

THE REFLECTOR

BULLETIN OF CHURCH OF CHRIST, FULTONDALE, ALABAMA

Damnable Doctrines Defending Divorces

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"--Matt. 19:3

Judging from the divorce rate of today, one would think that Jesus must have answered with a resounding, "YES". But, he did not! Instead of "any and every reason" (New International Version), he gave one reason--fornication or sexual immorality (New American Standard Version). One may not like this narrow view. One may look for an out. But, after all the protesting has been done and all the "loop-holes" have been devised--the law will still give divorce for but one cause!

Seemingly unsurmountable problems and unsolvable situations cannot set aside what Jesus plainly says.

I am amazed and alarmed at the length that some brethren are now going to in defending some divorces and marriages. California cannot claim a monopoly of such preachers! I once could count on one hand all the preachers that I knew who would say that one could obey the gospel and still live in a marriage where a former partner had been divorced for other than fornication. Now I could take off my shoes and still not count them all!

What has happened? Could it be that they have grown weary of having to figure out complicated cases? Could it be that they are ruled more by emotions than scripture--especially when it involves people close to them? Could it be that such marital entanglements are so common, with no social stigma now attached to them, that they have conditioned themselves to accept them? Could it be that it's just easier to tell one who wants to become a Christian or to be fellowshiped by the congregation that they can continue their marriage--by finding some way to take adultery out of such marriages? I have no way of knowing why positions are taken. But, I do know what is being taught and it must be dealt with in plain language.

Those who are charged to "preach the word ...REPROVE, REBUKE, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" must expose any doctrine that results in adultery. They must not ignore any doctrine that puts brethren into a position of fellowshiping an adulterer. We now notice four doctrines that are dangerous, if not down right damnable in their effect:

FORNICATE TO FREEDOM: There are brethren that will defend the right of one put away for fornication to remarry without committing sin. How about them apples? A man can fornicate, giving his wife reason to divorce him, then he is free to marry another without sin. He sees this pretty young thing that he would like to marry, but he can't do it because he is already married. He has no grounds for divorce. His wife will not give him a divorce because she thinks fornication is the only grounds for divorce. So, how can he get her to free him so he can marry the apple of his eye? He will fornicate to freedom! He will even give his wife the proof of his unfaithfulness, so she will divorce him--leaving him free to marry again without sin.

Those who take such a position may not like my description of the consequences of their doctrine--but it is there just the same. The scriptures give only the one who puts another away for fornication the right to remarry without sinning. One has to add to the word of God to say that the put-away fornicator can also remarry.

REPENT AND STAY: A number of brethren teach that one who commits adultery by remarrying must not dissolve this marriage in order to be forgiven. It would make no difference how many divorces and marriages one has had and for whatever cause, the person can repent (??) and stay with the partner he has now.

"When is adultery not adultery?", is the big question. It's kind of a "now you see it, and now you don't" situation. It was adultery before he repented (?) -- but it is not after repentance! He is still living with the same woman, doing the same thing, that he did before his repentance (?) --but it is no longer adultery? Now, this makes for an interesting situation. What if his wife will not repent? Is her relations with him still sin, while his relations with her is no longer sin? That is some kind of trick? She is committing adultery with him, but he is no longer committing adultery with her in the same act!

This makes about as much sense as two men giving up honest jobs and now gamble for a living. One becomes convinced that he should obey the gospel. He knows that he should not have left his honest employment but he has already done it. He is now making a good living by gambling. It seems almost too much to have to give up this means of making a living. He is not even sure that he could get his old job back or any other honorable employment. He has to make house payments, car payments, and buy the necessities of life

for his family. It would present such a hardship on him and his family to have to give up gambling now. But, surely the Lord will forgive him. So, he presents his problem to a preacher. The preacher tells him that if he will just repent of having abandoned honest labor and turned to a life of gambling in the first place--then all future rolls of the dice can now be considered "working with his hands that which is good"! But, let's not forget the other man who gave up honest labor and gambles with him. His dice rolling is still gambling because he has not repented. Believe such if you can!

It is just too bad that John the Baptist was not aware of this loop-hole. He was preaching repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. Instead of telling Herod that "it is not lawful for you to have her" (See Matt. 14), he could have at least have added "until you repent and are baptized". I suspect it would have been easier to have brought Herod to repentance had he been told that repentance would make "it lawful for you to have her".

"LET HIM DEPART" AND LOOK FOR ANOTHER?

Some say that I Cor. 7:15 gives a believer, whose partner leaves him through no fault of his own, the right to marry another. The passage does not say that! It releases the believer in such cases from the bondage (obligation) to "dwell with her" (v. 13) but it does not say a thing about his being free to marry another. In fact, verse 11, strongly suggests the opposite! While the passage contemplates circumstance that would make it impossible for him to dwell with her in peace and loyalty to Christ and thus he must dwell apart from her--there is nothing there to allow divorce or remarriage! If so, where is it?

Even if I Cor. 7:15 did say what some seem to think it says, it would be dangerous to apply it for all time. Paul was dealing with the life of Christians at that time under "the present distress" (v. 26). He strongly advised against marriage at all under those conditions (verses 1,27,40). But, in normal times and circumstances this advice did not apply (See 1 Tim. 5:14). But, we emphasize again I Cor. 7:15 says nothing about DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE even during "THE PRESENT DISTRESS"! But, does it not say that "a brother or a sister is NOT UNDER BONDAGE in such cases?", we are asked. Yes it does. But "not under bondage" to what? She is not under bondage to the obligation to "dwell with him" at the expense of peace and faithfulness to God. But that is a far cry from saying the "marriage bond" is broken and he is now free to divorce her and marry another!

DIVORCE FOR ANY CAUSE BUT REMARRIAGE FOR ONE CAUSE. A goodly number of folks seem to

think that there is little wrong with getting a divorce for just about any unpleasantness, as long as one remains single after his divorce. They think no sin has been committed. While ADULTRY would not be the sin without marriage to another--sin is involved none the less. In Matt. 19:1-9, the subject is DIVORCE, FOR WHAT CAUSE? Jesus points, in verse 9, to just what sin is committed in "marrying another" after the divorce. It is adultery. But, he is not saying NO sin is involved in the divorce itself. In fact, the sin of "putting asunder what God hath joined together" is involved. It is not "lawful" to "put away his wife for every cause", hence sinful. Sin is transgression of law (I John 3:4). While Moses "suffered you to PUT AWAY YOUR WIVES" (for every cause) it was not lawful from the beginning nor is it now.

It is a mistake to assume that one can divorce for any and every cause and be sinless so long as he does not marry again. Or that he can just remain single until the other one commits adultery (by remarrying or otherwise) that such frees him to remarry. In fact, Matt. 5:32, shows that if one divorces his wife (or husband) and she remarries he "causes her to commit adultery". This is why I advise against one consenting to a divorce unless he knows that his partner has committed fornication.

Divorce is a serious problem, even among members of the church. Preachers are devising doctrines that permit it and even remarriage for many causes. Some limit their teaching along this line to private counseling. But this is dangerous to the church. It may cause couples to feel spiritually secure in an adulterous marriage. Brethren (and especially elders) would do well to ask their preachers what they believe and advise along these lines. We think brethren would be surprised at some of the answers.--Edward O. Bragwell

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

of the

CHURCH OF CHRIST
1116 Walker's Chapel Road
Fultondale, Alabama

SUNDAYS:

Bible Classes..... 9:45 A.M.
Worship..... 10:45 A.M.
Worship..... 6:30 P.M.

WEDNESDAYS:

Bible Classes..... 7:30 P.M.

What It Means To Be A Preacher

I am a preacher's son. I grew up in a preacher's home. For over forty years now I have been preaching. I began in May, 1936. The things I write here are from my personal experiences as a preacher and a preacher's son:

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS FIRST OF ALL TO STUDY.

To study the Bible, to read it, meditate on it, and never stop studying it. To study it first of all to live it in your own life, and then to study it to teach it to others.

It means to be able to study in your office, or at home or in your car, or on a bus, or in a hotel room, in the homes of brethren, anywhere, anytime. It means to study in spite of worries, noise, phone calls, visits, or any other distraction. It means to study whether you want to or not because you have a lesson to present at a stated time, and you must be ready.

It means to study language and how to make it clear, to study other languages so you can preach in them, to study people so you will know how to deal with them, to study the perplexing problems facing the church (only a coward refuses to face up to them. A weakling lets others do his studying for him and then tell him what to believe.)

It means to study sermons, to learn how to outline notes logically, to reoutline them, to polish them and revise them, to find illustrations and examples to strengthen them, to search out ways to make people see what the lessons mean and how they apply to them.

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS TO GO.

It means to go by train, bus, plane, a-foot, horseback, or on a bicycle. It means to spend many dreary hours waiting, waiting in a bus station or an airline terminal. It means to sit behind a steering wheel until it becomes an instrument of torture. It means to walk the crowded streets of the city, to trudge the dusty byways of country communities. It means to knock on doors, to walk up flights of stairs. It means to enter the most barren hovel in the filthiest slum, or to walk the soft carpets of the rich man's mansion, and be a gracious guest either place. It means to cross state lines and national boundaries.

It means to learn to sleep in any kind of bed, eat any kind of food, adapt to any circumstance. It means to have to write letters home, to tell your children goodbye and hello, to wish your wife could always be with you. It means to pack and to unpack suitcases.

It means to move to another town, to break your children's hearts as they leave friends and schools they love, and to do this over and over.

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS TO TALK.

To talk to a large crowd, to a small group or to an individual. It means to preach your best sermon to one person. It means to explain, to repeat, to reason, to proclaim, to rebuke, to exhort. It means to talk in simple language so all can understand, but to make your lesson so interesting that all will listen. It means to preach when babies are crying, jet planes are flying overhead and latecomers to the service are trying to find seats.

It means to talk whether you are in the mood or not, when you are tired, sleepy, hungry, discouraged. It means to talk even to people who are prejudiced and rebellious, and to those who will twist your words and try to make you say something you did not say.

It means to carry on a conversation, not only about the Bible and the church, but about the weather, the other man's work, his family, his ideas and his hobbies. It means to listen when the other man is talking, listen with sympathy to people's problems, answer their questions, withstand their criticism. It means to refrain from talking when it is better to be quiet.

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE.

It means to love them, good people, weak people, stubborn people, sinful people, church members, and the unconverted, other preachers, elders, deacons, your friends, and even your enemies.

It means never to trust people too much, but to always believe they can be helped to do better. It means to get along with them, but not give in to their whims.

It means to be with people when every fiber of your being yearns for the privilege of being alone. It means to meet new people, and always more new people and love it, yet to remember old friends. It means to know people's names, where they live, how to find them, what to say to them, and how to get them to listen.

It means to be with people in times of stark tragedy and to let them know that you weep with them. It means to be with them at weddings and at times of great joy, to be with them in that time of the most sublime joy, when they obey the Gospel. It means to be willing to run little errands for people,

yet not be imposed on. It means to be willing to do the humblest chore for them, yet render the greatest service to them, teach them the truth. It means to receive favors, to be grateful, to be sincere. It means to change people, to lift them up and to show them by example.

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS TO FIGHT.

It means to fight the devil everywhere and anywhere you find him. It means to fight him in your own heart, to buffet your own body in order to overcome laziness, weakness, secret sins, biting tongue, quick temper, egotism, selfishness, love of money, love of luxury, hate, jealousy, and cowardice. It means to fight apostasy in the church, and this won't make you popular. It means to fight worldliness, first of all in yourself, and then in others.

It means to oppose false teachers in the world, and also in the church. It means to oppose ambitious brethren, those people who have abounding zeal, but no knowledge, and sometimes, no sense. It means to oppose lazy brethren with no zeal at all. It means to stand beside weak brethren and help them in

their fight until they can stand alone.

It means to preach sermons you wish you didn't have to preach. It means to argue, debate, explain, and to reason. It means to fight when others refuse to fight, and sometimes it means to stand alone for what is right, as friends turn their backs on you one by one.

TO BE A PREACHER MEANS TO BE HAPPY.

It means to have the respect and comradeship of the finest people in the world, the saints of God.

It means to have the thrill of getting the best possible view of the power of God's word as it works in the lives of people to change them and lift them up.

It means to be engaged full time in the most exciting, satisfying, completely fulfilling work in the world.

It means to have a kind of happiness few others dream of. Let those who don't find happiness in preaching, get out of the pulpit. They don't have enough understanding of what it means to be a preacher to be any good at it anyway! -- Mack Kercheville

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