



# The Reflector

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## Multiple Marriages - a growing problem

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Multiple marriages raise few questions or eyebrows in our present society. Consequently, we have friends, relatives, and brethren in second and third marriages -- without having been widowed. This is a problem for Christians, both individually and collectively. It affects our evangelistic efforts. Many prospective Christians are in multiple marriages.

Shall we hold to the "old line" that second marriages result in adultery *unless the former companion was put away for fornication*? Shall we insist that such repent and turn from adultery before we can fellowship them? Shall we decide we have been too narrow in the past and decide that maybe there are other circumstances (desertion, for instance) that would give a Christian the right to take another partner?

Brethren, we must not allow our zeal for church growth or our sympathy for those involved to color our thinking on this subject. It is awfully easy for us to allow our emotions to overrule what the Bible clearly says. A happily married couple studies with us and learns the truth about the Lord and His church. They want to be baptized and become members of the Lord's church. We know that

either or both of them are in their second marriages -- without having divorced the former mate(s) for fornication. It is easy to think: "This couple would make such fine members of the church, so why should their marital status be a problem? Since they are now happily married, surely there must be some way that they can remain as they are and still be Christians."

Then, there is that good sister whose husband just walked off, leaving her with those little

people have slipped into them without having had proper guidance to steer them away from them. Ending such habits and relationships can be emotionally traumatic to the extreme. Often innocent parties are hurt in the process. We may have all the compassion and sympathy in the world for such people. The bottom line is still that repentance demands that they break the habits and sever the relationships -- no matter how pleasant the habits or passionate the

"I know that men are perverting 1 Corinthians 7:15. They use this passage to justify *another* way into a second marriage of one who has a living mate. The truth of the matter is that 1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches no such thing. The 'bondage' of this passage is not the same as the 'bound' in 1 Corinthians 7:27,39 and Romans 7:2." -- Elmer Moore in *The Preceptor*

children. As far as she knows, he was never unfaithful to her. He was just a sorry bum. Surely, there is some way that she can marry again and have a happy home. For a tender-hearted and compassionate person such circumstances can easily sway his thinking to accept a more liberal view of divorce and re-marriage than is allowed by a strict view of the wording of Matthew 19:9.

Sinful habits and relationships are hard to break. Many good

relationships. It is a part of the cost that must be counted and the price paid in order to be a disciple of Jesus. One who makes up his mind to leave all for Christ will make the necessary sacrifices.

As multiple marriages multiply, we believe brethren need to increase their awareness of what it means to the church. Brethren, overly eager for church growth and/or overly sensitive to emotional ties, are

## Marriage Certificate

John Doe  
**Divorced**  
Mary Smith

## Marriage Certificate

John Doe  
**Divorced**  
Suzan Jones

## Marriage Certificate

John Doe  
And  
Annie Brown

going to redouble their efforts to find ways to accommodate the church to the realities of modern society. We have seen the trend developing for several years now. Several theories have been advanced to allow one to be considered a faithful Christian while remaining in a second marriage -- even if he did not put away his former partner for fornication.

The first theory that we remember surfacing is that alien sinners are not amenable to the law of Christ. So, any marriages contracted while an alien really do not count. One can only be held responsible for what he does from conversion forward. So, the marriage one is in at the time he becomes amenable to the law Christ is the only one that counts. The absurdity of this idea has been shown by many in many ways. If a alien is not amenable to the law of Christ at all, then how could he become a sinner (alien or otherwise), since sin is lawlessness (1 John 4:3)? Lately, some have modified this position and say that while, generally speaking, aliens are subject to the law of Christ, Matthew 19:9 is a "kingdom passage". It only applies to those in the kingdom and has nothing to do with what an alien has done in the past. Therefore, he may have married often in the days of his alienation, but Matthew 19:9 can only be applied after he becomes a Christian. Jesus did not say that divorcing for just any reason would be unlawful only after the kingdom comes. He said that Moses permitted it, but from the *beginn-*

*ing* it was not so. God's marriage law is as old as mankind (verses 4-6), not merely a "kingdom law".

Then came along the idea that once adultery occurs, a marriage is severed, then everybody is free to marry. All of this in spite of the fact that no passage gives the guilty party in a divorce the right to marry again.

Then there are those who think they have found an additional exception to the one Jesus gave -- the so-called "Pauline exception" based on 1 Cor. 7. The idea is that if a believer is deserted by an unbelieving (or unfaithful) companion then the believer has a right to remarry -- since they are not "under bondage". Brother Elmer Moore has made some excellent comments on this passage:

"Does Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:15 provide *another* reason for divorce and remarriage? Does *desertion* constitute scriptural ground for divorce and remarriage? Let us consider the question. The statement in Matthew 19:9 'except it be for fornication' is indeed significant. What is implied is an exceptive sentence. The significance of an exceptive sentence is that of '*if and only if*.' Thus Jesus declares that one can enter into a second marriage *if and only if* his living mate was guilty of fornication. The statement *will not allow another way.*

Let me illustrate the foregoing. In John 3:3-5 Jesus declares that one cannot enter the kingdom 'except' he is born of water and the Spirit. Brethren know this has reference to water baptism in harmony with the Spirit's law. When men cite 1 John 5:1 and similar passages to argue entrance into the Kingdom by faith only, they have invented *another* way into the kingdom. . . . We know that one perverts the passages cited in an effort to find *some other* way into the kingdom. In precisely the same way, I know that men are perverting 1 Corinthians 7:15. They use this passage to justify *another* way into a second marriage of one who has a living mate. The truth of the matter is that 1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches no such thing. The 'bondage' of this passage is not the same as the 'bound' in 1 Corinthians 7:27,39 and Romans 7:2. Paul, twice in this chapter, uses the same basic word as he does in Romans 7:2. However, the word translated 'bondage' is a different one. The word occurs many times in the New Testament and not once does it refer to the marriage bond -- unless 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the exception. This word refers to *slavery*. The context of the statement will bear this out. The unbe-

Schedule of Services	
Sundays:	
Bible Classes	9:45 a.m.
Worship	10:45 a.m.
Worship	6:00 p.m.
Wednesdays:	
Bible Classes	7:30 p.m.

liever is threatening to leave unless the Christian abandons her or his belief in and service to Christ. The apostle points out that the Christian is not such a slave as to have to abandon Christ and continue to fulfill the marriage responsibilities outlined by the writer. Roy H. Lanier notes, 'the believer is not so bound to the unbeliever that he must give up Christ to hold to the unbeliever.' The idea of *remarriage* is not under consideration in this passage. When one realizes the *exceptive* nature of Matthew 19:9, he will realize that to set out another reason for divorce and remarriage would be a flat *contradiction* of the passage."

(from *The Preceptor*).

Now we are hearing brethren wonder out loud if we cannot add these second marriages to a list of things of individual conviction and application -- like the covering, military service, etc. Since many churches are made up of individuals who hold and practice different views on these subjects with no problems, why can we not just treat second marriages (for whatever reason) in the same manner -- whether or not we personally agree with their position?

Most brethren recognize that there are areas of honest disagreement among brethren where we can allow each one to be *fully* persuaded in his own mind, with each practicing and teaching his convictions, and allowing those who differ with him the

same right without it affecting their fellowship. Romans 14 makes this clear. Paul frankly stated what his conviction was on the "meat-eating" issue. (v. 14). At the same time he recognized that "to him who considers it to be unclean, to him it is unclean". He could charitably practice and even express his individual faith in the matter, while granting one who differed the same right. Some things are of that nature. So, brethren have recognized this over the years and have worked together even when they may have differed on various individual convictions.

However, fornication or adultery is not such a matter. There are specific instructions to the church as to what to do about a fornicator in its midst. (1 Cor. 5). The congregation at Thyatira was sharply rebuked for allowing one to teach "My servants to commit sexual immorality". (Rev. 2:20). Since Matthew 19:9 clearly says that anyone who puts away his wife (except for sexual immorality) and marries another commits adultery, faithful brethren have no choice but to deny fellowship to such a one.

Brethren, we are indeed living in perilous times when it comes to this subject. There are well-known and well-respected preachers who are encouraging brethren to accept such fornicators. Oh, I know they would not call them fornicators -- but the Bible does. Some do it privately, others more openly. Some of these circulate rather freely among brethren in gospel meetings and other efforts on behalf of the gospel. Some solicit our support of them in their work -- sometimes being recommended by brethren with name recognition in the brotherhood. In many cases churches who use them and support them are totally unaware of their teaching and influence in this matter. If we do not know where one stands, it might be well for us

to ask some rather pointed and probing questions and expect some straight answers before using or supporting him -- especially since this thing is becoming so wide-spread.

It is a serious thing to allow folks to go on living in adultery thinking they are alright. It is also serious to allow churches to be filled with such. If Thyatira stood condemned by the Master for allowing "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality", do you think the Lord will be happy if we knowingly use and support a brother, who calls himself a preacher, who teaches that people may remain in an adulterous marriage. Think about, brethren.

## ONE LESS CARROT

My eight-year-old daughter was in her first school play today. The excitement has been mounting for several weeks now as she has come home each evening to tell us about the rehearsals with the music teacher and the costumes they were to wear. The enthusiasm caught one within the family as she practiced her song faithfully every night. My wife went to school one morning to help make the costumes. Our daughter was a carrot. That's right -- the name of the play was Peter Rabbit, and every one in her second grade class was a carrot in Mr. McGregor's garden. Other second grade classes made up the peas, beans, beets, etc.

Her's was a singing part only (in unison with all the other carrots); yet it was a big and new experience for her. In fact, she invited her grandmother, who drove 75 miles one way, and brought with her an aunt and some cousins.

I am very happy about my

# GOSPEL MEETING

August 12-14, 1988

**Alan Hargett**

of Bessemer, Alabama

NIGHTS 7:30 P.M.

SUNDAY 9:45 & 10:45 A.M.

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daughter's participation in this play. Do you ask why? Well, I'll tell you anyway. Because she chose to miss being in the performance. You see, today is Wednesday, and the church here conducts a Bible Study on Wednesday evenings. The school also scheduled the second graders' presentation of Peter Rabbit for this evening. My wife and I and the others attended the dress-rehearsal this afternoon.

I hope that none will deem this report inappropriate for publication in a church bulletin, because there is a lesson in it.

Not one word from my wife or myself was needed for our

daughter to reach the conclusion that she would be unable to attend the main performance of the play. You see, she has attended worship services and Bible Study from the age of two weeks or so. I'm not saying that we have made no mistakes in our attempts to train our children, neither do I mean for this to sound like the boastfulness of a proud father. But a few weeks ago we were made to feel very good when we overheard a member of the church asking our daughter what she was going to do about the "predicament" of the play being on Wednesday night. Her answer: "Oh well, there will just be one less carrot."

Simple? Sure it is. And yet some of my brethren seem to have terrible problems with similar situations. I constantly hear them talking of having to let the kids do some of the things they want to do, and not forcing the church upon them, etc... Could it be that the interest our children develop in the church is directly proportionate to the interest the parents manifest before them? I'm sure that we would not have let our daughter choose otherwise had she wanted to - but the point is she did what she wanted to without our having to say a word. It is a

good feeling to know that among all the things we have done wrong as parents, that we have done at least a little bit that apparently was right.

I suppose that the parents of other second graders will long remember their children's first play as Peter Rabbit; but somehow I feel that we will always recall the performance as "One Less Carrot."

Parents, Isn't it time we started putting first things first, before our children decide that the church is not as important as ballgames, plays, television, etc? Read Matt. 6:33 and Heb. 10:25 and compare your life and example before your children to the teaching of God's word.

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## Determination

I am only one, but I am one;

I cannot do everything,

But I can do something,

What I ought to do

By God's grace I will do.

-- Listen