would restore to him the joy of his salvation. He was very graphic in his language, saying, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." He was not satisfied with mere forgiveness and cleansing but pleaded for restoration also.

He cried, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." This is the cry of a man living during the Old Testament times when the Spirit of God could be taken away. In the New Testament we learn that the Holy Spirit will abide with the New Testament believer forever. However, where sin is in the life, unless we come to the Lord for thorough cleansing, the Holy Spirit will not be able to use us. He may find it necessary to put us on the shelf, setting us aside from any effective service. The result in that case would be exactly the same as in the Old Testament.

If we are willing to pray that God will not cast us away but restore to us the joy of salvation and uphold us by His free Spirit, God will put us back into the former place of fellowship. Once sin has been properly judged and confessed, we must accept His forgiveness and cleansing with thanksgiving.

If we have thoroughly judged ourselves before God and confessed our sins to Him, we can claim His grace and accept by faith His complete forgiveness. This is clearly stated for us in I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is

faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God will remember these things no more against us. We must neither continue to brood over them nor take them lightly. Satan will try to keep casting them back into our faces. He will accuse us in our conscience, hoping to get us to believe that we are past God's ability to be ever used again. But his efforts will fail if we freely accept God's forgiveness.

David undoubtedly remembered his terrible sin every time he went back to the housetop. But this would serve to keep him humble before God as he recognized how God's great mercy had ended in his forgiveness and restoration. Nowhere do we find where he continued to brood over the forgiven past. He humbly and joyfully accepted God's forgiveness and rejoiced in God's continuing grace.

David clearly saw what God wanted. As a repentant sinner David said, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." God did not despise David's humility. His servant went down in history as a man after the heart of God. This was not due to his never sinning but because, when he did sin, he judged his sin thoroughly before God and by faith accepted the mercies of Almighty God.

I think of a Christian worker who came to me apparently for help. Actually, he was separated from his wife and wanted to marry another woman. He talked with me for hours trying to find a loophole that would excuse his marrying this other woman. He was very presumptuous in thinking God would overlook this wrong.

I think of another man who sinned and came to talk to me about it. It took him an hour and a half to tell me the story because his heart was so broken before the Lord. His sin was a public sin, so when he confessed it, it took half an hour to tell what was on his heart because he was so broken before God. That man in walking before God today in the light of God's grace. When we acknowledge our sin before God and claim His forgiveness by faith we will be restored to His fellowship.

But that is not all. David saw further truth here: "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness, O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

If you who read this are out of fellowship with God let me challenge you to return to Him this very day. Read Psalm 51. Make it your prayer until you have thoroughly confessed your sin and have judged it before God; and then accept His forgiveness according to I John 1:9. Be sure to thank God for His bountiful mercies. Claim victory by faith. Stop brooding over the past. Rejoice in His fulness of love.

WARNINGS

The warnings which follow are for our benefit. The first one is found in Galatians 5:13 and reminds us that God's promised mercy is no license to sin. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

The second warning comes from David's experience and has to do with presumptuous sin. God is merciful and longsuffering we'll go ahead in sin anyway. Perhaps you who read this are wanting to go ahead and marry a divorced person, or will go ahead and divorce the wife or husband with whom you are now living. David knew the consequences of this kind of thinking and desiring and prayed in Psalm 19:13: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." It is a great transgression to go against God's known will, deliberately sinning after we have known the truth. I tremble for people who presume upon God's grace in this matter.

In Romans 6:12,14 we are distinctly exhorted not to let sin reign in our bodies. God has made ample provision for us so that there need be no slavery on our part to sin. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 119:133: "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

Still a third warning is this that when a Christian sins deliberately and continually after he has a knowledge of the truth, God's judgment can be very severe. There is such a thing as a sin unto death. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.

LIMITED SERVICE

There is still a fourth warning given in a number of the Pauline Epistles. A man's married status can limit his service for the Lord. In writing to Timothy Paul stated: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desire a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (I Tim. 3:1-5).

To Titus Paul said, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:5-9). A bishop is an overseer or elder; in today's language these

possibly mean the pastor of a church. He must be a man who believes in having only one wife and that marriage in for as long as both partners live.

The same standards are given in the New Testament for deacons. "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 3:12,13). This does not mean that God will not use those who have become involved in divorce and remarriage, but it does limit their sphere of leadership.

If the message in this book apply to your life then let me ask you to read prayerfully Psalms 51 and 32. The first shows how David accepted God's forgiveness and the second expresses his joy in God's wonderful mercy.