

# HEAD ON A PLATTER

A Generation's Rude Awakening To The Forgotten Sin Of  
Divorce and Remarriage

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# Acknowledgements

There are several people I would like to take the time to thank in relation to the writing of this book. First of all I would like to thank my good friend Doug Van Meter, who challenged me some twelve years ago in South Africa to study this topic out in the Word of God. Secondly, I am indebted to several friends of mine in the ministry who have provided me with an invaluable source of input and feedback over the years. These countless number of discussions have proved to be most beneficial for me personally, as I have prayerfully attempted to sort through this extremely perplexing subject.

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# FOREWORD

It was in January of 1997 that I prayerfully committed something to the Lord. That “something” has forever changed my life and ministry. At that time my wife, five children and I were serving on the mission field of South Africa, and loving every minute of it! We had been there a little under three years representing and being supported by a large Independent Baptist Church in the States. Six months previously, this sending church of ours had been through a tremendous ordeal involving one of its key pastors. Through his own personal sin, as well as a decade or more of wreckless counsel (and lack thereof) numerous marriages began falling apart. As reports of these situations made their way to us nearly halfway around the globe, our hearts grew sore. I felt a burden being placed upon me by the Lord to do something about it...but what could I do 10,000 miles away? It was at this point that I told the Lord, and no one else besides my wife, that if He wanted me to go back to the States and have a Josiah-styled ministry of cleaning up the mess in that church, I would go. Exactly one year later we received from the Senior pastor of our home church an invitation to return and join the pastoral staff. Then after selling nearly everything we owned, we moved back to this country, and began a phase of ministry that I could never have anticipated.

The damage that had been done in so many of the marriages, not to mention years of inaction that allowed sinful practices to take deep root, made it difficult to know where to begin. I determined to draw a line in the sand and deal with the issue of divorce in the lives of those who had not yet experienced its painful defeat. I taught and counseled those considering marriage to count the cost before they tied the knot. I admonished those who were presently married to determine to never be the ones guilty of destroying their marriages, and warned them of the consequences if they did. This approach worked for a while and was actually welcomed by many as a much-needed emphasis in the church. However, before too long the inevitable backlash began. Many of those who had been divorced and/or remarried became irritated with the implications of my teaching in relation to their particular set of circumstances. “What are you trying to say about me?” This was the question frequently posed to me by some divorced individual in the church who had caught wind of my counsel. To this question I would always reply, “I’m not talking about you and your situation. I’m trying to help those who are approaching marriage, or those

who are still in their first marriage, to understand the need to make their commitment to each other work.” As much as I tried to convince them and myself that this message was not directed toward them, it became more and more evident that the implications were indeed inseparable. After several years and dozens of harsh encounters with divorced people, I finally realized my days in that church were limited. And what was once considered a breath of fresh air had become an unwelcome blast of stench to the majority.

Almost simultaneously with that time in my ministry I discovered a new hero in the Bible. He was a man who took on this same issue of divorce and remarriage in his day, and it not only affected his ministry, but it cost him his life as well! It is in remembrance of his conviction and courage that this book is so entitled. And it is my prayer for the rest of us today who proclaim the Word of God to be our ultimate source of authority, to take a stand within our churches against the most pressing and controversial issue of our day... **DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE.**

# INTRODUCTION

The first recorded sermon of John the Baptist can be easily summarized as follows, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” (*Matthew 3:2*) These bold words came blasting forth only to be met with incredible resistance from the religious crowd of John’s day. However, as convicting and pointed as this message was, it did not come close to the level of intensity that was directed toward the audience of the Baptizer’s last recorded sermon. The general cry for repentance was tailored and pointed toward a single, particular person living in a single, particular sin. “*It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.*” (*Mark 6:18*) This message heralded a clear message through the palace of Herod the tetrarch, and it was received as it was intended. There were no “Amens” or “Thank you Brother John for that great message today.” Instead, John was cast straight into prison and remained there until an extremely angry and divorced woman decided his fate. She understood exactly what this message implied and how it related to her current marriage with Herod: **THEY WERE LIVING IN FORNICATION!** And because she had an unwillingness to repent and abandon the unlawful relationship, she took out her rage on the messenger of God. “*But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. **And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.*** (*Matthew 14:6-11*)

As short as it was, the ministry of John the Baptist left a lasting impression upon future generations, reminding us of the price that sometimes has to be paid for taking a stand against sin. The intent of this book is to awaken our current generation to the level of deprivation to which we have fallen in the doctrine, counsel, and practices of divorce and remarriage. But for such an awakening to take place, men of God will be required to adhere themselves to the truth in spite of all costs. Let it likewise be understood that the price to be paid will be high. In other words, **MORE HEADS ARE BOUND TO ROLL!**

Many people reading this book will very likely come across statements that totally contradict what they have always believed and taught on this highly controversial subject. Therefore, a simple word to the wise

would undoubtedly be in order right about now. One should probably make an effort to prayerfully listen to everything that the Spirit of God is saying before he or she draws any final conclusions. Or to put it in the words of Solomon: *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. (Proverbs 18:13)*

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## Chapter 1

# Straining at Gnats and Swallowing Camels

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which **strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.***  
*Matthew 23:23-24*

During the first century in the land of Israel, there existed a group of Jewish leaders who constantly found themselves subjected to scrutiny by the Lord Jesus Christ. Representing a small, but very vocal and outspoken portion of society, they were the conservatives of that era. Jesus pointed out to the people of that day that this group said many things right, but they had a problem of action. And as a result, much of their behavior was in direct opposition to the very Word of God they claimed to believe and uphold.

The Scribes and Pharisees often emphasized what looked good on the outside and what was ACCEPTABLE in societal standards. They failed to deal with the real issues in people's lives and to challenge their followers to be transformed in mind and molded in heart. Consequently they managed to lead their followers down a dangerous path of false security. In a way that only our Savior could say, He used His words in Matthew 23 to paint a picture in our minds that is worth over 1000 words. For years they had consistently strained at tiny gnats while developing an insatiable habit of swallowing single-humped, cud-chewing, hair-covered, slobbering camels!

There are many divisive issues bombarding Bible-believing Christianity today, but there are none as complex and controversial as the topic of divorce and remarriage. And despite the serious implications of Scripture in relation to this crisis, most of the leaders within our churches have already made the decision to swallow this particular camel whole! In our world today the commonly accepted belief is that divorce is the standard way out of what probably was just not MEANT TO BE. Hence, Christians often see divorce as a provisional "way of escape" that they might be able to bear their own particular set of circumstances. (By the way, to misapply I Corinthians 10:13 toward divorce is a gross misconstruing of Scripture.

This verse means in times that we are tempted to do wrong, God will always supply the means by which we can do right.)

For comfort's sake, people often make their stand on this issue at the extreme ends of possibility. Some will say, "Everyone who is divorced and remarried is in sin." Now indeed, it is true that MANY divorced and remarried people are guilty of sin, but it is absolutely untrue to universally decree that charge upon all. This is easy to understand on other Biblical issues. "*Thou shalt not kill,*" the Bible says. But under the command of war or under the circumstance of self-defense we do not charge another Christian of breaking that commandment. We do not dare accuse God of sin for issuing commands contrary to that law. Nor can we ignore the many times God's Old Testament law required the life of a person guilty of some heinous sin. (Lev. 20:2; 24:14; Deut. 21:21; 22:24; etc.) We understand that in SOME situations, at SOME times, and because of a FEW unusual circumstances it is possible to "kill" without being guilty of sin. Cannot the same principle then be applied to the doctrine of divorce and remarriage?

Similar to a high school pep rally, one person begins by yelling, "EVERYONE who is divorced and remarried has fallen into sin." This causes the other side to enthusiastically echo back, "Divorce and remarriage is acceptable and forgivable for EVERY REASON and in EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE." Now most people who are standing on this side do not realize or admit to saying this. And definitely people who camp dangerously close to these borders do not recognize how far they have slid toward the complete acceptance of this position. Their blindness is caused by personal circumstance, emotional relationships... and a steady diet of camels! Here is an example of how confused most people are.

A woman believes divorce is wrong. However, she believes divorce is forgivable and sometimes even needed to rescue individuals from being swallowed by misfortune and uncontrollable circumstances. She believes that divorce can be granted and is allowed by God for certain reasons. And although she knows there is somewhat of a stigma attached with one being divorced, she cannot help but notice the growing number of divorced men and women there within her church.

She has been married for two years. The glamorous luster of her spouse has quickly faded because he has learned to love a six-pack of beer and a good poker game seemingly more than her. She often hears him sneaking back into bed in the middle of the night after being out late with the boys. In his waking hours, he has lost hundreds of dollars that they did not have gambling in Casinos. He does not take care of many of his responsibilities at home, nor does he attend to her personal needs. In her

mind, all he has managed to do is successfully turn marital BLISS into a marital BLISTER of catastrophic proportions.

In her misery, she begins seeking some relief and inevitably turns her mind to the socially acceptable means of divorce. EVERYONE she talks to rightfully sees her as the victim. No one can see the situation getting any better, and all realize that for her to stay in the marriage is to sign up for a life of misery, neglect, and devastation. “Surely God does not intend for me to live this way!” becomes the out-crying plea of her heart.

The internal pressure continues as his actions negatively progress. He has lost several jobs and has failed in every responsibility within the home. Hundreds of gambling dollars have multiplied to several thousand as he utilizes numerous credit cards in his gaming endeavors. She routinely comes home to a stench-filled atmosphere, and the physical part of their relationship is now all but gone.

External pressures mount up as counselors and friends begin to empathize with her misery. They continually advise her that no one should have to live that way. Everyone supports her because of the injustice of how he treats her. “When are you going to leave him and get on with your life,” is the daily question she hears. It is also the moment by moment question she finds herself pondering.

She goes more faithfully to church now even though she is unaccompanied by her spouse. She is after all, a woman of faith. She is seeking direction from the pulpit. She wants to hear from the man who joined them at the altar with a public vow of “For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer...” She wants to find God’s desire and stay centered in His will for her life.

She is thankful she belongs to a church that still preaches the Bible. Other “liberal” churches allow anything for any reason. She knows a lack of conviction to stand firmly on Biblical issues slowly leads to doctrinal corruption. She has heard that preached a thousand times before. She has often been encouraged by the hard, sin-attacking preaching that barrels forth from the pulpit. Resounding “Amen’s” and a hearty “Preach that!” would follow every line-drawing statement about the need for believers to be separated from the sinful practices of the world. She comfortably sits along side many others Sunday after Sunday knowing her life falls free from all of those things and more. But now, unlike the past, she is involved in a very tangible personal crisis that is robbing her of joy and consuming her happiness. She has heard all the statistics about one out of two marriages ending in divorce. She is sadly aware, like many others, that those statistics are true for people of the world AND for Christians in the church. Her

plight is a realistic situation found throughout her own congregation, and it is shared by at least one of the people she sits next to in the pew. The sermon of the day ends, but nothing is said one way or the other about her private controversy. More gnats have been strained, but the camel of divorce has once again been successfully swallowed.

She seeks personal counsel from her spiritual leader. “Pastor, I know that you know my situation and I’m...” she pauses to hold back her tears and give strength to her voice. She continues, “I’m thinking about divorcing my husband. Is it lawful for me...is it acceptable in God’s eyes for me to put away my husband?” Those statements in the presence of the man of God seemed to relieve her of some pressure, but what will the shepherd say? In some ways she was expecting a sharp rebuke similar to the pulpit blasts against other universally accepted issues of sin. Instead she hears a solemn inquisition into the current status. “Has anything changed in his behavior? Does he still refuse to come in for counseling? Has he shown any signs of repentance or sorrow over what he’s doing?” The questions continued with no accusations placed upon her for lacking faith, losing hope, or failing to trust in what the risen Christ could do. She is allowed to slide one step further down the scale.

The marital union now stands in danger of being dissolved by the one who most supported its inception... her own self. She begins to receive support from different members of the congregation. Tradition silences most everyone in the church from verbally speaking any counsel of forsaking the marriage, but lifestyles always preach a clearer, more audible message. Several couples in her church have recently been divorced. Sure, they were challenged to make it last and even mildly shunned during the process, but almost immediately their sin became labeled a MISTAKE and the mistake label became overlooked. They received no action of church discipline even if they were to blame or anxiously encouraged the papers to be filed. “Divorce is a forgivable sin,” the woman thinks to herself.

Beginning a process of comparison with every Christian situation she can think of, she searches for an excuse she can apply. John is divorced. She could remember a few years ago when John and Samantha sat together in every service. They sung in the choir, they performed many specials, and he even taught different studies. Now, he sits on the piano side and she sits on the organ side. They changed their ministry involvements. He does not sing in the choir so that she can. She goes to the studies that are not taught by him. And neither have the quality of voice that allows them to sing solos instead of duets. But, after all, he had an affair and the divorce happened

before he was ready to repent. Now he has said he was sorry, and their lives are expected to continue individual courses.

There was also Kayla's divorce, Roger and Heather, Kenneth and Trisha, Jim's brother, Rhonda, Mrs. Smith, and most recently Doug and his wife Laura. Most of these people's situations were forgotten over time so that no accurate details could now be acquired. No one seemed to know why; people only knew that each had been personally devastated by the issue of divorce. And tragically each one of these marriages fell apart right before everyone's eyes without a word ever being said from the pulpit one way or the other! Surely her situation could compare.

Her status at home did not change. Life was miserable. Hope faded. All that was once looked upon as a glorious day to see God join man and woman into the miracle and covenant binding union of marriage became lost in an unplanned barrage of misfortune. The man she married was not the husband she was looking for. The process would be painful, but the procedure must be completed for her personal happiness to continue. "God will forgive me for this. He forgives every sin," she continually told herself as she met with the lawyer.

He did not fight what was happening because he knew he was guilty. He lived in misery too. His was caused by the self-inflicted sorrow of constantly surrendering to destructive sin. His conscience never escaped conviction as he watched his wife's life swallowed up in his mistakes. He held onto a glimmer of hope that he could one day change because he had observed her doing so many things right. He never shared these things with her, but the melding of her life with his had silent impact. He had even been restrained from various extreme actions because of her faithfully enduring love, but now...

"God forgive me of this sin," she now tells herself over and over in silent prayer. As many others before her, she has finally come to realize that camels do not cause any permanent indigestion.

## **A NOTE TO SPIRITUAL LEADERS**

Men of God, who are called to preach the whole counsel of God, have the job of preaching the **WHOLE** counsel of God. Why is it people can sit in a congregation for years and listen to literally hundreds of sermons and never hear a man of God clearly proclaim divorce to be wrong? Maybe that means it is not wrong! So why doesn't one ever hear a public proclamation that it is okay to divorce one's spouse? Maybe it is more complicated than that. Maybe there are times when it is acceptable and times when it is not.

So why doesn't anyone ever hear the men of God who are responsible for giving understanding and exhortation of the Scriptures define the issue's boundaries? Why is there so much confusion around this issue?

Surrounding the issue of divorce and remarriage is a cloud of confusion caused by a failure of leaders to communicate CLEAR and PRECISE doctrine. People everywhere are being faced with the possibility of divorce situations affecting their lives. Many who are struggling with this life-changing decision cannot find any consistency or clarity in the counsel they receive. Verses that top the counseling list are often chopped up in their usage or only partially applied. Apparent contradictions are communicated from passage to passage creating an ILLUSION that the Word of God is inconsistent on the issue. The common man honestly seeking answers must eventually surrender the hope of finding any familiar voice to help him through his struggle. WE AS LEADERS HAVE FAILED!

The typical church has lost its purity and spiritual light due to the penetration of the world's darkness. Consistent doctrines and practices for church discipline have been traded for the philosophies of being a church for all people. For years, spiritual leaders have watched the pulse of their churches fade as they dance around the divorce and remarriage subject. Sometimes what is plainly communicated in Scripture is silently ignored because of the over-whelming implications and repercussions attached to any action. We realize the growing numbers of people who will be affected by any attempt to deal with the issue. But since when did that become the determining factor as to what doctrinal stand a church should take? Since when does the multitude of lives already affected by a devastating sin give us license to commit a sin of omission by failing to sound an alarm to detour the destruction of more people's lives? When will we be humble enough to confess our own poor counsel in the past and our own personal mistakes to help others live victoriously in their present marriage unions? When are we going to define our own beliefs strong enough to be capable of presenting them as an authoritative standard to follow in every situation?

The Bible has long stood as the dictionary for Christian morals and practice. It adequately handles every situation and every relationship. Marriage is the first and primary relationship the Bible talks about within the human race. It is the first institution ordained by God. To not guard the purity, sanctity, and holiness of the marriages of our people is a sin on our part and a disservice to the office of a pastor. Congregations need to receive enduring hope and be instructed toward righteousness. They need to be plainly warned about sinful actions that carry life long consequences. They

need to be held accountable to corrective discipline when they fail to heed directive statements of God's Word.

Spiritual leaders often speak of revival. "There is a need for revival in the hearts of God's people," they say in response to the degradation facing modern Christianity. Revival has never happened without an abandonment of sin. God cannot be fully expressed in a vessel that is not broken over sin and submitted to God's directive in revenging oneself of its devastating effects.

IT IS TIME for spiritual leaders to stop straining at gnats and swallowing camels! IT IS TIME for spiritual leaders to abandon their personal desires to be the most well known and the most listened to. IT IS TIME for spiritual leaders to abandon modern philosophies of becoming the next discovered rising star for building a "mega-church". IT IS TIME for churches to be led away from being a church for all people, and be led toward becoming a church of God's people. IT IS TIME for spiritual leaders to do their job no matter what the cost. But the cost will be high. "Amens" and a good hearty "Preach that" can be quickly transformed into an "Off with his head!"

## Chapter 2

# Bound By The Law, But Still Under Grace

*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? 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**. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulterous: but if her husband is dead, she is free from **that law**; so that she is no adulterous, though she be married to another man. 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.*

*(Romans 7:1-4)*

The modern-day New Testament Christian is quick to proclaim his or her realized freedoms from the shackles of Old Testament law. Grace in the eyes of our Lord could not be made any easier to obtain... we must simply hear, believe, and receive the proclamation of the Gospel. It is a “do nothing” truth. Christ has fulfilled every lawful requirement needed to obtain the righteousness of God for us. Our reception of Christ’s righteousness comes through His loving and giving nature to supply what we lack (and what no person can obtain on their own). He has done EVERYTHING the law required while we do NOTHING.

But consider this. How was Christ proven to be the righteousness of God? What was the standard used to measure His performances? What did Christ mean when He said, “*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, **but to fulfil**. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled*” (Matthew 5:17, 18)? Those words meant Jesus Christ performed what the law stated. His obedience to the Word of God as stated in Old Testament principles, is one of Christianity’s proofs that He was who He claimed to be. He was good and He did that which was good. He did that which was good because He obeyed the law.

In no way is the New Testament Christian under the obligation to live under Old Testament regulations for righteousness. Much of what the Old

Testament required was finished and fulfilled by the actions and sacrifice of our Savior. Our righteousness, acceptance by Christ, and supply of grace is in no way determined by our perfected adherence to legalistic standards that were obliterated by Christ's cross. We have become as it were captives of His grace. And this reception of God's grace gives us unquestionable justification and undeniable redemption from sin in spite of all failures. Meager attempts to do what is right on our own have been replaced by trusting in a substituted application of Christ's success. But as we know, the reception of this grace DOES NOT free us from the responsibility of being accountable to God. We are obligated under a love relationship to Jesus Christ to reveal His living power in us through a performance of the things He considers to be right. Grace brings a freedom away from sin's dominion into Christ's control. He gives us liberty to overcome what was impossible before in order to live for His purposes.

Because we know that we are not bound by the law of Moses in order to be saved, Christians scarcely become motivated to make any attempt to familiarize themselves with the awesome truths found within Old Testament portions of Scripture. "That was then and this is now" is the common position we take. But remember, the Old Testament is not to be avoided simply because we are not obligated to fulfill its requirements. Bible truth NEVER contradicts itself. And just because that truth is found in the Old Testament portion of our Bible does not make it bad in any way. Can one really understand the fullness of Hebrews before he has a basic understanding of Leviticus? Who has studied the book of Revelation without being forced to conjointly study the book of Daniel? Old Testament passages only become bad when we abandon the freely given righteousness of Christ in an effort to try to establish our own righteousness through its actions or adherence. The principles of the law are good. Knowing what the law says often yields a deeper understanding of what the New Testament is trying to establish. And understanding this concept is vitally important as it pertains to the subject of marriage and divorce.

NOTHING Jesus Christ ever said or did during His earthly ministry contradicted what was said in the law of Moses. An example of this can be seen in John 8, which records the familiar story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. John shows how Jesus is confronted with a legal presentation of Moses' words. This woman is caught in adultery and should be "legally" stoned according to Deuteronomy 22:23-24: *"If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried*

*not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.*" Note that Christ did not plead for this woman through ignorance of the law. He did not pretend to be blind to the segment of the law referred to from Old Testament Scripture. He did not issue any statements or even allude to the fact that the law should be ignored or overlooked in this matter. On the contrary, He gave an official decree based upon the law's demand for consequence! "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*" The righteousness of the law stated she should be stoned. Christ's words did not negate the law; He simply defined WHO could act in performance of the sentence against her. Furthermore, He then did something that only Christ could do so flawlessly. He used the very law that accused her to release her.

The men all left because they knew they could not rightfully stand as judges or perform in the office of executioner. The woman is left alone with Jesus and His next words state, "*Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?*" As He expressed His agreement with the law, Jesus qualified Himself as the one who could execute it. However, the performance of the law required the presence of two people – the woman AND the man responsible (Deut. 22:24). To perform the law to the letter required them BOTH to be brought out unto the gate of the city and be stoned. (By the way, this may be the real reason why these men left with their tails between their legs. They were all quite possibly guilty of actually committing adultery with her!) There were not any present witnesses to the crime and she no longer faced ANY accusers. His next statement was, "*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*" The matter was LEGALLY thrown out of court based upon the man's failure to appear in court. (Deuteronomy 22:6 further stated the death penalty could not be carried out at the mouth of one witness. Jesus stood alone with the woman.) Jesus spoke three times throughout this crisis and never once contradicted what the Old Testament proclaimed. She received grace and He obeyed the law.

Jesus Christ's words were always intended to define, give greater insight, awaken deeper understanding, or provide an extended revelation of the same truths found previously in Scripture. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount contains a series of "*ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time*" statements followed by a series of "*but I say unto you*" statements. None of these statements negated the current laws accepted in Judaism. He simply gave deeper understanding. Christ directed His listeners to consider the heart attitude behind the action and the spirit of the law behind the letter.

He revealed the inward sin that caused men to fail in their attempt to be outwardly righteous, but the principles remained intact.

The Holy Spirit used Paul in a similar fashion to continue the same process throughout the church-age books. Though clearly the apostle to the Gentiles, he continually utilized his familiarity with the Old Testament law in order to teach his new converts doctrine. And just as the Lord Jesus did in His earthly ministry, Paul consistently re-established Old Testament principles within the foundation of his New Testament teachings.

Take for example, the current passage being considered in Romans 7. Paul assumes the people reading this portion of his letter “*know the law.*” And though the ultimate purpose of this chapter is to declare a person’s need to be dead to the law in order to be saved, one cannot overlook the practical implications. In Romans 7:2 as well as I Corinthians 7:39, Paul states that a woman is BOUND BY THE LAW to her husband as long as he is alive. This truth is found all throughout the Old Testament, but there is not a specific verse that states it this way. He also declares plainly that if a married woman is married to another man while the first husband is alive she SHALL BE CALLED AN ADULTERESS (Romans 7:3). Once again Paul is not quoting Old Testament Scripture, but he is rather summarizing the teaching of the law and the teaching of the Lord Jesus. “*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*” (Matthew 5:31-32) And with these words we see for the first time in the divorce and remarriage issue, the seriousness of the matter from God’s perspective. For according to Scripture, a woman divorced from her husband (due to no apparent fault of her own) finds herself in a continual state of adultery when she remarries while her first husband is still alive. And the EXCEPTION which we will investigate later, only serves to prove the rule! Why is this so? Simple. No woman in history has ever been allowed to have more than one husband at a time LEGALLY in God’s eyes.

We will pick up on this specific issue of the adulterous nature of most remarriages after divorce later on in another chapter. But before we do, it is imperative to broach another controversial subject that is directly related. For what’s good for the goose is not necessarily always good for the gander! Because although it is true that a woman could not have more than one husband at the same time under the law, the adverse is not. What does that mean? The implication is this: a married man could be married to another wife at the same time without God considering it to be an adulterous

relationship. Now before anyone runs off shouting “HERESY”, let us first examine what the Word of God has to say on this subject. Because like it or not, we must come to terms with the Lord’s clear acceptance and tolerance of men in the Bible having more than one wife if we are ever going to understand the New Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage.

In Deuteronomy 21:15-17, we read the following words, “***If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.***” This passage reveals a unique possibility for the husband that is not possible for the wife. With the phrase “*if a man have two wives,*” God is recognizing the possibility of a man having multiple wives.

In the Old Testament, if a married man married an unmarried woman she became his second wife. Whether we like it or not in our modern American mindset, God clearly allowed such men to live in this condition. God never condemned the aspect of multiple wives in the Scriptures. He never once called it a sin. On the contrary, God gave David several wives, and might have allowed him to have a couple more if he asked. *And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.* (2 Samuel 12:7,8)

Because Israel was building a physical kingdom, God allowed men to have more than one wife so that the women could bring forth fruit and fulfill their purpose. In Deuteronomy 7:14 we read the following: *Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle.* He did, however, put a couple of limitations on these relationships. First of all, a man could not marry two women if they were near of kin to each other. *Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son’s daughter, or her daughter’s daughter, to uncover her nakedness; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness. Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time.* (Leviticus 18:17,18) Secondly, a man needed to be able to maintain the

Biblical needs that each wife would require. *If he take him **another wife**; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.* (Exodus 21:10) This passage discusses the responsibilities of a husband in a marriage. Food and raiment are two of the things discussed. He must provide these necessities for his wife. That is the same principle, by the way, we will find assigned in Matthew 6:31 and 1 Timothy 6:8. Those two things should be provided by anyone who is taking care of another. The other necessity considered from this passage is “*her duty of marriage*”. The word ‘duty’ is used in a similar context in Deuteronomy 25:5, 7 referring to the aspect of physical intimacy. (I Corinthians 7:3-5) We see then that the Old Testament husband is responsible for the provisions of the wife, even “*if he take him another wife.*” He could not gain another wife if he was not currently providing for the one(s) he had.

The Bible does warn, however, that there was a danger for a king (or anyone for that matter) to “*multiply wives*” unto himself. *When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. **neither shall he multiply wives to himself**, that his heart turn not away: Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.* (Deuteronomy 17:14-17) The only specific guidelines God offers on the issue of how many extra wives were allowed is that the number fell somewhere between 1 and 1000! *And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.* (1 Kings 11:3)

If someone has never reconciled this truth in Scripture, it sounds almost blasphemous. If one has never given time to the specifics about the multiple wives practice found in the Old Testament, he or she has probably concluded that it was an overlooked sin. However, the Scripture is clear on the fact that the Lord allowed it. He was always very specific about the unlawful marriages of the inhabitants of the land. And He had no problem judging His people for those same abominations! Look at His OPINION in Leviticus 18:24-29, *Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself*

*vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abomination; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you; (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people.* So we can easily assume that if the act of having two wives in itself was an abomination to God, He would have called it just that without making any allowances for it.

New Testament guidelines fail to outright condemn the practice of a man having multiple wives. There is a clear statement that a man with more than one wife was limited in his capacity to serve in the local church. *A bishop then must be blameless, the **husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach... Let the deacons be **the husbands of one wife**, ruling their children and their own houses well.* (1 Timothy 3:2, 12) However, this statement is not based upon the doctrinal reasoning of sin, but rather the practical reasons of focus, time restraints, and capabilities of a man desiring to serve the Lord. As the apostle Paul stated, the Lord clearly wanted Christian men to be able to serve Him without distraction. *“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may **attend upon the Lord without distraction.**”* (1 Corinthians 7:32-35) And apparently in God’s mind, two wives constituted too much of a distraction for any man desiring the office of a bishop or a deacon.

We have a tendency to look down our noses at polygamous societies today because it is unlawful in America. But is it not interesting that in reality that is exactly what we have in the sight of God, due to many of the circumstances created by divorce and remarriage! The only difference is that most of the polygamous marriages in our country are unlawful in the sight of God! Understanding and accepting God’s teaching in the Old Testament in regard to the issue of multiple wives is easier said than done. But realizing this truth will help our understanding a little later on as to why

Jesus said or did not say certain things concerning divorce and remarriage in the gospels. So whether it was one wife or more, the same truth applied to the woman every time... she was **BOUND BY THE LAW** to her husband. And as we will continue to see, even in the dispensation of grace that principle still applies.

## Chapter 3

# Father Knows Best

*But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.*

*I Corinthians 7:36-38*

Much of what goes wrong in our world today is due to what was improperly maintained or totally neglected one time or another in the past. “Nip it in the bud” and “A stitch in time saves nine”, etc. are common expressions we hear all the time that remind us of this universal truth. And when it comes to the crisis in our society in regard to the deterioration of millions of marriages, this principle definitely applies. In the following two chapters of this book (chapters 3 and 4) we are going to follow this train of thought as to understanding the need for NIPPING divorce and remarriage IN THE BUD. And as we have seen in the last chapter, the principles that need to be applied are already firmly established in the law.

Many unmarried people could be spared from the devastating affect of divorce that awaits them if all of the parties involved understood the significance placed upon the relationship between a young lady and her father. The Old Testament has quite a bit to say about a father’s rights and responsibilities toward his daughter BEFORE she ever married. And once again, we need to do some digging in order to discover the mind of God.

### **The Protection of a Virgin’s Honor**

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the God we serve is indeed a holy God who completely abhors sin. And because He is holy, His desire is for the people that claim His name to be holy as well. This was especially true when it came to the sexual purity and integrity of the sons and daughters of the children of Israel. An example of this is found in Deuteronomy 23:17-18, where the Word of God says the following. *“There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of*

*the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the Lord thy God.”* In the Old Testament, it was the responsibility of a father to guard over his daughter’s virginity until the day she would marry. It was his job to know the status of his daughter’s condition in this area well enough to offer proof of his claims if ever challenged. To see this, we note the following passage in Deuteronomy 22:13-19: *If any 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: then shall the **father** of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel’s virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: and the damsel’s **father** shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; and, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter’s virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him; and they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the **father** of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days.*

It was also the goal of such a man to keep his daughter from shaming herself, the family name, the nation as a whole and more importantly... the name of God! And this guardianship held a level of seriousness that, at times, became a matter of life and death. *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. (Deuteronomy 22:20-21)* The protection of a young lady’s virginity was a high priority for any father, but it was especially crucial when it came to that of a priest and his daughter. For if she did not live up to the expectations of the law, sooner or later her life would be tragically taken. *And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her **father**: she shall be burnt with fire. (Leviticus 21: 9)*

### **The Collection of a Virgin’s Dowry**

It was also the father’s privilege under Old Testament law to be recompensed by any husband-to-be for keeping his daughter a virgin until marriage. This “*dowry*” was normally a one time payment given to the father. It was administered to the father when the young lady was presented

to the husband pure. This same custom has been practiced in many cultures throughout the ages, and is even still observed today. In South Africa for example, an African man is required to pay the father of the young lady the “leboa” before receiving her to be his wife. In theory this is the way it should be. However, most young men sadly disregard this process and choose the path of fornication... thereby robbing many young women of their virginity. The price of the leboa equals approximately the amount paid for a fairly decent car. The problem is that most African men cannot afford the car, nor can they afford the leboa. As a result women are not often given over in marriage and most do not retain their virginity either. In Africa, this positive feature about their culture unfortunately gets washed away because of a lack of concern to guard the woman’s virginity. And because of a lack of consequences, the problem only continues to grow worse. In Exodus 22:16-17 we see what happened when a young man “jumped the gun” in respect to a young lady’s virginity. *And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her **father** utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins. (Exodus 22:16-17)*

The dowry owed by men who seduced a virgin daughter of Israel potentially included a lifetime installment through marriage. If a daughter’s virginity was given away to a young man without the father’s consent, his position changed from that of guardian to judge. The FATHER made a decision if the couple would become husband and wife or not. And if the father decided the man who performed this act with his daughter should marry her, he was unquestionably and legally locked-in to the marriage for life. *If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel’s **father** fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days. (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)*

Because of these various laws, which carried with them some pretty hefty financial penalties, there was undoubtedly the temptation for some fathers to consider prostituting their young daughters. But as always, the Lord foresaw the wickedness of man’s heart, and initiated yet another law to help prevent this from happening. *Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness. (Lev. 19:29)* And even if he tried, a second dowry could never be collected since he could not again prove his daughter was still a virgin.

In the Old Testament, everyone had something to lose when it came to such instances of sexual misconduct. A father could lose out on a pretty good chunk of change if he neglected to guard his daughter's virginity. A man desiring to take advantage of a young lady's innocence could quickly find himself amerced in 50 shekels of silver and a legally binding marriage that could not be broken for any cause. And a young lady could quickly lose her life if she was not careful. This whole process provided a system of "checks and balances". From these principles we can begin to gain insight into God's heavenly perspective as to how a marriage was to have been approached. They provided guidance and safeguards for all parties involved revealing both the justice and foresight of God. Now these are Old Testament principles, right? Praise God they have no relevance for us today... or do they? Amazingly so, many of these same principles are carried over into the New Testament.

### **The Authority of the Father**

Again let us carefully examine the following inspired words of the apostle Paul penned in the dispensation of grace. *But if any **man** think that **he** behaveth **himself** uncomely toward **his** virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let **him** do what **he** will **he** sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless **he** that standeth stedfast in **his** heart, having no necessity, but hath power over **his** own will, and hath so decreed in **his** heart that **he** will keep **his** virgin, doeth well. So then **he** that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but **he** that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. (I Corinthians 7:36-38)* The clear subject of this passage of Scripture is the MAN who is also the FATHER of an unmarried daughter.

As we will see later in chapter 7 of this book, I Corinthians 7 is the premiere passage in the New Testament that defines today's position in regard to the subject of marriage and divorce. Here in this segment of the chapter, God discusses some significant pre-marital principles that parallel Old Testament truths. Seeing and understanding what God previously stated provides us with a foundation to discern this fairly confusing Scripture and apply its truths to our lives. And once again we begin to realize that the things God determined to be right "way back then" interfuse with these new statements without any contradiction. The phrase "*if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin*" is not a cultural statement that can be ignored because Americans today do not recognize its relevance or usage. This is a New Testament passage intended to create Christian culture in the lives of believers who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written about

a father who is still acting as guardian over the purity of his daughter's virginity. And he is given by the Lord the same level of responsibility and authority as was given to a father in this same position in the Old Testament. Now that may be old fashioned, but it cannot be labeled "Old Testament."

## **The Submission of the Daughter**

In this same passage (I Corinthians 7:36-38) God also reveals to us that He still recognizes the right of a father to decide WHO and IF his daughter will marry. The New Testament father is given authority over the ladies of his house. Submission of the daughter to the father's authority remains relevant to the eyes of our Lord. The father's discernment is God's intended protection from the girl latching onto someone who will not be the kind of husband she needs. SHE is not making the decision in this passage, the father is. The father is being held accountable for the right and wrong of the marriage decision. He makes a decision whether or not to "*keep his virgin*" or to "*give her in marriage.*" Our culture may not recognize this truth, but God clearly states the father is the authoritative figure in the home. He makes it equally clear that every woman needs a spiritual head of covering for her own protection. In I Corinthians 11:10 we read the following: *For this cause ought the woman to have **power on her head** because of the angels.* Under New Testament guidance no woman should act on her own will to be married without the blessing from the father or approval from her guardian.

God also expresses a continued concern that a woman remains a virgin until she is married. This remains unchanged regardless of how old she may be. The Lord's emphasis on this matter has many practical applications toward health, conscience, and avoiding certain struggles during the marriage. But there is an existing doctrinal reason as well. According to Ephesians 5:31-32 marriage represents the picture of Christ and the Church. *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning **Christ and the church.*** The permanent joining of the Church to Christ is what the joining of a man and woman in the covenant of marriage is pictorially preaching. Paul further states in II Corinthians 11:2 that the church is to be presented to Christ as a "*chaste virgin.*" God desires for this message to be accurately represented when the union of two lives occurs. But it is only by the preservation of a lady's virginity that God can accomplish His desire to portray this beautiful message.

## The Accountability of the Suitor

The young man of today also has accountability according to this passage as well. He is expected by God to recognize the father's authority. The Word of God reminds us of the reality that a young woman belongs to one of two people: her FATHER or her HUSBAND. A woman carries within the label of her last name a clear statement to which she belongs. New guardianship cannot be assumed until the former is willfully released. When guardianship is exchanged the name becomes different. Certainly it is one of the hardest decisions for a father to make, but there usually comes the day when he chooses to release this guardianship of his daughter to the watch-care of another man. The phrases "*and need so require*" and "*he that standeth steadfast in his heart, having no necessity*" imply that a husband is being considered for the daughter. And although this decision undoubtedly affects the future of both the young man and the young lady, it is the father who has the final say in the matter.

A good father who has a daughter passing "*the flower of her age*" has hopefully maintained a successful guardianship over his daughter's virginity. Likewise, he has consistently provided for her physical needs. He will know when the time is right for her to get married. If he knows and loves his daughter as he should, this bittersweet decision to let her go will be based upon his understanding of what is best for her life. And rather than seeing this as a THREAT to a woman's independence it should be viewed by the girl as God's sovereign, heavenly filter placed in her life. Whether a father lived in the Old or New Testament time frame, there would be an anguishing internal battle probing him to seek the voice of God in relation to this decision. And if he listens for the answer, the Lord will undoubtedly speak.

Passages like I Corinthians 7:36-38 are not only instructional for the church-age, but their truths are an echo of Old Testament principle. They are not new principles; but they are old principles that still stand as right and good. They are not only framed for an Old Testament saint; but they are extended for New Testament living. They are not just rules that must be followed; but they are actually principles that will multiply God's blessing in everyday life. There is everything right about a New Testament father accepting the responsibility of guarding over his daughter's virginity. How much teenage promiscuity and pregnancies could be subverted if fathers were actively involved in their daughters' social lives? And how many divorces could be avoided if New Testament fathers were exercised in the right they have to determine if and to whom their daughters will join in marriage? The decision to "cut one's losses" in an easily obtained divorce

later down the road might be postponed if the cost of marriage was firmly established in the mind of the young man BEFORE he made the proposal.

New Testament truths often are not really that new in their discovery. Old Testament principles are remarkably timeless in their application. They are referred to time and time again as a basis that could benefit any dispensation of time. Time as it were seems to generally stand still when it comes to what God sees as right and wrong or good and bad. And this is particularly true when it comes to the involvement of a father in his daughter's life before marriage.

## Chapter 4

# What Can a Man Get For a Rib?

*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 out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. 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. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

*Genesis 2:18-25*

Genesis 2 records the inspired, Biblical account of the creation of a literal man named Adam. It is a completely accurate story with absolutely no question whatsoever about its authenticity. There are a lot of details we do not have, but we definitely know the way it all turned out. It would be interesting to speculate for a minute, however, how radically different it would be today in our marriages if some of the events had happened just a LITTLE bit differently!

It has been joked about before that if Adam had been given a choice for a marriage that had no potential problems of any sort, it would have cost him an arm and a leg. His other choice, however, would only have cost him a rib! Now although we know Adam was not given that kind of choice before God created his helpmeet, he was given a choice none-the-less. And what Adam chose to do interestingly enough was to please his wife, and ultimately himself rather than God. And in reality, that is the underlying problem in every marriage that ends in divorce today... someone seeking to please someone else rather than Almighty God!

Just as there are Old Testament truths still applicable today in regard to the relationship between a father and his daughter, the same holds true for a man and his wife. It is God's mind that actually defines what constitutes a

marriage. And like the things already discussed in the previous two chapters, God's definition must be consistently seen throughout the entirety of His Bible. The marriage bond was originally created and initiated in the mind of God. It was His idea from the beginning. Man did not develop marriage as a means to fulfill his own needs, nor was it man who determined that it was not good for him to be alone. Marriage was conceived in the mind of God. Unfortunately, that simple truth is rarely realized in a young couple's mind when they contemplate the ideal of marriage. Most people approaching the marriage altar have never even considered the fact that their marriage union was intended to be God-serving. They usually seek God's blessing, but they have not stopped to realize that it should be God bringing them together, as He intends to use their marriage for His divine purposes. But unfortunately, affections often over-ride this spiritual truth.

## **The Institution of Marriage**

Much of what we need to understand about the marriage relationship is written in the Old Testament BEFORE the law of Moses. Adam and Eve are obviously the first example of marriage in the Bible. Examining this passage reveals God's definition of marriage from its conception. And it is no accident that the Lord Jesus referred back to this example in His ministry when challenged on the subject of divorce and remarriage. (We will have more to say on that particular discussion later in chapter 6.)

There are three commonly accepted elements that constitute a marriage in the sight of God. The first element is CONSENT. Adam consented when he said, "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.*" (Genesis 2:23) God the Father showed His approving consent by adding, "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.*" (Genesis 2:24) Today when a man makes a commitment to a young lady's father to take care of her for the rest of his life, he like Adam is giving his consent. However, this proposal in itself is only the beginning of the process. For it is the consent of the father or guardian, that actually determines whether an agreement pertaining to marriage has been reached or not. This is extremely important from God's perspective, as it prevents any pre-marital sexual relationship in itself from being perceived by anyone as constituting an automatic marriage union. Even the laws within our own country recognize this truth, as they require proper parental consent to be obtained before the marriage of a minor can be considered to have been legitimate. Unfortunately, some Christians have

tried to simplify the definition of marriage down to a concept of FLESH JOINING FLESH. They say, “When flesh joins flesh that actually constitutes a marriage, and when flesh leaves flesh that constitutes a divorce.” Such oversimplification is not only foolishness, but it gives sanctity to fornication and pre-marital sexual relations... thereby creating utter confusion in the whole marriage and divorce debate.

The second element of a Biblical marriage is CEREMONY. Ceremonies do not have to be extravagant, nor do they have to contain the same specific elements, but in most cultures some sort of ceremony can generally be noted. As we examine the bits and pieces of ceremonies evidenced throughout Scripture, we can see what has been incorporated and assimilated into our practices today. Here in Genesis 2, we see the Father giving away the bride and the groom making a vow of commitment. We perform that same type of recognition in our modern day ceremonies. In Genesis 24, Rebekah covered herself with a veil when Eliezer presented her to Isaac. And even though there were other historical and cultural reasons for her actions, we can still recognize some kind of brief ceremony that provides insight into our common, modern day practices with regard to weddings. Similarly to the way consent shows a commitment to father and family, ceremony shows a commitment to the government and society in general.

The last element that helps to define the union of a man with a woman is CONSUMMATION. Both individuals show a commitment to one another as they join themselves together intimately. At this point the marriage is complete and God no longer looks at two individuals, but rather sees the two as one. It is a process that has within itself a very unique and beautiful way of drawing two people together, not only in the eyes of the world, but more importantly in the eyes of the Lord.

## **The Termination of Marriage**

People never fathom that their marriage will end in divorce BEFORE they get married, but statistics prove that on the other side of the altar opinions quickly change. So before men and women ever reach that point, they once again need to hold themselves accountable to the mind of God. They need to know the Lord’s commands and internalize His expectations in counting the cost of what it actually means to be husband and wife. We have already seen two New Testament passages that say basically the same thing on this subject. The first is Romans 7:2-3. *“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. So then If, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulterous: 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.*” The second passage is I Corinthians 7:39. *“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be **dead**, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”* BOTH of these texts clearly state the simple but profound fact that a marriage is terminated at death. “Till death do us part” is how we word that today! And when a man and woman express that portion of the vows, they are actually recognizing the authority of God’s Word over the longevity of their marriage. Their conscience is freely expressing the law of God engraved in their hearts. In short, God’s expectation is for marriage to last a life-time. Once God joins something together, it should NEVER be taken apart. If that singular truth is not the foundation of every action within a person’s marriage, it will exist in a process of decay. And when enough time passes, that marriage will more than likely begin to dissolve.

### **The Desecration of Marriage**

Without a doubt, the most common and destructive problem within a couple’s lives is when the marriage bed is defiled through adultery. And whenever this sin has taken place throughout the ages, most marriages have tragically come crashing to an end. Now please understand, God hates adultery just as much today as He did before the time of Christ. Make no mistake about it! *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”* (Hebrews 13:4) However, let it also clearly be understood that the solution for dealing with this sin in any dispensation has never been through divorce.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Lord used the father of a young lady during Old Testament times to help guard and protect her purity before marriage. But when the engagement period began, the responsibility also began to shift to the “*husband*” in this important area of her life. And unfaithfulness during the espousal period was considered just as serious in the eyes of God as it was when it happened in marriage. For example, if a man’s betrothed wife was defiled by another man, the punishment for the offender was death. *If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the*

*man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you. But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: but unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter: for he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her. (Deuteronomy 22:23-27)* And depending on where it happened (in the city or in the country) the “wife” might have been stoned as well!

There were also specific instructions given in the law of Moses in relation to the unfaithfulness of an espoused bondmaid. It was common practice in Old Testament times for a man to betrothe his handmaid to himself to be married. If such a woman fornicated with another man during the espousal period, she likewise was guilty of committing sin. However, unlike the previous scenario, she was scourged instead of being stoned. *And whosoever lieth carnally with a woman, that is a bondmaid, betrothed to an husband, and not at all redeemed, nor freedom given her; she shall be scourged; they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, even a ram for a trespass offering and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the Lord for his sin which he hath done: and the sin which he hath done shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 19:20-22)* By these specific laws we can safely conclude that the chastity of an espoused wife was to be guarded and respected by all. And any violators were to be lawfully punished at varying degrees based upon divers circumstances.

Once the espousal period was over for an Old Testament Jewish couple and the marriage was consummated, the issue of the woman's purity remained a high priority in the sight of God. Consequently, when a wife was unfaithful to her husband and it was confirmed by at least two or three witnesses, she and the adulterer were automatically put to death. *And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death...If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22)* And because the Lord so desired to discourage a woman from committing adultery after marriage, He even instituted the “*law of jealousies*” for suspected unfaithfulness of the wife when there were no witnesses to be found. (Numbers 5:11-31)

Now having seen these truths, it should be fairly easy for most people to conclude that the Lord clearly abhors the sin of adultery! However, just as many people will undoubtedly be left with the lingering question as to why this all seems to be so one-sided against the woman. There is no law anywhere stating that if a married man fornicated with an unmarried woman it made him an adulterer. The man who fornicated with an espoused bondmaid was not commanded to be scourged, but she was. And the Bible says nothing about a “*law of jealousies*” for a woman to exercise against her husband when she suspected he had been with another woman in Old Testament times. While these statements are true, we must always remember that God has never turned a blind eye to any man’s sin anywhere in history. And if we could look at all of this from the Lord’s perspective today, we would soon come to realize that an incredible value has been placed upon the purity and chastity of a married woman because He simply wants to protect her! “*Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour’s wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent...But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.*” (Proverbs 6:27-29,32-33) And if men would understand the basic but profound truth that a married woman actually does belong to someone else, a lot of marriages could be spared the unnecessary pain and agony of dealing with the consequences of adultery.

### **The Doctrinal Implications of Marriage**

Now on this side of the cross, the church or the husband has absolutely no authority to ever enforce any death penalty from the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the importance of marital sanctity remains precious to our Lord. However, the purity and moral integrity of the nation of Israel is not the issue any more. Christ’s focus is completely on the purity and moral integrity of His bride, the Church. Doctrinally, every marriage has a responsibility before God to be used as His example of truth in the world. As we have already seen, a Christian’s marriage is supposed to represent a picture of salvation by grace (Romans 7:1-4). Paul used the illustration of marriage here to show the concept of how dead we have to be to the law before we can be joined to Christ. If there is any life left at all in a husband, or any way one can prove he is still alive, then the wife is still married and bound by the law to him. She CANNOT be married to anyone

else. He must be undeniably, completely dead before she as the wife can move on. The same parallel exists in our spiritual marriage. The law must be dead to us... completely, undeniably dead before we are eligible for a new union with our Lord.

The marriage of a man and a woman is also supposed to be a doctrinal picture of Christ's unique relationship with the church as revealed in Ephesians 5:22-32. *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 every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.* (Notice the Lord's referral yet once again to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden.) The wife in a marriage is to picture the Church's submission and obedience to Christ. Needless to say, this is a difficult task when the husband is constantly being unlovable, or consistently making ludicrous decisions. But even when this is the case, a wife will never be issued a license by the Lord to rebel against her husband's authority. The man on the other hand, is responsible for portraying a love that is beyond human understanding. His love is supposed to be a protecting love as he accepts the position of "head" and "savior." He is to match Christ's self-sacrificing love as he learns to give himself for his bride the same way Christ "gave himself" for the church. He needs to have a love that sees her with perfect purity, lacking "spot", "wrinkle" or "blemish." He needs to give his wife the security of a permanent love because she is now "of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."

Finally, one of the greatest sermons we can ever preach with our marriages is the permanency of Christ's love. Our marriages need to reveal the mystery of the believer's eternal security through the gospel. However, when a Christian marriage falls apart, it begins to preach a message of heresy. It sends a wrong signal to others that there are some sins that are unforgivable. It communicates to the world that a believer has not received

forgiveness for everything he has done. The husband particularly carries a heavy doctrinal responsibility in relation to his marriage. A husband divorcing his wife for any cause places a limit on the abundance of Christ's love. He assigns a measurement to what cannot be measured. He portrays a lie about the permanency of Christ's love for His bride. And though he undoubtedly expects the Lord to forgive him of any and all sins, he himself sadly is not willing to extend the same grace and forgiveness toward his wife.

Without a doubt, countless people could be saved from the horrors of divorce if they simply recognized the immense value that has been placed upon the husband and wife relationship. Marriages were never intended to be disposable, but were rather designed by the Lord to endure a lifetime. One cannot say marriage is all about love unless he or she is the husband or wife trying to Biblically live out his or her role in the relationship. However, marital love is not merely a feeling based on emotion, but it is rather an action based upon the decision to willingly offer oneself as a living sacrifice. (In other words, it costs more than a rib, or an arm and a leg!) For you see, Biblical Christ-like love alone possesses the ability to truly endure any and all trials and tribulations that can ever be thrown its way. And just as a pilot does not hand out parachutes to the members of his flight crew when they begin to board the plane, neither does our Lord issue parachutes to the partners of His husband and wife crews when they enter into this incredibly beautiful relationship called marriage!

## Chapter 5

# A Case of Divine Tittle-Tattling

*“And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than **one tittle of the law** to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”*

*Luke 16:14-18*

We have been examining thus far some Old Testament texts, which provide us with a foundation for establishing principles in relation to the general subject of marriage. Like many Christians today, most First Century Jews based a good portion of what they believed about divorce and remarriage on these and other passages of Scripture, as well. However, frequently the verses being used had at one time or another been taken completely out of their proper context. As a result, the principles that subsequently would have been derived from the text, were far from what the Lord had ever intended. Many of these practices unfortunately had been believed, taught and passed down for centuries within their culture, and had become to them cherished TRADITION. But like many other Jewish traditions, their belief was in direct opposition to the very law it claimed to support. An example of this is found in Matthew 15. Having been accused by certain individuals of violating the “*traditions of the elders*”, Jesus asked those present a question. “*Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your **tradition**?*” (Matthew 15:3) And after giving an example of their violations, He reminded them again that they were the ones in reality who were guilty of making the commandments of God of none effect by their much celebrated traditions (Matthew 15:6).

There are two public discussions recorded in the gospels that took place between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Pharisees on the subject of divorce and remarriage. In the following two chapters of this book we will

examine them both, as they are vital to our understanding of the whole matter. The first conversation is recorded in Luke 16. Interestingly enough, it was initiated by the Lord in response to these men's sarcastic remarks concerning His teaching on the seemingly unrelated subject of covetousness. The second exchange is found in Matthew 19 and was a follow-up to the first. However, as we will see in chapter 6, it was a very calculated discussion which began with a question posed to the Lord by representatives of this same religious sect. We have already noted in chapter 1 of this book that much of the problem which existed in that day and age in relation to divorce can be directly accredited to the influence of Israel's religious leaders. The Pharisees prided themselves in keeping the LETTER of the law; but as Christ pointed out, they had forgotten to dot every "i" and cross every "t". And in a very real way, the Word of God was actually doing some divine TITTLE-tattling on these men to the Lord!

In Luke 16:14-18, Jesus declared to the self-righteous Pharisees their abominable acts of covetousness as seen from God's perspective. However, out of all the examples He could have used to reveal this, the Lord chose to highlight the adulterous nature of the marriages of many of these men. For according to Him, all of these relationships had directly resulted from the socially accepted practice of divorce and remarriage. And it is right in the middle of this discussion that our Savior once again made it clear that the problem was directly related to the wreckless mishandling of the Old Testament law. But how could they have missed something this significant? There was no verse anywhere in the Old Testament that said anything remotely close to what Jesus was saying... not even a word. There was seemingly NOTHING anywhere for any one of them to have missed! Well miss it they did... and it was right there in front of them the whole time. However, it was not a verse or a phrase or even a word that was staring at them, but rather a small horn-like stroke of the Hebrew pen called a "*tittle*." And this little speck of ink, when placed under Heaven's divine microscope, was saying some very big things in relation to God's view of these men's marriages.

Now the implications of these words spoken by the Lord not only extended to those who were standing by close enough to hear, but they echoed loud and clear across the spectrum of time as well. For not only were the Pharisees guilty of adultery in the days of our Lord, but this meant that other Hebrew men had been as well for hundreds and hundreds of years. Most Hebrew men thought nothing of either putting away their wives and taking on another, or marrying a woman who had been unlawfully divorced from her husband. Why should they? Not only was everyone around them

doing it, but everyone before them had seemingly followed this same practice as well. Besides, as men they were allowed to have more than one wife anyway. And after all, who could really AFFORD to provide for the needs of several women at the same time? Clothing and feeding a wife was extremely expensive in those days! They were so blinded by their pride and tradition and COVETOUSNESS that they had never given the issue of divorce and remarriage a second thought.

### **The Text**

*If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.  
Exodus 21:10*

So just what was the real issue with these men? In an effort to justify themselves before others, many of Israel's religious leaders had managed over the years to find a couple of passages of Scripture they could adjust to fit their self-absorbed lifestyles. One of these TEXTS was taken out of Exodus 21. But as we will see, not only was it ripped completely out of its proper context, but the law to which they clung did not even address most of their situations to begin with. In this particular passage the Lord was addressing the very real issue in Old Testament times of a man having more than one wife. As we have already discussed in chapter 2 of this book, this practice in itself was not sinful, although there were specific limitations placed upon it by the law. The first verse was simply reminding a man of his responsibility to provide for his wife in three particular areas... food, raiment, and duty of marriage. This could not be diminished in any way, and needed to be taken into consideration before he took on the added responsibility of providing for another woman's needs. Within the perimeters of the Old Testament, this verse was not that difficult to understand. But the next one (verse 11) was the verse that gave the Pharisees, as well as other men throughout the centuries, all the ammunition they needed.

### **The Pretext**

*And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.*

## *Exodus 21:11*

By the first coming of Christ, the Jewish Rabbinical school of thought had developed a very interesting interpretation of Exodus 21:11. The only problem was that it was absolutely wrong. The common belief was very simply this: if a woman's needs (food, raiment and duty of marriage) were not being met by her husband, she had grounds for divorce. And this false conclusion, or PRETEXT, led many men and women to subsequently make decisions in their lives that were down right wicked in the eyes of the Lord. On one hand, Jewish women were being allowed to leave their husbands on the basis of one or more of these needs not being met. While on the other hand, many men were taking on second wives and neglecting the needs of the first. Then they used that loophole as justification for putting them away. At which point these wives could "go out free" from the marriage. Then once "free" they inevitably would find themselves remarried within a very short period of time. And much like it is today, because so many people were guilty of these actions, little if any stigma was ever attached to a divorced and remarried individual. At first glance, one might read these two verses and find himself agreeing with the Pharisees' interpretation. However, after backing up to the beginning of the chapter and reading everything together, hopefully such initial observations will change.

### **The Context**

*"Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh **he shall go out free for nothing**. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever. And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, **she shall not go out as the menservants do**. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty*

*of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her,  
then shall she go out free without money.*

*Exodus 21:1-11*

The CONTEXT of Exodus 21:10-11 is dealing with the treatment of Hebrew servants. However, if the servants were Gentiles, then a completely different set of rules applied. Again we find ourselves faced with the task of attempting to understand customs that are not practiced in America today. However, we must put our opinions and emotions aside and get into the mind of God if we are going to properly interpret this passage. The first six verses address the maximum length of service for a Hebrew man who had been purchased to be a servant. According to God's law, the man could only be forced to serve up to a total of six years. But when the seventh year of release came up, the master was to let him "go out free" (Exodus 21:2). If the man decided to stay, it was his choice alone, and he would serve his master forever.

Now as for the Hebrew women who were sold to be maidservants, the law was not the same. Exodus 21:7 makes it very clear that she did not "go out" in the same way that the menservants went out. She too would be allowed to "go out" free in that seventh year of release, but only if her master made the choice. And the way he chose was basically determined by what he decided to do or not to do with her. First of all, if he did not want to marry her, he could allow someone else to redeem her, as long as the man was a Hebrew (Exodus 21:8). His second option according to verse 9, was to deal with her as a Father would, and betrothe her to his son. His third and final option was to marry her. But if he married her, he needed to be willing to provide for her all the days of her life... just like he would any other wife (Exodus 21:10). These were the THREE decisions he had to make within that six year period. And if he did not do any of "these three" things unto her, then she was to be allowed to "go out free" in the year of release.

When read within its proper context, this passage of Scripture makes God's mind very clear as to His desires for the treatment of His people. Had Israel obeyed these precepts as well as others pertaining to the laws of release, they would have avoided a lot of serious consequences further down the road. But unfortunately, they did not. Instead, they chose to follow the false interpretation of Exodus 21:10-11 throughout the centuries between the time of Moses and the time of Christ. And as a result, many Hebrew women found themselves without a husband, without a home and without the necessary resources to feed and clothe themselves. And with seemingly no

place else to turn, most opted to find other men as soon as possible who were willing to take them in to be their wives.

Although it is not possible to pinpoint exactly WHEN this teaching began, it is not difficult to understand HOW it became a part of Israel's culture. We know that by the time of Jeremiah, most if not all of the laws pertaining to the year of release were not being followed by the Jews. According to II Chronicles 36:21, the land had not rested for 490 years. So in order to make up for those 70 Sabbath years, the Lord would send Judah into captivity for 70 consecutive years. *"To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil **threescore and ten years.**"* And it was sometime during that same 490 year period that the men of Israel began disobeying the commandments given in Exodus 21 by not letting their servants go free every seven years. *"Therefore the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, **At the end of seven years let ye go** every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: **but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear.**"* (Jeremiah 34:12-14)

For a brief time before the 70 year captivity, Judah made a covenant to return to the keeping of these laws of release. But no sooner than they had gone back to the commandment, they turned again from it. *"This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids. (Jeremiah 34:8-11)* Somehow these covetous Hebrew masters had justified NOT letting their menservants and maidservants go, despite the clear teaching of Exodus 21. But when it was to their advantage, they twisted the same passage of Scripture in order to justify actually letting some of their maidservants go, although they had become their lawfully wedded wives. It

would only have been a short jump from that rationale to the justification of any Hebrew man being allowed to put away his wife for any, or no reason at all. And once that jump was made, this practice became such a part of the Jewish tradition it survived intact until the First Coming of Christ.

Much of what Israel believed and practiced historically in regard to marriage was in fact totally in agreement with the law. There was absolutely nothing unlawful about a man having purchased for himself a maidservant in the First Century. Neither was it wrong for him to have married her sometime before the seventh year of release. There was nothing sinful for that same man to have taken to himself a second wife while the first one was alive. However, it was most definitely a violation of the law to put away the first wife, or in any way encourage her to leave in order to make way for another. In fact, it was so wrong, the Lord Himself declared it to be **ADULTEROUS** whenever it happened.

One can only imagine how bewildered the Pharisees must have been when Jesus made His comments to them in Luke 16. But by the time the Savior walked away from this discussion, their confusion soon gave way to anger. Who was He to judge them in relation to their marriages in the first place? How could He imply that their divorces were unlawful, and had actually caused them, as well as others, to commit the sin of adultery? And who told Him about their marriages in the first place? Although the Lord made it very clear that the “*tittle of the law*” had actually been the one doing all the tattling on their adulterous marriages, these extremely religious men despised Him just the same. Within a short time of this conversation, word of Jesus’ answer apparently made its way back to Judea (Matthew 19:1-3). And as we will see in the next chapter, this more than likely fueled the Pharisees’ fire, and gave them justification in their minds to tempt Him with their question in regard to the legality of divorce as determined by the law. And once again we will see how that the answer of the Lord made God’s view very plain to them all.

## Chapter 6

# The Exception that Became the Rule... Without Exception

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

*Matthew 19:3-9*

As we have already seen, speaking out publicly in the First Century against divorce and remarriage could be hazardous to one's health, especially in the land of Judea. Knowing this was so, the Pharisees tried to entrap the Lord Jesus Christ by engaging Him in a discussion on this very topic. It is not by coincidence that this inquisition occurred in the exact same region where John the Baptist lost his life for preaching against Herod's unlawful marriage with his divorced sister-in-law. And since Herod thought that Jesus might possibly be John the Baptist raised from the dead (Matthew 14:1-2), these newly acquired enemies of the Lord were undoubtedly hoping for yet another beheading. However, the Master of answering fools according to their folly was able to not only silence the mouths of these vain talkers, but He managed to provide His adherents with another key to unlock the mystery surrounding the issue of divorce and remarriage.

For centuries, Jewish men had been abusing the provision made in the law of Moses for divorce, which was intended only to deal with a few specific set of circumstances. This clause was originally intended, as the Lord pointed out, to be a rare EXCEPTION to a more steadfast rule.

However, as was so often the case, the children of Israel had twisted the Scriptures to fit their own self-serving agendas. As we have just seen, by the time the Lord Jesus came on the scene, the number of men putting away their wives was growing rapidly. With the increase in numbers came an equally climbing number of reasons as to why divorce was allowed. Confusion was the result! And although there was no sincere quest for truth on the part of those asking our Lord this question, there undoubtedly were many standing around who were curious as to the answer. Was it indeed lawful for a man to put away his wife for EVERY cause?

There are few questions recorded in the Bible that reflect the hearts and lives of Twenty-first Century man more than the one asked by the Pharisees in Matthew 19. For as it was in the days of our Lord, so it is in our day today. And especially here in the United States, men and women have been divorcing and remarrying at staggering percentages and for innumerable reasons now for the past several decades. And slowly but surely, most Christians and even pastors, have thrown in the towel when it comes to speaking out publicly against this very touchy subject. It has come to the point now in most circles of our society and sadly most churches, that a reason is not even necessary anymore in order for one to divorce his or her spouse! And like the Pharisees of old, people definitely no longer comprehend why it would be anyone else's business if they so chose to do. How could this have happened? Simple...the exception to the rule has become the very rule in itself. And this new rule in most people's minds has absolutely no exceptions!

## **The Original Design for Lawful Marriage**

*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.*

*Matthew 19:4-6*

The Lord Jesus began His answer to the Pharisees' question by asking them a question, "***Have ye not read...?***" Of course they had read the story of the creation account of man! Why would He ask them a question like that? First of all, He was doing what He did so often in His ministry... putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Peter 2:15). But the Lord is also making it abundantly clear to all who are paying attention, that the

literal account of the first marriage in the Bible is imperative to our understanding of God's initial intent for the institution of marriage. The uniting together of two human beings, as was accomplished in the case of this first couple, sets a precedent for all future generations. First of all, the design for this union as pointed out by the Lord in Matthew 19:4 very clearly called for a *male* and a *female*. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:27)* The pattern that God was using for mankind had already been implemented with the rest of His creation on the sixth day (a bull and a cow, a buck and a doe, a ram and a sheep, etc.). And since the Lord's plan for mankind was to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, He rested from His role of Creator in order to make way for man's responsibility to be the procreator. *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)* And as nature has consistently proven now for over 6,000 consecutive years, procreation is only possible between members of the opposite sex! So from this we can logically conclude that marriage was designed to take place between a MAN and a WOMAN.

A second truth we can discern from the Genesis account of creation is that marriage was intended to be between two people. Unlike the rest of His creation, the Lord wanted the husband and wife relationship to be an intimate one. It was never intended to be shared with others. This is why God formed Eve from her husband's side. *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. (Genesis 2:21-23)* There is no indication that any other part of God's kingdom had this restriction ever placed upon it. Fornication was a sin possible to be committed only by people. Notice Jesus said in Matthew 19:5, "*they twain shall be one flesh.*" Therefore, we can also surmise that the original purpose of marriage was to be between ONE man and ONE woman.

Another truth learned from the story of Adam's union with Eve is that marriage was never intended to end. The Lord Jesus said it this way, "*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (Matthew 19:6) In this original state, the man and the woman were designed to stay together for life... and that was a very long time! Since it was never God's

desire for death to enter into the world, the marriage of Adam and Eve would never have come to an end! Taking this into consideration, it should be safe to say that from the very beginning, the Lord's intention for a man and a woman was to be married to one another ONE time.

Now although all of these principles are true, we can never forget that something dreadful happened in the garden of Eden that brought the HONEYMOON abruptly to an end... and that something was obviously sin! And because of man's sin, many things that should never have taken place unfortunately became a reality. And one of these consequences would be the eventual necessity for the implementation of this thing we call divorce.

### **The Eventual Need for Lawful Divorce.**

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

*Matthew 19:7-8*

Having partially answered the Pharisees' question, the Lord awaited their response. And without hesitation, these skilled debaters went straight to the law of Moses for what they thought would be the kill. The passage they referenced is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-2 which says, *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. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.* The Pharisees undoubtedly thought for a brief moment in time that they had finally stumped the Champion. However, as the Lord began to speak, their folly was quickly made manifest to all. Jesus wasted no time explaining to these men that the reason Moses was writing this amendment to the law in the first place was specifically due to the "hardness" of their hearts. And this was anything but a general statement. The Lord was reminding them of the historical context of the giving of this law in Deuteronomy in relation to the nation of Israel.

Forty years previously at Mount Sinai, the Lord had given the children of Israel some other very detailed laws pertaining to the subject of unlawful sexual behavior. Most of these commandments, which were recorded in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, expressly forbade certain physical unions between two or more people. There were at least seven general categories

covered in all. And as we will see, in less than forty years, the children of Israel had managed to disregard most if not all of these commandments in the wilderness.

The first type of relationship that was forbidden under the first giving of the law was one that would involve any of the inhabitants of the promised land. *Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a-whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a-whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a-whoring after their gods. (Exodus 34:12-16)* At first glance this seems pretty harsh, but as we continue to read, we will come to appreciate the wisdom of God on this matter. For not only would Israel's uniting with these nations have led them to spiritual destruction, but it would very likely have led to their physical demise as well.

The remainder of these forbidden physical unions were listed in Leviticus 18. And it is here where we discover the horrific lifestyle of the people of the land. Notice the Lord made the children of Israel aware of these abominations so that they would understand what they could not do, and why they could not marry those who were living this way. *After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. (Leviticus 18:3)*

The most detailed of any of these categories mentioned by God dealt with illicit incestual relationships. In Leviticus 18:6 we read the following, *None of you shall approach to any that is **near of kin** to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the Lord.* After giving this initial commandment, the Lord listed ten or more specific “*near of kin*” relationships that were expressly forbidden to the children of Israel (Leviticus 18:7-16). This would cover about everything one would expect to see mentioned in such a discussion. However, notice that the marrying of cousins was not included in this list of unlawful unions. That was probably due to the fact that the human race had not deteriorated genetically to the place that it is today. The Lord was attempting to keep the children of Israel as pure as possible without compromising the quality of the gene pool.

Another relationship strictly forbidden was that of taking multiple wives who were directly related to each other. *Thou shalt not uncover the*

*nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness. Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time. (Leviticus 18:17-18)* As mentioned in chapter 2 of this book, there was absolutely nothing wrong with a man taking more than one wife. It became sinful, however, when the second wife was a “*near kinswoman*” of the first. This would have been incredibly stressful and disturbing (“*vexing*”) to the women, but also very confusing as well for any children who would have been born. (“Are you my half-brother or are you my uncle?”)

The rest of these abominable unions were listed in Leviticus 18:19-23. Men were forbidden to be with women who were unclean due to a continual menstrual flow, as well as those who were married to another man. And finally, men and women alike were expressly warned against the sinfully wicked activities of sodomy and bestiality. Once again in verse 24 the Lord soberly reminded Israel that ALL of these abominations had been regularly practiced by the inhabitants of the land. *Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you.* These customs had more than likely been practiced by the heathen for centuries. This is why the children of Israel could not even marry the little ones when they became of age. If enough serious diseases and genetic disorders would have made their way into the bloodline of God's people, the whole nation of Israel could have possibly been wiped out within a few generations.

The consequences for anyone entering into these kinds of unlawful relationships ranged from death to being cut off in the sight of the people, and are mentioned in Leviticus 20:10-21. But despite all of the detailed warnings, many of the children of Israel apparently began disobeying some of these commandments in the wilderness. And within a short space of time, the next generation was following in the steps of their parents. For they had **HARDENED THEIR HEARTS** as well (Hebrews 3:8-9) and began unlawfully uncovering the nakedness of others. How can we know this? Because the “*uncleanness*” Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 24:1 addressed those very matters of “*nakedness*” he mentioned forty years earlier in Leviticus 18 and 20. (The same Hebrew word that is translated as “*uncleanness*” in Deuteronomy 24 is also translated as “*nakedness*” in Leviticus.)

Now as previously stated, some of these matters of uncovering nakedness were more serious in the sight of God than were others. We can easily conclude this because not all violators were to be put to death. For

example, the man who uncovered the nakedness of his half sister, or his aunt was to “*bear his iniquity*” (Leviticus 20:17, 19-20). However, he was not given the death penalty. The same truth applied to the man who uncovered the nakedness of a woman “*put apart for her uncleanness*” (Leviticus 18:19; 20:18). He and the woman were only to be “*cut off*” from among the congregation, not killed. (The more serious types of sexual sin which carried the death penalty were addressed first in Leviticus 20:10-16, while the remainder were covered in the next five verses.) But even though these relationships were not as heinous to the Lord, He still desired the children of Israel to avoid them all at any cost. In Leviticus 18 an individual was commanded what not to do, while Leviticus 20 instructed the leaders of Israel what they were to do in response to any violations. And in Deuteronomy 24 a man was informed how to remedy any such unclean relationship he found himself in that did not result in his death.

Jesus said that Moses had indeed “*suffered*” certain men to put away their wives. But in answering the Pharisees’ question this way, He made it extremely clear that divorce was directly related to the hardness of Israel’s hearts during that period of time between the first and second giving of the law. And it was not something that the Lord had given Israel to practice until after they had violated His law, and put themselves in situations they should never have been in. Jesus was reminding the Pharisees that the Lord wanted a holy nation of people! This is why He “*separated*” the children of Israel from other nations in the first place. *But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people... And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine. (Leviticus 20:24,26)* This is also why He commanded Moses to “*separate*” them from their own “*uncleanness*” as a nation. *Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them. (Leviticus 15:31)* And all of this explains why the Lord eventually instructed Moses to command the children of Israel to “*put away*” their wives! (We will examine several specific examples of this in the next chapter.)

### **The Inevitable Sin After Unlawful Divorce**

*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**.*

### Matthew 19:9

Jesus was now coming to the conclusion of this discussion. And this final statement was a total shocker to them all... including His disciples. In Matthew 19:9 we have recorded the Lord's public answer to the Pharisees, while Mark 10:10-12 relays His private answer to the bewildered twelve afterward. What Jesus said was something they had never fully understood though they had heard Him say it before. For according to His words, when a man UNLAWFULLY divorced his wife and afterward remarried he was actually committing adultery! *And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. (Mark 10:11)* This made no sense to them at all because when a man LAWFULLY put away his wife in the Old Testament, both he and his wife were free to remarry (Deuteronomy 24:2). It would appear that Jesus' audience was failing to see the difference between LAWFUL and UNLAWFUL divorces.

This was not, however, a completely new revelation Jesus was giving. But as we noted in the previous chapter, it was rather a deeper understanding of what had already been said and written. Likewise He instructed them that after being divorced from her husband, if a woman remarried she and that man committed adultery as well! And as we have seen in chapter 2 of this book, this statement was true even if SHE had done nothing wrong. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:31, 32)* The Lord Jesus was heralding LOUD and CLEAR to all who were listening the divine perspective of the Father. For the Lord Himself had already declared nearly four hundred years before that He HATED such divorce! *Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. **For the Lord, the God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away:** for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. (Malachi 2:14-16)*

Whenever a woman divorced her husband in the Old Testament, it was considered UNLAWFUL. There were no provisions for such an action in the law of Moses. It was an option left open for the men only in the

specific situations previously mentioned. Therefore Jesus was able to say that a woman who remarried after divorcing her husband committed adultery! *And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. (Mark 10:12)* Once again we see the consistency of the Bible maintained as God did not recognize such a divorce. What He did recognize, however, was the woman's first legitimate marriage. This explains why God allowed David to reconcile with his wife Michal. When David was on the run from King Saul, Michal was taken and UNLAWFULLY given to another man in marriage. *But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim. (I Samuel 25:44)* Had her "divorce" been legal, according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 David could not have remarried her again. *And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face. And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned. (II Samuel 3:13-16)* And furthermore, if God had recognized that first "divorce" and consequential remarriage, then He allowed David and Michal to live in an adulterous relationship after they reconciled!

Throughout all of His teaching, the Lord was attempting to protect innocent women from being victimized by unscrupulous men. He was in a sense evening the playing field by letting these men know just how serious this issue was in God's sight. And since their unlawful actions were causing their wives to unknowingly commit adultery when they remarried, the same judgment was then being placed upon them. And once again, we see the need for continual revelation on this whole issue of marriage and divorce as Israel continued to disregard God's Word. And although these revelations may have been new to the listeners, they were not new to the One doing the speaking.

The bottom line is this: divorce was a process given to Israel to remedy problems that for the most part, should never have existed in the first place. It was NEVER intended to be used by men to get out of undesirable marriages. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Israel had done. Likewise, it was never intended to be used by anyone to deal with adultery. Divorce and remarriage had become such a problem in the days of our Lord, He spent a good deal of His time addressing the issue by clarifying the law. And as we

have already noted, the Lord Jesus pointed out at the beginning of His ministry, He came not to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). This statement would involve Him fulfilling many of the prophecies with His life and filling in some key statements to further explain the law. This is why the “*fornication*” He spoke of in Matthew 19:9 had to be the same thing the law addressed clear back in the Old Testament. It was in fact the “*uncleanness*” Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 24:1... the unlawful uncovering of “*nakedness*” strictly forbidden in Leviticus 18. If a man’s wife committed adultery, it was to be handled as it had always been handled under the law: she was to be stoned. *If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.* (Deuteronomy 22:22) Moses was not CHANGING this law 45 seconds right after he gave it, nor was our Lord changing it 16 centuries later! What both Moses and the Lord Jesus were saying is that if a man discovered that he had UNLAWFULLY uncovered the nakedness of a woman he was married to, he must LAWFULLY put her away. For she had not committed fornication AGAINST him, she was actually committing fornication WITH him!

Jesus not only supported the law of Moses, He reinforced it. He reminded the people of His day of the original intent of marriage. And it was His heart’s desire to enlighten their hearts to the fact that the concept of divorce should NEVER conflict with God’s original purpose as well... ONE man, ONE woman, ONE time. This is why the Lord had to remind the people that it was in fact the sin-causing hardness centered in the heart of man that caused there to be an eventual need for Deuteronomy’s provision for lawful divorce in certain limited circumstances. The Lord Jesus was saying that if God joined a man and a woman together, no man had better try to rip them apart. However, if man was responsible for joining two people together, then everyone had better be equally careful in trying to keep the Lord from breaking them up.

## Chapter 7

# What Man Hath Joined, Let God Put Asunder

We have just seen how that God hated divorce when it was used for self-serving purposes, because of the inevitable sin of adultery that resulted when most people remarried after an unlawful divorce. But we have also discovered that the Lord provided the solution for such people to get out of these and other wicked relationships by actually commanding them to divorce. Now this is obviously a radical concept indeed for most people today to accept, let alone embrace. Understanding this is so, the purpose of this chapter will be to demonstrate how that the Bible preserves for us several specific examples of the Lord's attempts to reveal to people their need to dissolve their unlawful marriages.

### **Herod and His Brother's Wife**

*But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. 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. For John had said unto Herod, **It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.***

*Mark 6:16-18*

The first story, we are going to examine is none other than the unlawful marriage of Herod. In Mark's gospel we see where Herod had married a woman by the name of Herodias. Now that in itself seems quite innocent enough, but there was just one slight problem: apparently Herodias had been married previously to Herod's brother Philip. And though we are not absolutely sure as to whether she was the one who left Philip or whether he put her away, one thing is certain: God still recognized that marriage as being legitimate! Luke makes it very clear in his gospel account that Philip was still very much alive when his wife married Herod. *"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and **Herod** being tetrarch of Galilee, and **his brother Philip** tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of*

*God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias **his brother Philip's wife**, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.” (Luke 3:1-3, 18-20)*

Now John the Baptist's message to Herod had some serious implications. First as we have just read was the fact that God did not recognize the divorce of Philip and Herodias as being valid (Deuteronomy 24:1). As a result, the Lord did not recognize the second marriage between Herod and Herodias as being lawful. And what John was declaring was exactly what the Lord was seeing... they were living in adultery (Romans 7:1-3)!

Now the solution to this problem was actually quite simple to remedy. Herod needed to follow the same basic principle that outlined every message John ever preached... he needed to REPENT! *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, **Repent** ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:1-2)* And he needed to DO what all the other listeners of John were commanded to do in order to prove themselves as sincere... he needed to obey God's Word as it pertained to his particular situation. *“**Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, **What shall we do then?** He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, **what shall we do?** And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And **what shall we do?** and he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” (Luke 3:8-14)*** But how could he DO anything about his situation, he had already married his brother's wife? There was only one thing that Herod could do, and he knew it! He needed to put Herodias away according to Mosaic law. And the reason for the action was as simple as the solution... **THEY WERE LIVING IN FORNICATION!**

John's desire was no different from any other servant of God throughout the ages. All he wanted Herod to do was to receive and respond

to the message. But saying “SORRY” to his brother would not have been enough. Just as it would not have been enough for someone who stole his neighbor’s camel to simply come back and say “SORRY”... only to climb back onto the same camel and then ride off into the sunset! Herod needed to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. He needed to PUT AWAY Herodias!

## **The Corinthian Man and His Father’s Wife**

*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**.*  
*1 Corinthians 5:1*

In this New Testament example, we see where a certain man in the church at Corinth had MARRIED his father’s wife. (If we compare Mark 6:17,18 with I Corinthians 5:1, we can conclude that when a man HAD someone else’s wife, it meant that he had married her.) Apparently the father had either divorced his wife or he had died. In this situation however, even if the father had died, God did not recognize this new marriage as being lawful. “*The nakedness of thy father’s wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father’s nakedness.*” (Leviticus 18:8) Now this was absolute wickedness in the eyes of the Lord, and once again we see the possibility for two married people to actually be LIVING IN FORNICATION with each other (I Corinthians 5:1).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, heathen nations did not have exactly the best reputation when it came to their sexual behavior. This is why the Holy Spirit led the early leaders in the book of Acts to remind their Gentile converts of the need to abstain from all types of fornication. “*Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they **abstain** from pollutions of idols, and **from fornication**, and from things strangled, and from blood.*” (Acts 15:19-20) But Paul interestingly brings to our attention the fact that even the Gentiles of his day had some lines drawn in the sand when it came to what kind of situations they allowed in marriage. And what was being permitted to take place in the church at Corinth was not one of them! How could this have happened? Well according to the Word of God, they had become PUFFED UP with their newly acquired Bible knowledge and began to abuse the LIBERTY that they had in Christ. “*Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge.*”

*Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth... But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.” (I Corinthians 8: 1,9) And this PUFFED UP attitude was also causing them to justify and tolerate blatantly sinful behavior in the lives of their people. “And ye are **puffed up**, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” (I Corinthians 5:2) Paul was not only stunned by the behavior of the man and woman, but he was totally flabbergasted by the response of the church.*

And once again we see that the ultimate solution to this vile situation was basically the same... this man and woman needed to REPENT. Then they needed to DO whatever it took to clear themselves in this particular matter. Or in other words, they needed to dissolve this wicked relationship immediately! “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” (II Corinthians 7:11) Now this might have involved some other specific things, but it undoubtedly included the abandonment of the relationship. It would be ludicrous for us to believe that Paul merely intended for this man to simply say “SORRY” and then be allowed to return to the church with this same woman! Can one imagine the hypocrisy of him going back to the same church in Corinth, sitting in the same pew the next Sunday with his arm still around his father’s wife? Would Paul have considered the matter justly dealt with and concluded if the man and the woman simply transferred their membership to another church (Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, etc.) in order to get a FRESH START? Paul’s harsh rebuke was obviously intended to provoke both thought and action in the couple. The only possible solution was to put away his father’s wife and clear Christ’s Church from the charge of supporting the sin of fornication. Once again we see that the lawful use of divorce was offered as a solution for a problem with no other option. To ignore its use would have been to sentence this couple to the perpetual sin of fornication.

### **The Men of Judah and Their Strange Wives**

*Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, **The people Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.***

*For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.*

*Ezra 9:1-2*

In this third example, we see where the remnant of Judah had returned to the land after being held captive in Babylon for seventy years. And once again we find the children of Israel disobeying God's Word in relation to their marriages. For unfortunately, many of the men were unlawfully taking to themselves wives who were inhabitants of the land. And as we have already noted, this was strictly forbidden in the law of Moses. "*When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: **Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.**" (Deuteronomy 7:1-3) And what was so alarming was the fact that many of the men guilty of this sin were actually leaders. They should have known better! Now when all of this was brought to the attention of Ezra, the man of God was completely beside himself. "*And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and **sat down astonished.** Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; **and I sat astonished** until the evening sacrifice." (Ezra 9:3-4)**

By now Ezra was seeing that there was a clear pattern of disobedience on the part of Israel in the area of FORNICATION. He knew that many had unlawfully uncovered nakedness for forty years in the wilderness in spite of what they had been told at Mount Sinai. "*Neither let us commit **fornication**, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*" (I Corinthians 10:8) He also knew that after the children of Israel had entered into the promised land, they continued to defy these specific laws of Leviticus 18 for yet another thousand years! "*In thee have they **discovered their father's nakedness**: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath **committed abomination** with his neighbour's wife; and another hath **lewdly defiled** his daughter-in-law; and another in thee hath **humbled his sister, his father's daughter.**" (Ezekiel 22:10-11)*

And Ezra was well aware of the fact that it was because of this continual unwillingness on the part of Israel to submit to God's laws in the area of marriage, that the land itself had eventually spewed them out. *"Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out."* (Leviticus 20:22)

And it would not seem that the men of Judah had learned anything at all from their seventy years spent in exile. Because now some sixty years after they had returned to the land, they were at it again! *"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken thy commandments, which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?"* (Ezra 9:10-14)

Ezra had good cause to be concerned about God's judgment in relation to this reoccurring sin of fornication, because no matter what the Lord said or did, Israel always seemed to fall back into the rut. He was afraid that because of this current transgression, God might wipe them out completely! Ezra took his observations, his questions and his fear and laid them out before the Lord in prayer. And by the time he had finished, many of the people were under conviction. *"Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore."* (Ezra 10:1)

What followed these events was indeed an amazing thing to see! For it was the men of Judah who recognized the remedy for their unlawful actions. They were the ones who asked Ezra to hold them accountable to DO what they needed to do. And what they needed to do was to put away their wives *"according to the law."* *"And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet*

*now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to **put away all the wives**, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done **according to the law**. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swore.” (Ezra 10:2-5)*

The Bible records that Ezra did exactly what the men of Judah requested, and held them to their words. He called them all to Jerusalem and within three months the matter was taken care of (Ezra 10:6-17). And not only was this handled publicly in order for that generation to see, but the names were recorded in God’s Word forever so that future generations could see as well (Ezra 10:18-43)!

Ezra the priest was a “*ready scribe*” and he knew the law well. He not only fully understood the implications of the decision that Israel was making, but he also understood the consequences facing the children of Israel should they choose to ignore their sin. Ezra knew that innocent lives would be forever affected. He knew that the children who were born from these relationships would suffer great turmoil, being sentenced to live the rest of their lives separated from their fathers. If there had been any other way to resolve this situation, God would have obviously given the people the proper remedy. But the Lord did not render one because there was no other way! There was undoubtedly much weeping and wailing in those days as these women and children walked away from their husbands and fathers, more than likely never to see them again. But as grievous as this was in the sight of God, it was apparently more grievous for Him to allow these marriages to stay intact. Saying “SORRY” was not enough. Saying “We will make sure our children LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES” would not have solved the problem as far as the Lord was concerned. It was now time for action. It was time for this cycle of sin to be broken!

We have seen three Biblical examples of where specific people were commanded to put away their wives because the marriages were unlawful. And in each case, the Lord used a man of God to cry out with passion against the particular issues of that day. This now leads us to the next question to consider. For if divorce in the Bible is indeed the only process given by the Lord to resolve such unlawful unions, is this the solution for the same type of situations today? Is this the remedy for the vast majority of the multitude of divorced and remarried people who are encamped within our congregations?

## Chapter 8

# **Ignorance May be Bliss... But Only Wisdom Will be Blessed!**

*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

*James 1:5-8*

It is impossible for anyone to know everything about anything! And although our modern technology has made the acquiring of knowledge much easier to accomplish, it has also created somewhat of a problem for most people... INFORMATION OVERLOAD! As humans, we can only absorb so much knowledge and gain understanding about any particular subject in a given amount of time. And since Christians are human, the same principle applies to us. The only difference is this. We have the ability to gain access to God's infinite wisdom and then apply that same acquired knowledge and understanding to our lives. Knowing this is so, an attempt has been made in the writing of this book to get to the point as quickly as possible. Hopefully this has been accomplished without omitting any of the essential truths necessary for the reader to come to the proper conclusion. Because although it is true that nobody knows it all, there are unfortunately too many people out there in relation to this topic of divorce and remarriage, who are guilty of not knowing enough. And instead of boldly going to God for answers, they often choose to remain stagnant in their blissful state of ignorance.

Now not only can our minds be over loaded with information, but it is also possible for our emotions to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of feelings as well. And this becomes extremely significant when we stop and consider the influence our emotions often have in the decision-making process of our lives. Such sensations as doubt, fear, anxiety, and despair can so quickly overtake us, that we do not even recognize how they are affecting our choices. And because of this, a similar effort has been put forth into the pages of this book to raise the level of awareness to the reality of the divorce crisis without playing on the emotions of the reader. For if one's emotions lead him or her to a particular conclusion today, those same emotions will more than likely lead that same person to a different one tomorrow.

Having said all of this, hopefully there are still some people out there who are reading this book and are now ready to make some decisions in regard to their marriages. The Lord is not the author of confusion! And if we have a personal relationship with Him through His resurrected and glorified Son, Jesus Christ, we have complete access to His infinite wisdom. And wisdom is what many people need right about now at this crucial time in their lives. As believers, we should never do ANYTHING without consulting God first. But we had better not ask Him for the wisdom He has available for us, unless by faith we are willing to do SOMETHING with it in relation to our specific situations.

So what exactly is one to do in response to the truths learned in this study? Let's start with the ladies. If you as a woman have never been married before then by all means seek God's face as to whether it is His plan for you to be so or not. You should talk to your parents, especially your father, and be willing to submit to their counsel. If the Lord has gifted you as a young lady to stay single, you must not allow anyone to pressure you into getting married. Do not think of yourself as being strange or weird, but rather see yourself as being very blessed indeed of God. On the other hand, if your heart's desire is to find a husband and raise a family, then be absolutely sure to allow the fear of God to direct your steps to the right man out there. You cannot be in a hurry or settle for second best, because Satan's BEST is usually standing right there before God's! And be certain that the man you eventually do marry shares not only the same faith, but also the same convictions you do as well about divorce and remarriage. *"For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn."* (I Corinthians 7:7-9)

If you are already joined together in marriage with a husband and it is the first for you both, or your former spouses are dead, then by all means guard your relationship with everything you have and commit to making your marriage a success! However, if you have already married a divorced man, you had better find out the reason that marriage was terminated. Because if it was due to his sin, according to the Word of God, you are in adultery until his first wife dies. *"And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her."* (Mark 10:11) On the other hand, if the divorce was directly a result of her sinful actions, then your marriage is legitimate. However, you should not assume that just because she filed that makes him innocent in the matter.

And although no verse anywhere in the Bible says that the wife causes the husband to commit adultery when she divorces him, be sure to find out why she did... it may surprise you! For very likely it was his sin (adultery, abuse, etc.) that played a major part in provoking his former wife to make that decision.

Similarly when you as the woman have already remarried after your divorce AND YOUR FIRST HUSBAND IS STILL ALIVE, then according to the most compassionate man who ever walked the face of this earth, you are in adultery! The only Biblical exceptions to this are as follows. First of all, if your prior marriage was unlawful and you dissolved it, then you are free to be married now. The reason being is that in the Lord's mind you were in fornication with that first man, and the union was never recognized as being legitimate.

The only other time you would be free to remarry is if your UNSAVED husband divorced you because of your FAITH in Christ and not your sin. If that is the case then according to 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, you are not under bondage and are free to be remarried. ***“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. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 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. 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 reason Paul addressed this particular aspect of divorce and remarriage, was because Christ never did during His earthly ministry.

It should be cautioned, however, not to attempt to wrest the Scriptures to your advantage on this particular exception. Because if your husband was saved, the teaching of Paul in I Corinthians 7:15 does not apply to your situation. The following two verses make it clear that the word “UNBELIEVING” is in reference to one who is LOST. *“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 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.”* (I Corinthians 7:16-17) Paul already admonished the believing husband not to put away his Christian wife in verses 10 and 11. *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord...let not the husband put away his wife.”* And his reason was the same as Christ's was in Matthew 5:32. *“Whosoever shall put away his wife... causeth her to commit*

*adultery.*” He did not want any women unintentionally committing the sin of adultery when they remarried after an unlawful divorce. In these last two passages, both Paul and the Lord were addressing two EQUALLY YOKED people. There was no new revelation here. Therefore in such cases, when two equally yoked people obtained a divorce, the woman was NOT free to remarry. Ladies, God does not want you to unintentionally commit adultery either! However, your ignorance does not release you from the reality of how the Lord views your current marriage.

By the way, contrary to popular opinion, there is absolutely no place in the Bible that says any woman in history has ever had GROUNDS for a divorce! As we have already noted in chapter 5 of this book, divorce was only given to Israel in order for men to dissolve their unlawful relationships. And though it is true that some women did in fact put away their husbands, the Bible makes it clear that such women were clearly forbidden to remarry. *“And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” (Mark 10:12)* It is sad to realize how most people today have totally failed to see these details in Scripture. As a result, countless men and women have been poorly counseled and taught in their churches to believe that adultery is Biblical grounds for divorce, despite the fact that no verse anywhere in the Bible says that! If this were true, not only would it have contradicted the law which was in operation at that time, but it would have absolutely made no sense at all. *“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” (Matthew 5:31, 32)* With this interpretation, the guilty adulterous wife after being divorced from her husband, would have had the freedom to remarry without that new relationship having been considered adulterous. However, the innocent wife would not have enjoyed that same luxury to remarry after her divorce.

On the other hand, if you as a woman have departed from your husband due to EXTREME circumstances in your marriage, it may not in itself have necessarily been a sinful thing for you to have done. That decision is one ultimately that is between you and the Lord and your local church. According to Hebrews 13:17, the leaders in that church are the ones whose responsibility is to watch for your soul, and are accountable to God for the counsel they have given you. Hopefully they have done their job properly and are fully aware of your particular set of circumstances. However, do not allow anyone to convince you that you now have some RIGHT to remarry someone else before that husband dies! The Lord has

given you very precise instruction in I Corinthians 7:10,11. *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: **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 words “*but and if*” show that God anticipated situations like yours to exist. But now that you have departed from your husband you need to remain unmarried or be reconciled to him. These alone are your only two Biblical options until he dies. Then and only then will you be free in God’s eyes to marry whom you will. *“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.”* (I Corinthians 7:39)

Ladies, God loves you so much! That is why He has gone to such lengths in the Bible to protect you from bad marriages in the first place. It is He who will convict you in your conscience if these words that you are reading are indeed true. Your friends, family and even church may very likely attempt to convince you that these things cannot be so. But if the Lord does indeed show you that you are in fornication with your current husband, there is only one acceptable course of action to take... **REPENT AND END THE RELATIONSHIP** by dissolving the marriage! Then depending upon the circumstances, you will have some potentially tough decisions to make. If the issue was with your unlawful husband’s past marriage and divorce, then you are now free to remarry. But take advantage of this opportunity and do not repeat the same mistake by marrying out of the Lord’s will again. However, if the issue was with your previous marriage and divorce, then as we have just seen, you are to now remain unmarried, be reconciled to your first husband, or wait until he dies.

Now as for you men, please listen closely to the following words. You are the ones who have been given by God the greater responsibility in relation to your marriages. If you have never been married before, then take advantage of this stage in your life and focus on **BEING** the man of God you will need to be if your future marriage is going to succeed. Keep yourself pure sexually and guard your eyes! Do not develop habits now that you and your wife will regret later. Why should you expect God to answer your prayers for a godly and pure young lady to marry one day when you are not behaving yourself in a Christ-like manner today?

If you and your wife are in your first marriage or your former spouses are dead, then by all means, love your wife as Christ so graciously does you. And the only way to do that is by being willing to die for her by dying to yourself first. However, if you have already married a divorced woman **AND HER HUSBAND IS STILL ALIVE**, understand that according to

what we have seen, you are more than likely committing adultery with her. The only exception to this would be if the following statements are true. If your wife's former marriage(s) were unlawful to begin with, then you are free to be married to her now. The same would apply if she was married to a lost man and he made the decision to leave her because of her faith in Christ (I Corinthians 7:15). Outside of those two scenarios, if you are married to a divorced woman, it is unlawful in God's eyes. And as we have already stated you may have done it ignorantly, but that does not release you from the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:32 which state that "*whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*"

And in a similar way, when you as the man have already remarried after your divorce AND YOUR FIRST WIFE IS STILL ALIVE, you are in adultery unless the following exceptions apply. First of all, if your unbelieving wife left you because of your faith in Christ and not because of the lack thereof, then you are free in God's eyes to be married again (I Corinthians 7:15). Another reason you would be free to remarry is if your divorce had taken place during a period of engagement. This is exactly what Paul was talking about in I Corinthians 7:25-28. "*Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.*" Many people have carelessly taken this passage out of its proper context and attempted to use it in order to justify any divorced man wanting to remarry. The Bible is simply saying that if you were a virgin "*bound*" to a wife in an official betrothal and you somehow became "*loosed*" from that agreement, you would be free to marry someone else. (The same by the way, would apply to the young lady.) The third reason you as a divorced man would be free to find another spouse, even though your first wife was still alive, is if you divorced in order to get out of an UNLAWFUL marriage (Matthew 19:9). And although it is true that your SAVED wife does not cause you to commit adultery against her when you remarry after she divorced you, remember that God knows the REAL reason! Because if it was because of your sin, do not attempt to twist God's Word any further to your own demise by thinking you can remarry.

Men, God loves you no less than He does your wives, but He does hold you more accountable. He will also convict you of your current marriage if it is indeed sinful in His sight. The issue is not what other people

may think, or what they say, or what they even may do. The issue is, however, very simply this... how does Almighty God view your marriage? If He does not approve, He will let you know. And if He begins to let you know, and you do hear that voice of the Lord telling you that you are in fornication with your current wife, there is only one acceptable course of action for you to take: **REPENT AND DISSOLVE THE UNGODLY RELATIONSHIP**. Then depending upon your circumstances, you too will have some potentially difficult decisions to make. If the problem was with your unlawful wife's past marriage and divorce, then you are now free to remarry. However, if the problem was with your previous marriage and divorce, then you are to now remain unmarried, be reconciled to your first wife, or wait until she dies.

Nobody is implying that the courses of action prescribed in this book are easy for anyone to take... in fact, quite the contrary! These choices are some of the most difficult ones that any person could make. However, they are no more difficult than the decisions faced by millions of others throughout the ages in relation to this subject. But understand this, the longer that anyone delays in obeying the Word of God, the longer it will be before he or she will experience the true blessings of the Lord. Ignorance may indeed be blissful for a season, but only the wisdom we receive and apply to our lives will be blessed forever by the Lord.

## Chapter 9

# **Erring on the Side of Grace... or Disgrace?**

*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.*  
*James 3:1-2*

This chapter is addressed to those who are spiritual leaders within their respective local churches. And it is our prayer that this message will be received as a God-sent challenge as opposed to some ill-intended attempt to undermine anyone's ministry. This book is written with the assumption that our leaders sincerely do love the God they serve as well as the precious souls that have been entrusted to their oversight. Nobody is accusing anyone of intentionally misleading others on this very touchy subject of divorce and remarriage. To be honest, the very reason this book has been so long in the process of publishing is due to a fear of leading ANYONE down a stray path toward making a wrong decision in relation to his or her current or future marriage. And to be equally honest, the reason why many men of God today have not taken this study to its natural conclusion is probably similar. However, to not come to a conclusion or to stop short of the right one should be just as frightening! But whether we are a pastor, a marriage counselor, or a leader in our church, we obviously need to know what WE believe on this controversial subject of divorce and remarriage. And hopefully we all understand that the counsel any of us give or do not give, and the decisions that we make or do not make in regard to this topic will either be rewarded or condemned by Almighty God!

The following pages contain some very shocking statements made by professing Christians belonging to churches that claim to believe the Bible here in America, over the past several years. These comments are as close to word for word as memory can recall, and are absolutely true. Much of what these people have said undoubtedly stems from a legitimate effort on their part to reconcile what they have seen allowed to take place within their churches, with what they have heard taught in the Word of God. However, a good portion of what is expressed is merely an attempt to justify one's own unbiblical marriage or those of others in their midst by consistently calling into question the process by which people in the church are judged. And if

one is going to begin addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage within his particular church, it is important to understand how many of God's people will very likely respond.

**“Legalism! The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life!”** This comment has been made more than once by people in response to anyone who would attempt to ever address the subject of divorce and remarriage. First of all, the placing of labels on other people is usually the easiest way to justify to one's self that there is no need to listen to what the other person has to say. Secondly, a “LEGALIST” is usually someone who is not as “LIBERAL” as the other person... and vice versa. There is absolutely nothing legalistic in itself about one's efforts to apply the principles of God's Word to the lives of other people. In fact, it is actually quite Biblical. And to equate New Testament truth to the “*letter*” of the Old Testament law is somewhat of a stretch, especially when we consider the passage of Scripture that is being referred to. The context of this statement is actually a contrast of the law of Moses with the New Testament itself. *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?”* (II Corinthians 3:6-8) Paul told Timothy to “*command and teach*” others to do what he said to do (I Timothy 4:11, 16). And as already discussed, the New Testament has a lot to say about divorce and remarriage. We do need to control our attitudes from becoming self-righteous when dealing with other people, however, we have absolutely no freedom to take liberties with what the Bible clearly commands.

**“How could we ever counsel two ‘unlawfully’ married people to divorce? Two wrongs don't make a right!”** Comments like this are usually made out of sincerity, but the one making the observation is sincerely wrong! The assumption that dissolving an unlawful marriage would somehow be wrong, shows a total misunderstanding of the very Scriptures themselves. As we have already seen, divorce was in fact given to Israel by God as the very SOLUTION for getting out of unbiblical relationships. There is everything good and right about us counseling God's people to repent and obey His Word.

**“By telling certain divorced people they cannot remarry, aren't you making divorce the ‘unpardonable sin’?”** Unfortunately, people within our churches have learned to use emotional labels to put others back

on their heels when faced with biblical truth. First of all, nobody is making divorce “the unpardonable sin.” Divorce is in fact often a sin, but it can be forgiven like any other sin if the person sincerely seeks forgiveness from God. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)* Though forgiven, however, this does not automatically negate certain consequences that may be experienced by the individual. For just because the person is forgiven does not mean that the Lord has given him or her permission to remarry! Remarriage, as we have seen, is usually not an option for most divorced people as it causes them to enter into an adulterous relationship. But if such a person does remarry, there is now another sin that needs to be addressed. This too can be forgiven as it is not some “unpardonable sin” either. Nevertheless, the solution for such a person is still to repent and get out of the marriage. The issue is not forgiveness but rather repentance and obedience! We cannot allow people to play word games with us, nor can we afford to fall into the same trap ourselves. Instead we must use the Scriptures to identify and define the real issues and then deal with them according to God’s revealed truth.

**“How can you sit there and tell me that I cannot divorce and remarry, when so and so, and so and so have done the exact same thing here in this church?”** Sadly, this is probably the strongest argument people have when justifying any sinful action in their lives that they may be confronted on. A church teaches more about its belief on a particular subject by what is allowed to take place in the lives of its members, than by what is ever preached from the pulpit. This is especially true when it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage. This does not mean, however, that God will not hold such people accountable to the standards that are clearly set forth in His Word! Most pastors are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place because of their own past mistakes in judgment, or those of other pastors from before them. But instead of allowing such mistakes to continue to set forth bad precedent, we must openly acknowledge them and move on. Because until we do, this type of comment will continue to prevail.

**“Well, they have already divorced, and we just now found out about it. There is nothing we as a church can do now! And since they did not directly go against anyone’s counsel in getting the divorce, they should be allowed to go on with their lives here in the church... even if they decide to remarry someone else.”** This comment is without a doubt one of the most bizarre statements ever made by a pastor claiming to be a Bible-believer. There are several misconceptions reflected by this

perspective. First of all, who says a church cannot deal with someone's sin after the fact? In the above-mentioned scenario, it had been only two months since the divorce. If a child comes home with an "F" on his grade card, or a note from his teacher for bad behavior in class the previous week, is it too late for the parent to discipline him? The issue is simple: most churches and pastors DON'T WANT to deal with such problems. So what they do is turn a blind eye until the ink has dried on the divorce papers, throw up their hands, and say, "Sorry, too late!" Secondly, even though such people may not be directly disobeying pastoral counsel when they get a divorce like the one mentioned above, they are directly disobeying the Word of God. And after all, that should be the real issue in a church that claims to believe the Bible! There is something that can be done when such a situation occurs. The couple can be called into the pastor's office and it can be explained to them why they are going to repent and reconcile with one another or be put out of the church! Because if nothing is done, then once again a precedent gets set that will preach much louder than any hundred sermons on the same subject. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Ecclesiastes 8:11)*

**"Do you mean to tell me that because my adulterous relationship caused my husband to divorce me I cannot remarry? That is a life sentence!"** Well, that might be one way to look at it, but at least the person still has a life! If such a woman had done this in the Old Testament, she would have been sentenced to death. When such comments are made by people in our churches we need to remind them of the benefits they have in the age of grace. Then we should encourage them to accept the consequences of their actions and take advantage of God's grace in order to share with others why they should not repeat the same mistake. And when we allow such a woman to have her way and remarry within the church, we have just helped a dozen others justify doing the same in their lives. There is indeed a lack of true brokenness today in the hearts of God's people when it comes to sexual sin. And honestly, not much seems to have changed over the past 3,000 years. For in Proverbs 30:20 we are reminded of a similar attitude shared by certain women of old. *"Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness."*

**"You are teaching doctrines of devils by telling certain divorced people that they cannot remarry."** Unfortunately, the more Bible knowledge some individuals gain, the more vulnerable they become to the temptation of twisting its meaning in order to make a point. The attempt to

apply I Timothy 4:13 to the subject of divorce and remarriage would have some very interesting implications in relation to other marital issues. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; **Forbidding to marry**, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”* Such a teaching for instance, would mean then that we could not forbid homosexuals from desiring to marry one another within our churches. Parents as well could not forbid their twelve-year-old children from getting married without the risk of teaching doctrines of devils. The issue being discussed by Paul in I Timothy 4 is that of someone attempting to forbid lawful marriages from taking place... not unlawful ones. As leaders, we must not be caught off guard by such feeble attempts to emotionally manipulate our beliefs or our decisions.

**“I have believed and taught my own particular way for over thirty years as a pastor on this very subject of divorce and remarriage!”** This may be true, but it is also quite possible that someone could have been WRONG for thirty years. If believing and teaching something for a long time constitutes legitimacy, then Satan has the corner on the market! Unfortunately many pastors have taught and counseled WRONG their whole ministries when it comes to the subject of divorce and remarriage. And though they may never come right out and admit it, this is exactly why they think they are right. The longer we minister or believe a certain way, the harder it is for us to change. And to admit to past mistakes means also to own up to a lot of messed up lives that have been affected by that teaching. Nobody likes to wake up one day and realize he is wrong about something he has taught for a long time. But as we have already said, this is exactly what must begin to take place within our churches. We need pastors and leaders who are willing to stand up and say that they now realize that they have been wrong, and then begin to slowly re-teach God’s people sound doctrine in relation to this subject.

**“We know we are going to make errors in our judgment concerning certain situations, so when we err, let’s make sure to err on the side of grace.”** All of us who are leaders within our churches know that as humans, we have the potential to be wrong from time to time when it comes to giving out counsel and making decisions concerning spiritual issues. However, nobody likes to be wrong and most of us do not plan to be wrong. But that is exactly what happens so often when it comes to our modern day way of addressing tough issues like divorce and remarriage.

Unfortunately, there are pastors and churches out there that live by this philosophy. Now admittedly, that sounds very spiritual on the surface, but that is not the best way to prepare ourselves as leaders in our churches for making future judgment calls in any area of the Christian life. For to “ERR ON THE SIDE OF GRACE” is still error! *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 3,4)* This is an extremely dangerous philosophy for a church to adopt, as it can lead to a cheapening of our understanding of one of God’s most precious gifts... His grace. And once we cease to comprehend what grace is really all about, it is only a matter of time until we find ourselves erring so often on THE SIDE OF GRACE that we develop a lifestyle of justifying sin in our lives. By the way, a much better and more Biblical philosophy of ministry to live by is found in James 1:16. *“Do not err, my beloved brethren.”*

**“They obtained a legal divorce, so therefore the laws of our land recognize it. And since they are no longer ‘legally’ husband and wife, they are free to remarry. After all, Romans 13 says that we are commanded to obey the laws of the land.”** Once again, we see that a little Bible knowledge has the potential to do a lot of damage if it is not properly put to use. The Bible does indeed teach us that we are to obey the laws of our country. However, we are never expected to do this if it causes us to disobey God’s Word in the process. This comment brings to light the reality of how we will be viewed by others in the world. But it is sad when this perspective is shared by professing Christians within our churches. Such thinking is usually best answered by applying a little common sense to the conversation. And in this specific instance, common sense would go a long ways. For if this person’s rationale was accepted, one day soon we would have to allow same sex unions within our churches as well.

**“Well some people just think they are the spiritual police when it comes to divorce and remarriage, don’t they?”** Once again, LABELS, LABELS, LABELS! Whether one is simply a member of a church or even if he is a leader, we all make judgment calls every day about a lot of different things. In the past few decades, we have allowed the more outspoken, liberal-minded people in our society to talk us into thinking it is wrong to judge. Matthew 7:1 is one of the most misquoted and misunderstood Scriptures in the Bible. *“Judge not, that ye be not judged.”*

Most people use verses in the Bible like little hand grenades to be thrown back and forth to prove a point. However, the context of this particular verse not only does not re-enforce what most want it to mean, but actually teaches the exact opposite. It is NOT wrong to judge. Jesus is simply telling us to be sure and judge ourselves honestly FIRST so we can help others with their problems. If not, we are hypocrites. *“Thou hypocrite, **first** cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and **then** shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”* (Matthew 7:5.) The problem with most judgment in our churches today is the hypocrisy and impartiality of the judges. And when it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage, we definitely cannot afford any more mistrials! The solution is not for us to stop judging marital problems, but rather to identify the qualified judges. Paul says if a man is overtaken in a fault, the spiritually mature are to step in and attempt to restore him to the Lord. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are **spiritual**, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”* (Galatians 6:1,2)

There is absolutely no problem that the local church cannot judge. We are reminded of this principle as we listen to the Apostle’s stern words in I Corinthians 6:1-7 *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall **judge** the world? and if the world shall be **judged** by you, are ye unworthy to **judge** the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall **judge** angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have **judgments** of things pertaining to this life, set them to **judge** who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to **judge** between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?”*

It is to our SHAME as professing Bible-believing Christians when we say nobody has the ability to judge the sinful marital decisions made within our individual churches. Just as the Lord said, we would rather allow our people to take their issues to a secular judge and let him or her “solve” the problems, than have to deal with them ourselves. What a joke! What a disgrace! Why don’t we just stand up and shout at the world, “We don’t know what we are doing. Our people’s lives are a mess... would YOU please help us solve our problems by deciding who gets the kids, and how much money he needs to pay in child support, etc.” People can call us the

“spiritual police”, or whatever they want, but if we do not have anyone within our churches to judge between a husband and wife (or any other people) then we are in a world of hurt! We do not need any more REVISIONISTS in our churches today who change God’s Word to fit our modern day lifestyles, but what we do need is judges who will strictly adhere to the LETTER of the New Testament, and then seek God’s face to be able to spiritually discern the right course of action every single time.

Pastors and Christian leaders within our respective churches (or Bible colleges), you without a doubt are crucial to seeing this whole awakening become a reality in the lives of God’s people. What will YOU do in response to this revelation? If you have ever at all studied this issue out, you know how complex it is. However, let’s be honest... we have made it harder than it really is. We have allowed the devil to wreak havoc within our churches by allowing God’s people to continue down this path. Many of you have inherited ministries that are so embedded with divorced and remarried couples, that you do not know where to begin. How about starting by getting honest with God! You know how many years you have taught this wrong. You know how many marriages you have affected by your unbiblical counsel. Confess it to the Lord and REPENT! Then take your leadership through a study on this topic and commit to start drawing some lines in the sand and turn this thing around. Immediately alter the way you counsel people in marriage-related problems, and be willing to admit to your congregation errors in previous teaching.

Depending upon how long you have been there, how many divorces you have allowed, and how many unbiblical remarriages you have performed will undoubtedly determine the degree of fallout within your church. With rare exceptions you will encounter opposition and resentment like you have never experienced before! Some of your best friends will not give you a chance to even explain yourself to them. Some of your biggest leaders will rise up against you and question your authority. People who you thought had sound Biblical marriages but in reality did not, will come out of the woodwork and make your life difficult. You will probably lie in bed at night wondering how many people will leave your church, and how many more will refuse to join when they find out what you believe.

If you survive the transition, understand that you have signed up for a life long journey down a different path of ministry. You will have to be the kind of judge that will make the tough calls. But if you pray for God’s mercy and grace, He will give you His wisdom like He did King Solomon to do judgment and justice in the lives of His people. *“And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be*

*numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself **understanding to discern judgment**; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.” (I Kings 3:8-12)*

At that point you can rest assured that He will not put you in situations that you cannot handle, but will rather give you ones that help you set **PRECEDENTS**. “*Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. And this woman’s child died in the night; because she overlaid it. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold it was not my son, which I did bear. And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.” (I Kings 3:16-22)*

And when you apply that wisdom the way God intends, the fear of God will permeate in the midst of His people. “*Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead; and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. And all Israel **heard of the judgment which the king had judged**; and they feared the king: for they saw that **the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.**” (I Kings*

3:23-28.) Then and only then will the Lord be glorified in the marriages of His people!

Nobody in his right mind would ever look forward to making such radical changes in his ministry. Never-the-less, the time has come for us as leaders within our churches to respond to this spiritual pandemic before it's too late... because one day soon it will be! You may have to scrap the multi-million dollar building project. You may have to eat a lot of crow, but it is a small price to pay compared to the losses you will otherwise sustain at the judgment seat of Christ!

## Chapter 10

# Is There Not A Cause?

*And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?  
I Samuel 17:29*

When faced with the choice of listening to the taunting cries of a God-defying giant (while crouching behind his sheep) or doing something about it, a young man named David decided to take a stand. And as his motives were being scrutinized by those who had elected to take a seat, the young shepherd boy posed to them this question, ***“Is there not a cause?”*** (*I Samuel 17:29*) When confronted with the blatant rebellion of God’s own people in relation to fornication, the young son of a priest by the name of Phinehas, literally took matters into his own hands. And though he did not say a word, his actions spoke loud and clear as he thrust his javelin into the bodies of the man and woman who were engaged in the very act of their sin. *“And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.”* (*Numbers 25:6-8*) And as he looked around at all of the others who stood gazing back at him in disbelief, he must have silently asked himself the same question, ***“Is there not a cause?”*** This book is written with the same question in mind. And it is my firm belief that there are still some causes out there worth standing up for! However, it is also my conviction that the way in which we stand is just as important in the sight of God as the very stand we take itself. Or to use the words of my good friend in the ministry Doug Van Meter, “It is just as important to have the proper DISPOSITION in relation to any discussion about the Bible as it is to have the correct POSITION.”

People today often find themselves befuddled on important issues, such as divorce and remarriage, and are simply searching for the truth. However, truth is never determined by majority rule, nor can it ever be measured by the percentage of people that respond to its message. In fact quite the opposite is true. Most people are almost always wrong about

everything when it comes to spiritual issues. There were only eight people that boarded the ark prepared by Noah, believing that the forecast actually did indeed call for rain that day. The other hundred-plus million perished in their unbelief. Truth however, is always available and ever present throughout the ages, because truth is determined by the Lord. He cannot lie! *“In hope of eternal life, which **God**, that **cannot lie**, promised before the world began.”* (Titus 1:2) He only speaks the truth, because He is the Truth! *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* (John 14:6) And even if the whole world were to come together and unanimously agree about one thing, if they did not line up with the truth of God’s Word, then all that would mean is that they all had been wrong! *“God forbid: yea, **let God be true, but every man a liar**; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”* (Romans 3:4) Unfortunately, the whole divorce and remarriage debate only proves this point once again.

This book has been written in a sincere attempt to discover the truth about what one person thinks about the issue of divorce and remarriage... and that ONE PERSON would happen to be Almighty God. It is my heart’s prayer that this has been accomplished, or at the very least that the process has begun. The ultimate measure of success will not be determined by how many people read this book, nor by how many like what they read, nor even by how many respond to the message. This book will be successful only to the extent that it has attained to the accuracy which is found within God’s only written source of infallibly revealed truth to mankind...the Bible. *“Sanctify them through thy truth: **thy word is truth**.”* (John 17:17) And my desire as already stated, has not been merely to intellectually stimulate your mind as a reader in order to provoke you to think about what I believe to be true. But what I do prefer rather to accomplish is to stir your heart in order to provoke you to take action, according to what is true. *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children **walk in truth**.”* (III John 4)

I will probably never write another book. The writing of this one has been somewhat of a stretch for me, to say the least. If the truth would be known, I do not particularly care much to read other people’s books. I believe that there is way too much of an emphasis today in most circles to stay read up on all of the latest trends or debates within Christianity. And just as Solomon said, there has never been a shortage of what man thinks about any particular subject in life. *“And further, by these, my son, be admonished: **of making many books there is no end**; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:12) We as Christians need to spend a lot more time with the Lord in the Book that already has all the answers,

instead of reading what everybody else says about it! Having said that, I do believe that the Lord has placed upon my heart a burden and a sense of urgency to write on this particular subject of divorce and remarriage. And due to my own personal opinion about the writing of books in general, I am compelled to take a few closing pages in this book to explain the specifics as to why I am convinced that this is so. This may not prove anything to you as a reader, but at the very least this brief testimony may possibly encourage you in your own personal walk with the Lord to discover the plans and purposes that He has for your life.

All throughout history, the Lord has delighted in using His people to accomplish His purpose in establishing a kingdom for Himself. And just as each individual is different, so it is with the particular plan that the Father has for that person's life. This is all so incredible to me, but what amazes me even more is the way in which the Lord reveals His plans to us. And as my wife and I can testify from our lives, He is just as unique in the way He reveals the plan to us than the very plan itself. One of the reasons why so many Christians spend their lives constantly second-guessing every major decision they make, is because they have never learned this principle. An old preacher once said it this way, "Never doubt in the dark what God already showed to you in the light." Unfortunately, most believers have rarely if ever experienced the thrill of having God speak to them through their circumstances, and then clearly confirm the message to them through His Word. And consequently like Jacob, they spend their whole lives manipulating people and circumstances, thereby robbing themselves of the very confidence and resolve required to truly impact this world for Christ.

I can clearly look at my Christian life thus far, and identify four distinctly different phases of ministry that the Lord has brought me through, including the one I am in now. I did not recognize the first phase until after the fact, but the next three were plainly visible before they actually ever began. And what has been fascinating for both me and my wife RoAnn to see, is the way in which God has specifically confirmed them to us...through our six precious children! After we were engaged to be married in 1986 (the same year both of us came to know the Lord) we began discussing and praying about what size of a family God wanted us to have. And having heard several testimonies of couples being blessed with large families, we asked the Lord to give us six children, if it was in line with His plan for us. The passage that we believed the Lord was confirming this with was Psalm 127:3-5. "*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. **Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall***

*not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.”* And since the quiver on my bow could hold exactly six arrows, then six children was exactly what we wanted!

Six months after we were married in 1987, my wife and I were challenged by the Lord to give almost all of our savings to missions. And with the hope and anticipation of having a large family, we figured it would be the only time in our marriage we would ever be able to do something like this. For us, this was a huge step of faith! Not knowing what the Lord would do, we simply thanked Him ahead of time for how He would take care of our needs. We claimed Malachi 3:10-11 as a promise from God’s Word as to His provision for a blessing, as well as His protection from any disasters. *“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if **I will** not open you the windows of heaven, and **pour you out a blessing**, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And **I will rebuke the devourer** for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; nether shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.”* (Malachi 3:10-11) We both had a relative amount of peace...that is until we found out one week later that RoAnn was expecting! What followed this unexpected news was several months of doubting and questioning...and a lot of second-guessing as to our recent decision to sacrificially give to the Lord. But despite our wavering faith, the Lord not only blessed us with our first of five boys (**Enoch**) but He provided the money to pay for all of the expenses before they were due. And what was amazing to us, was the fact that the Lord not only provided the money to within one dollar of what we had need of (FORTY-EIGHT CENTS to the good), but that He did it without us ever saying a word to anyone!

Less than one year later, we were talking one day and realized that the Lord had miraculously given us back the same amount of savings that we had previously given to Him. And after more discussion and prayer, we decided to do the same thing again... give our money to the Lord. Except this time we specifically gave the money to a missionary going to South Africa. Again we thanked the Lord, not knowing what would happen. And once again, a week or two later, we realized my wife was expecting. Though we had been through this already before, there was still the lingering uncertainty as to whether we did the right thing or not in sacrificially giving to the Lord. We continued to confess our imperfect faith to the Lord, and to seek His provisions for our upcoming needs. And to our amazement, not only did the Lord bless us with our only little girl (**Joy**) but He once again provided for the expenses the day before they were due. And when I went in

to pay the doctor, we literally had TWO CENTS remaining to our name! Slowly but surely, the Lord was establishing a pattern in our lives that we would both soon be able to see.

Another year went by and I was beginning to feel the pressure of the need to go on a missions trip in order to fulfill one of the requirements of our Bible Institute. Not knowing where the money would come from, I signed up for a trip to South Africa. By now the expenses of two children had caught up with us, and we had absolutely no savings whatsoever. But in a way that only a creative, heavenly Father could do, He provided the exact amount of money for the trip. However, the night before I was to depart, I sat crying in the kitchen when I realized that I had to leave my family at home with only SEVENTY CENTS, until my paycheck came in later that week. But when I boarded the plane the next day, an unanticipated peace came over me. I was reminded that the Lord had never dropped the ball in our lives before, so why should I have believed that He would start doing it then? And it was on this very trip that the Lord placed a burden on my heart to be a missionary to South Africa.

The trip opened my eyes to a world of opportunities I could never before have imagined. When I arrived back in the States, I found out yet again that RoAnn was expecting our third child (**Caleb**). But it was not until the next year that the Lord showed me plainly what He had been orchestrating in our lives up until that time. And as I prepared a message to preach at our Bible Institute's graduation service (which was actually centered around our testimony of God's blessings in relation to our giving to missions) the Lord confirmed in His Word what He had already been doing for us in the past, as well as what He had planned for us to do in the future. It was time for us now to not just give our money to missions, but to be willing to give our lives to missions as well. And in less than two years from that day, we were on the foreign field and fully funded...without ever once asking for support!

With phase one of our ministry now over, and the second well on its way, we found ourselves rejoicing in the Lord's work there in South Africa. By this time our fourth and fifth children had been born (**Micaiah** and **Josiah**). But as I mentioned in the foreword of this book, disheartening news from our sending church back in the States concerning marriages which were falling apart, caused me to think about what the Lord might have us to do. And as I reflected on the way in which the Lord had led us to that point in the ministry, I wondered if He was preparing us for yet another phase ahead. If indeed I had been faithful there in South Africa like the prophet Micaiah of old to SPEAK what the Lord had told me to speak (I

Kings 22:14), was He now wanting me to go back to our church like King Josiah and DO what I thought He was telling me to do? (II Kings 23:1-25). From my distant perspective, it seemed so obvious that our church, through one man's wreckless lifestyle and teaching, had not been listening to the voice of God in relation to divorce and remarriage. All I wanted to do was to help clean up the mess! However, I did not want to manipulate our circumstances by asking the pastor to let us return home. If there was going to be a move, it had to be him asking us. Then less than one year later, after committing to the Lord that I would be willing to go back and have such a Josiah-styled ministry of tearing down the idols relating to divorce and remarriage, I was back on staff in that church.

That third phase of our ministry was without a doubt the most difficult one of all. The following brief overview should reveal just exactly how bad things were. In less than six years of ministering in that church, I personally had to deal with over 100 people who were involved in one kind of sexual sin or another. Some of these people were married, some were not. Some of them were newer members, but amazingly most were not! The majority, when confronted, seemingly repented of their actions and remained there in the church. However, a few dug in their heels and continued down the pathway of sin. These were ALL brought before the pastoral staff and were ALL unanimously placed on church discipline. During this same time period, I also counseled with dozens of people who desired to get married... many of whom were divorced. However, due to the nature of most of their divorces, I turned down twice as many ceremonies than I ever actually performed. I saw dozens of couples as well during those six years come in for marriage counseling due to one problem or another. Most stayed together, but several wound up divorced. And as my policy was, whenever a divorce took place which involved two members of our church, at least one person was brought before the pastoral staff for church discipline. Eleven such people were once again unanimously dealt with according to I Corinthians 5. Not once did a single pastor ever publicly disagree! How could they? Not only was every one of these people obviously the guilty party in their particular marriage conflict, but each one was clearly unrepentant in his or her sin.

Tearing down such idols was not only a full-time job in itself, but it was easier said than done. However, because I knew beyond all shadow of doubt that the Lord had brought us back, I never doubted my calling. In fact quite the opposite! The more I dealt with people and realized how confused they were, the more determined I was to stay and make a difference. However, not everyone shared my same enthusiasm for keeping marriages

together and tearing down the idols of sin. What I soon came to realize was that several of the other pastors who were responsible for the remaining seventy-five percent or so of the adults were grossly inconsistent in their handling of similar situations. This was particularly true when it came to the issue of divorce and remarriage. As a result, two distinctly different philosophies of ministry were operating in the same church at the same time. And because of this lack of consistency in dealing with people's marriages, unfortunately not much if anything ever changed. So with our sixth and final son named **Ezra** having already been born, I awaited the Lord's direction on our fourth and final phase of ministry.

After much prayer and soul-searching, it became more than clear to me that staying in that church was no longer possible without undermining the authority of the Senior Pastor. And it was at that point that I turned in my resignation. Even though I had no regrets as to the path which we had taken, I did have some initial doubts as to whether or not I had been faithful to the Lord to do all that could be done. But looking back from my perspective now some three years later, I am quite convinced that I could not have done anything else. And what I definitely could not have done while pastoring in that church, was to speak out against divorce and remarriage the way I am doing now. I am not mad, nor am I even the slightest bit bitter...but what I am, like Ezra the priest, is **READY!** *"This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a **ready** scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him...**For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments...And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, **Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.**"*** (Ezra 7:6,10; 10:10-11) I am **READY** to begin this final phase of my ministry for the Lord. I am **READY** to take a stand. I am **READY** to finish this book and to see it published, and to then get out its message to as many people as will listen. And my prayer is that the Lord will take my tongue as well and use it as *"the pen of a **ready** writer."* (Psalm 45:1) For you see, this book is not just a "book" to me... it is an extension of my life and of my family. And the writing of it is just as much a part of God's plan for my life than anything else by His grace I have ever done.

Yes, I do believe there are still some causes out there worth standing up for! But before a person can stand up, he must first be summoned to

WAKE UP! Now one of my jobs, as it just so happens to be in my house, is to wake up seven other people almost every day of the week. I have done this for many years, and in the process I have learned a thing or two about sleepers. Some people are light sleepers, and some are not. Some people wake up at the sound of their name, while others I am convinced, could sleep through a hurricane! Most of my little sleepers fall into the second category. And I am constantly amazed at what can be going on around them while they peacefully continue in their log-sawing state of rest. Now this is not only true literally, but it is just as true spiritually as well. And the truth of this matter is this: there are a lot of churches out there today that are asleep! And somewhere in the midst of that sleep a whole host of unlawfully divorced and remarried people have QUIETLY come crashing in and found themselves new homes. But how could this have happened without anyone being aware of what was going on? Easy...everyone was not just sleeping, but they were all without exception SOUND asleep!

Imagine just how difficult it would be for a typical modern day, liberal church that had gradually accepted homosexuals into its membership over the years, to one day WAKE UP to that mistake. To stand up and say, “No more!” would mean scores of people that had been led to think that they were blameless in their relationships would immediately take offense. They would either stay and make a fight or leave in a fit of rage. Doesn’t that sound so bizarre to you? I know it does to me. What in the world were they thinking of when they allowed that kind of person into their membership in the first place? Couldn’t they see in Scripture how obviously wicked that lifestyle was? How could they have slept through all of that in the first place? It makes you want to just scratch your head, doesn’t it?...Well before you start scratching, maybe you ought to ponder on just one more thought. Don’t you think John the Baptist would probably stand there and scratch his head (IF HE COULD FIND IT) with the same amazement if he looked at the typical Bible-believing church today, as he tried to surmise how in the world we became what we have become in relation to divorce and remarriage? It is time for all of us to WAKE UP. *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”* (Romans 13:11-12) Because if we do not WAKE UP to this forgotten sin pretty soon, it will one day be too late.