



The REFLECTOR

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DIVORCE: For every cause?

The content of television programming has changed drastically in recent years. Family programs seem to be virtually a thing of the past. They have been replaced with programs that advocate and glorify free love, adultery, homosexuality. When concerned Christians express openly their hatred for such, they are informed that the times have changed and that we live in a time of "new morality". The fruits of this "new morality" are displayed every day in our society. There is one dilemma that is particularly distressing and it can be emphasized by noting the present divorce rate in our nation. Approximately one third of all marriages end in divorce [the figure is three out of five in teenage marriages]. These high percentages stress the fact that most people do not understand the permanency of the marriage relationship as stated by Jesus Christ about 2,000 years ago.

In Matthew 19 we read of a conversation between the Lord and the Pharisees. The Pharisees began by asking Him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" vs. 3. Christ answered them by referring to the Genesis account in which God stated, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." vs. 5. He concluded this argument by saying, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." vs. 6. The persistent Pharisees insisted that Moses had made provisions for them to put away their wives and questioned the Lord about this. Jesus explained that it was because of the hardness of their hearts that Moses had made this provision and went on to reemphasize that this was not the case from the beginning. vs. 8. Our Lord then continued by stating his law concerning divorce and remarriage. "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." vs. 9. The teaching of our Lord here seems to be simple.

He teaches that there is but one act (fornication) that would give anyone the right to put away his or her marriage partner. Of course, we all agree, that the death of one of the partners would free the living one to remarry. This is clearly set forth by Paul in Rom. 7:1-3.

Even though the Bible is explicit in its teaching on this matter, it is sad to note that some who claim to be followers of the Lord have attempted to change his teaching. By the use of human rationalism and sophistry they are able to twist Jesus' words so that they will fit their preconceived ideas. One example of this is seen by the interpretation some have placed on Matthew 19:9. The proponents of this new doctrine will freely admit that when one divorces his or her marriage partner for reasons other than fornication and marries (cohabits) another, he or she commits adultery. However, they express the idea that the adultery involves only the first act of sexual intimacy. Furthermore, they claim that the marriage bond is broken and the guilty party may repent of this sin and be free to marry again.

Whether they are aware of it or not, the advocates of this theory have overlooked at least one very important point. When Jesus said the man in Matt. 19:9 "committeth adultery" he indicated by the tense of the verb (committeth) more than just the first sexual act. The verb is the present, indicative mood, denoting "linear" action in present time. (Idiom Book of N.T. Greek, C.F.C. Moule). In other words, if a man were to put away his wife for every cause except fornication and marry another, he would be living in adultery until he severed that relationship. The Bible is unmistakably clear on this point.

It is sad indeed when those who claim to be Christians, some of them preachers, are pressured so by our immoral society that they would compromise the plain teaching of our Lord on this vital subject. Let us never be guilty of following the blind leaders of this world, but let us resolve to be true followers of Christ -- a bright and shining light to a crooked and perverse nation.

•David B. Hartsell• via THE ILLUMINATOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brother Hartsell is one of many younger men whose soundness and candor causes us to be exceedingly optimistic about the future of the Lord's Cause.

DEACONESS ?



"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae..." [Romans 16:1, Revised Standard Version]

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" [Romans 16:1, King James Version].

Phoebe has become a rather popular sister lately; especially with those who see in her case justification for the office of deaconess.

Was Phoebe a deaconess in the same sense as the men whose qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3. Did she serve the church in the same capacity as those men? Some brethren, even among "conservatives", are saying so--some rather openly.

Have we been caught up in the spirit of the age? Have we become influenced more by the Women's Movement than we might realize? I don't know. But, I do know that the reasons usually given for this advocacy will not hold water!

DEACON - DEACONESS - SERVANT

The word DIAKONOS, translated servant (KJV) and deaconess (RSV), is the same word for deacon in 1 Tim. 3:10,13 and Phil. 1:1; but is also rendered minister 20 times and servant six other times. Of the ten or so translations of Romans 16:1 that I checked in my study they are about evenly divided between servant and deaconess.

The issue can not be settled by consideration of this passage alone. Even if we accept deaconess as a possible rendering of the word -- it does not follow that Phoebe was a deaconess in the very same way that those at Philippi were deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1). Or one would have to say that a word may have no more than one connotation in the Bible.

A word can have a common and a specialized meaning. Every where I go, I try to be a fair representative of Alabama, my native state -- but I am not a representative in the official sense of the word. I am not a member of the House of Representatives. Nor do I think that every time that I see representative in the paper that it is talking about a member of Congress. Elder (PRESBUTEROS) and deacon (DIAKONOS) are such words. Elder has a common (older person) and a specialized (Elders in church) meaning. (Cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). DIAKONOS (deacon) is the same way. It may mean a deacon like those in 1 Timothy 3, or it may simply mean any servant.

DIAKONOS is used of civil rulers (Rom. 13:

4), of Paul and Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), of Ty-chicus (Eph. 6:21), of Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6) and others. The fact that the word is translated minister in those cases does not change the fact that it is the same word. But it is just further proof that DIAKONOS does not always have the same meaning as it does in 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1.

I am nearly afraid to write the following for fear that some wild-eyed women's lib advocate will seize upon it to try to get some elderesses appointed. But I am willing to take that chance in order to show the absurdity of the deaconess position.

I can come as near, if not nearer, proving that the early church had women elders as one can that it had women deacons. Yes ma'am, you read it right! 1 Timothy 5:2 speaks of "elder women" and tells how to treat them. The word (PRESBUTEROS) is the same as elder in Titus 1:5. Aged women (PRESBUTIS) are given the work of teaching the younger women in Titus 2. That ought to just about wrap it up for one looking for an excuse to appoint she-elders. I had as soon appoint she-elders on the basis of these verses as I had to appoint she-deacons on the basis of Romans 16:1.

It is suggested, by some, that women deacons are needed because there are some things that they can do better than men. I can make the same argument for women elders. They can teach younger women and deal with some of their problems better than men. The women might feel more like talking with a woman about their spiritual problems than they would a man. A woman can come as near meeting the qualifications of an elders as one can meeting those of a deacon. If you want to insist that Phoebe was a deaconess, then I will insist that those in 1 Tim. 5:2 were elderesses. Who'll be the first now to come out in favor of she-elders among my brethren? Not me. I haven't overcome my inhibitions against appointing deaconesses yet.

ENROLLED WIDOWS

Some assume that those widows in 1 Timothy 5:9, who were "taken into the number" (enrolled, enlisted or put on the list) were deaconesses. That is exactly what they have done -- assumed it. There is nothing in the word, KATALEGO ("taken into the number", or "enrolled"), to warrant such a conclusion. They are not called deaconesses. The context does not hint that they were such. It talks about relieving widows, not appointing deaconesses (widows or otherwise.) While we agree that there may be more than one class of widows considered--widows that are to be honored, being widows indeed, and those enrolled as charges of the church--we cannot find one word suggesting that they were to be appointed and serve as deaconesses. We doubt that anyone else would get that idea without having already assumed that

Phoebe was a deaconess.

DEACONS' WIVES? OR DEACONESSSES?

Since the word for *wives* in 1 Timothy 3:11 is often used of women in general, some have thought that these women mentioned in connection with deacons were really deaconesses. Again, we doubt that anyone would get this idea without having first assumed that there deaconesses in the early church of which Phoebe was one. Albert Barnes, who thought Phoebe was a deaconess in the official sense, does a good job of refuting the idea that these women were deaconesses: "But that the common interpretation, which makes it refer to the wives of deacons, as such, is to be adhered to, seems to be clear. For, (1) It is the obvious and natural interpretation. (2) The word here used - *wives* - is never used of itself to denote deaconesses. (3) If the apostle had meant deaconesses it would have been easy to express it without ambiguity; comp. Notes, Rom. xvi.1. (4) What is here mentioned is important, whether the same thing is mentioned of bishops or not. (5) In the qualifications of bishops, the apostle had made a statement respecting his family, which made any specification about particular members of the family unnecessary. He was to be one who presided in a proper manner over his own house, or who had a well-regulated family, ver. 4,5..." (Notes on the New Testament, Thess.-Phil., p.149). Certainly, I would not take Barnes as authority, but it is interesting to note that he rejects the idea of these women being deaconesses even having thought that Phoebe was one. Of course, I think he missed the point on Phoebe for reasons given earlier.

Given all the Bible says about a woman's relationship to man and to God, how can one assume that Phoebe and others were deaconesses in the same sense the men of 1 Timothy 3 were--especially considering all the assumptions that have to be made to make them so? It is a mystery to me. •Ed•

December Figures

	Classes	Worship	Contribution
3rd	147	158	\$1200
6th	130		
10th	152	160	\$1145
13th	120		
17th	153	170	\$1082
20th	?		
24th	125	164	\$1030
27th	115		
31st	not available-will appear next month.		

THE INVITATION AND CONFESSION OF SIN

Some may not fully understand when to make public confession of sin. Through the years different ones have come forward at the invitation song and revealed matters that were of a private nature. This may have happened here and in other churches because some individuals may think such is required of them.

1. SECRET OR HEART SINS. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12). Perhaps David is asking for forgiveness of wrongs he is not even conscious of, yet knows are not hidden from the all-seeing eye of God. Still this verse might include private heart sins as in Ps. 44:21; 66:18; Prov. 6:18.

If all in a congregation began confessing such sin publicly that would become the main part of the worship period each time. The front pews could not hold us all! We would all just have to move toward the front a few seats. The gossips would have a field day. And the outsider would think that is the sinningest, weakest bunch of supposed Christians he has ever visited! And the few who didn't come forward would be sinning by refusing to confess such sin (1 Jn. 1:8; Matt. 6:11-12; note "daily"). How many days do you go without sin?

So we don't believe the invitation song is a call to come revealing "secret faults". Such sin is strictly against God and in the heart of the individual alone. Therefore it need not concern, disturb nor become a stumbling block to any other.

2. PRIVATE SINS. A sin against or involving another individual or several must be corrected accordingly. Read Matt. 5:24-25; Lk. 17:3-4; Jas. 5:16.

"Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). In the verses following where correction is not made the matter becomes public, "tell it unto the church". Once the whole church had knowledge of the matter it would become necessary to correct it before or with the whole church.

Simon sinned in his request of Peter. He wasn't told to "go forward" at the next meeting. He was commanded, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness; and pray God..." (Acts 8:18-24). Sins between brethren or within a family can be corrected without others becoming involved.

3. PUBLIC SINS. This is the general purpose of the invitation. One might go to every member privately and ask forgiveness, but such wouldn't be as expedient as coming be-

fore the assembly.

The brother's immorality in 1 Cor. 5 was a matter of common knowledge requiring public discipline and public repentance. Had Demas returned at some later date, public correction would have been in order since Paul had openly declared his forsaking the work (2 Tim. 4:10). Those who forsake assembling do right by confessing their sin publicly so brethren might know repentance has occurred. Then they would know to pray for them and restore fellowship.

Some sins may have originally involved only a small number but the sinner may be concerned that others might have also learned. So he confesses publicly. His conscientiousness is to be commended.

Relatively speaking, few respond to the invitation in worship. Does this mean brethren don't think they're guilty of sin? Not at all. They are probably correcting theirs as heart and private sins. They evidently don't believe themselves guilty of the "public" variety.

If one knows these things we have mentioned and still wishes to make public confession, even though it is unnecessary, surely he has that right. It may not be the best judgment in some cases, but none would want to deny another the right to brethren's public prayers if he conscientiously desires them.

This article is intended not to criticize anyone but to inform everyone. We all need a clearer understanding of this matter. Certainly we want erring brethren to "come forward" when they need to or feel this is their best solution. But we do not wish a lack of understanding to cause one to feel so obligated when scripturally he isn't.

•Ralph Williams•via THE PERFECTOR.

All of this reminds me of a story I once heard: A little tot brought his new book and sat down in his father's lap, asking to be read to. As the father was reading the book, the hero of the book was being badly beaten by the villain. Yet, the little tot was giggling and laughing as his father read. The father was disturbed at the child's reaction. He asked the child why he was so happy even though the hero was suffering such defeat. The child answered, "But Daddy, I know something you don't. I know how it is going to end, because Mommie has already read me the last page!"

The Christian can be happy in the midst of life's problems because he has access to the last page.

•Ed.

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The Last Page

Our classes, from the 7th grade up, have been studying the book of Revelation this past quarter. We think it has been a profitable study. We are convinced that the central lesson of the Revelation is victory -- victory over Satan, over persecution, over life's troubles, over false doctrine, etc. It would do every Christian good to read it often taking particular note to just how often the victory of Christ and His Cause is pictured.

The lesson seems to be that while things may be rough for Christians now, that evil seems to have the upper hand--it will not always be so! Christ and His saints will prevail in the end. It will all turn out great for the faithful in Christ Jesus.