

Does Death Alone
Break the
Marriage Relation

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by

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... FOREWORD ...

A word may be necessary to explain the issue of the accompanying pages. It has recently been strongly pressed, in more quarters than one, that nothing—and that word is used in its strictest sense—can ever justify divorce, that “true marriage is indissoluble,” “it cannot be unmade,” and so on, reiterated in varying forms again and again. Were this without practical consequence it might be ignored as extravagant, but serious results spring from it, and have already brought no little distress. The strong emphasis put on what is pressed as the basic sin of re-marriage after divorce, has virtually transferred the extreme guilt of adultery from the actual transgressor to the innocent party who has re-married. The present Paper is intended as an examination of Scripture as to this.

Does Death Alone Break the Marriage Relation?

This question, while not a pleasant one, nor taken up happily, has been forced upon many of late, and convictions have seriously differed as to the scriptural answer to it.

There is not the slightest difference between any of us as to the flagrant evils of modern-day divorce; but even in this utter abhorrence of what is popular and current, there may possibly be such a swing of the pendulum as may warp the judgment and lead to error on the other side. In avoiding one evil we are ever in danger of falling into its opposite.

We are quite of one mind too that only in cleaving to the written Word of God, and to the whole of it, can we be anchored from either extreme. We all agree too that the marriage relation had its root in Eden before the Fall, nor did that Fall alter in the slightest the primal intent of the beneficent Creator, as in the words, "Male and female created He them," and, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh," to which may be added the Lord's comment in Matt. 19: 6: "Wherefore they are no more twain but

one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”*

But before going further, that very word of the Lord, “Let not man put asunder,” most assuredly involves the *possibility* of man’s committing the wickedness of sundering that relationship. It throws a holy guard about it—it strengthens that guard, but it does not prevent human wickedness breaking through it; on the contrary, it is in itself a full recognition of that misused power. All such negative commandments necessarily predicate the possibility of their infringement. Were it impossible to be done, there would be no reason for forbidding it to be done. When the apostle wrote to the “faithful brethren” at Ephesus, “Let him that stole steal no more,” we all inevitably deduce that there still exists in the most spiritual of the Lord’s people, as these Ephesians were, that old Adamic nature which is quite *capable* of stealing. Precisely so the words, “Let not man put asunder,”

* The two expressions “joined together” and “put asunder” are in direct antithesis. Whatever the one means the other reverses. If the consequence of the “joining together” be “one flesh,” the consequence of “putting asunder” is that the tie is severed—they are no longer “one flesh.” One of our opposing writers, feeling the force of this, dilutes the words to, “Let none attempt it;” but the Lord could as easily have said that had He desired, but He did not, and reverence will accept the word as He spoke it, as conveying exactly what He meant.

must equally involve that the sundering of the marriage relation is *within the power of wicked human will*. Natural death as a cause is quite eliminated, for that is outside of man's hands altogether, so that it is certain that there must be at least one thing beside death that can break that relationship, and that must be found in the Scriptures.

We shall have to pass over the lives of the Patriarchs—for they did not conform in their practice to the divine order—and come to Israel. To that people God gave a code of laws enforcing among other things, the sacredness of the marriage tie, and affixing the most severe penalty for its infringement, both the guilty parties being condemned to death (Lev. 20: 10-12). One only possible exception to this severity is found in Deut. 22: 25, but it does not affect the basic principle, and we will not stay to comment upon it here. It remains that in Israel adultery was practically the equivalent of death, since by divine command it inevitably involved it: that is, *adultery severed the marriage bond as effectively as death*—it is primal and basic, not simply Jewish.

Again, in Deut. 24 there is a statute that bears directly on our question. A man might find some uncleanness* in the wife that he has recently married,

* The word rendered "uncleanness" is applied to a land lying exposed to its enemies (Gen. 49: 9), to a person shamefully exposed (Gen. 9: 22), and to some-

and give her a "bill of divorce." Whatever may have been meant by this "uncleanness," one thing is sure, it could not be adultery or fornication, for there was but one penalty for both, and that would have prevented all subsequent marriage (Deut. 22:13-29). That penalty was either death or a marriage that could never be dissolved (ver. 29), so that excludes the wife of chap. 24:1. This permission by the Mosaic law to divorce a wife was, our Lord said, because of the hardness of their hearts. It was then purely Mosaic, and had no bearing on the original sanctity of marriage. But in the case of being thus dismissed, the divorcée, not being guilty of the capital offence, either before or after marriage, was by this Mosaic permission free to be the wife of another man without incurring any guilt.

That *was* Mosaic, but now the question that bears directly on our subject is: If she does thus marry again, does that new marriage-relationship itself sever *absolutely the bond with her former husband, or does that bond still exist in spite of this new tie, as it certainly must do if death and nothing but death can sever it?* If it does so exist then, should the second partner either die, or in his turn dismiss her with another "bill of divorcement," it would inevitably follow

thing extremely repellant (Deut. 23:14), and as this last is the only other place where it is found in this book, it gives the sense to chap. 24 considered above.

that she must recognize that unbroken bond, and would be compelled to return to the first husband if still alive, for if nothing but death can dissolve marriage, that first marriage was unbroken and still in full force, and that would naturally involve the first husband remaining unmarried. *But that is precisely what she must not do!* It is most strictly forbidden, for that would be "abomination before Jehovah," and in these words Moses and his "permission" disappear — it is again Jehovah and His primal basic intent in marriage as instituted in Eden. The first tie has ceased to exist altogether, completely severed by that made with another man. The Mosaic permission for the hard-hearted husband to divorce, may have enabled him to marry again, but the remarriage of the divorcée freed him, by *Jehovah's basic principle*, to do so.

Nothing would appear clearer than this, but it is found, as some remind us, in the Old Testament, and we are living under another dispensation. Does then the grace of the gospel nullify or alter that divine order? Because of that grace does the bond still exist? Is the innocent party still bound, even though the second relation be illicit?—grace condoning or ignoring the sin of the guilty, so that to-day even adultery is not of such gravity as to have any effect on the first marriage? Surely "we have not so learned Christ," nor does grace so act, but in quite the opposite way: "the righteous requirements of the law" are not nul-

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lified or modified in the least, but "fulfilled" in those "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Whatever effect adultery had in one case, as regards divine order, it does in the other, as it is written even in Christian times, "The law is made . . . for fornicators" (1 Tim. 1: 10, *R. V.*), and that word must in this case necessarily include adultery, which would otherwise escape the condemnation of the law altogether. But this must be considered further.

The same thing is recognized as having the same effect in Matt. 5: 32, which reads: "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." If anything is beyond all question clear it is that this saving clause has nothing whatever to do with the Mosaic "permission," for it is in direct contrast with it that our Lord speaks: "I say unto you."

But that word "fornication" (it is claimed) evidences that this divorce is only permitted for the sin committed *before* marriage, and if either party so sins after marriage the exception does not apply at all! If that were the correct understanding of the word "fornication," it would follow that a husband might put away his wife for what had occurred in her inexperienced youth, but not for what deliberately broke her marriage-vows in mature age! Can that appeal

to any as consistent with divine justice? Is such an interpretation possible? The lesser evil affording good grounds for penalty, whilst the greater goes without any penalty whatever!

The mistake partly arises from assuming that our English word "fornication," and the limited use we make of it, is the exact equivalent of the words that were written; but in both the Old and New Testaments, the word so rendered has frequently, and at times necessarily, a far wider meaning than with us. Jehovah speaks of Israel as a married wife, who had "borne sons and daughters," but has now been guilty of "*fornication*" (Heb., *zahnah*—the same word as is translated by "fornication" in Isa. 23: 17; Ezek. 16: 26; 2 Chron. 21: 11; that is, the "fornication" was what we always term "adultery"). So too the *married* woman Jezebel, is charged with the same sin under the same word (*zahnah*). In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek word translated "fornication" (*porneia*) also covers all forms of sexual evil. In such texts as 1 Tim. 1:10, "adultery" would be omitted altogether as being forbidden by law, did not "fornication" (or as in A. V., "whoremongers,"* but R. V., "fornicators") cover it. So in Gal. 5 where we have a list of the "works of the flesh," all editors, without

* The difficulty is somewhat increased by the common reading in our Authorized Version, both in Old and New Testaments, being a word that is now obsolete,

a single exception, eliminate the word "adultery" from the list, as not having been written under the divine inspiration but interpolated by a human pen later, leaving the next word, "fornication," to cover it. If it did not, then "adultery" would again be omitted altogether as one of the works of the flesh, which is impossible.

Thus we may safely conclude that whilst at times the distinction between the two evils, "adultery" and "fornication," is recognized by the words used, the former being post-nuptial and the other ante-nuptial wickedness, this is not always the case, and the "fornication" that justifies (again be it emphasized, not by Mosaic permission, but by what was "from the beginning") the putting away, in Matt. 5: 32 and in the corresponding passage in chap. 19, was *marital* in-

as being excluded from refined speech: "whore" and its compounds; but if we go to the root of even that Saxon word "*hor*" we find its meaning to be "adultery."

Such well-known and respected commentators as Darby, Kelly, Grant, Alford, all speak of the sin of fornication as what had "ruptured *the bond of marriage*," which certainly could not be ruptured before it existed. Alford plainly says: "*Fornication*' must be taken to mean sin, not only before marriage but after it also, as including *adultery*."

Turning to the Lexicons we find "*Porneia*—fornication, but illicit sexual intercourse in general and at times specifically adultery," Grimm-Thayer and Robinson; but the Scriptures themselves give us the clearest evidence of this broad scope of the word.

fidelity, and not what may have taken place *prior* to the marriage. For by the primal divine law (nothing to do with Moses' permission) a woman who had thus sinned prior to marriage could never be united in wedlock at all—she was to be stoned with her equally guilty partner, and that would effectually enough forbid our considering the exceptional case in Matthew being this *pre-nuptial* wickedness, or “fornication” in the narrow sense of its modern use. There was (Deut. 22: 25) one sole exception to this: If the maiden was herself quite guiltless, then her assailant was compelled to marry her, and from that marriage there was never to be release, “he may not put her away all his days,” so that *that* would also forbid the exception in Matt. 5 and 19 being in view at all—*it was impossible*.

Thus it follows beyond all question that the word *fornication*, as in these two passages in Matthew's Gospel, is really what we call *adultery* and nothing else.

But it may be asked, If the word “fornication” means in these texts “adultery,” why did not the Lord continue using that word, and why substitute for it in the same connection, the word as to which there could be no ambiguity, saying that “Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth *adultery*”? It was, I would suggest, to emphasize beyond all question that the original marriage had not been affected by any slighter cause, as was permitted by Moses—that bond

remained, and to make this indisputably clear the Lord uses a word that could be rendered only by "adultery," and it was *that* that did rupture the original marriage, as it ever did and does.

But the force of these exceptions in both chaps. 5 and 19 of Matthew's Gospel is thought to be nullified by their being "Jewish?" and so not applicable to Christians at all. It is a strangely baseless mistake, and because of its seriousness I would again call attention to what *was* clearly Jewish being the permission to put away for less grave grounds than contravened God's institution "from the beginning," and to that primal intent the Lord returns. How can any say that "from the beginning" is "Jewish?" Was Judaism from the beginning? Surely not; but from the beginning marriage was inviolable save for that which itself ruptured it absolutely—"fornication," that here *must* inevitably stand for adultery.

I am aware that the harlot-church of Rome claims a superior sanctity by forbidding divorce on any grounds, and well she knows how to use that for propaganda, but we are not disposed to accept Jezebel as our teacher of purity; nor the "forbidding to marry" of her clergy; and all the vileness that has been so fully exposed as connected with her confessional—these and very much more do not establish our confidence in her as a teacher of morality; but lest we be charged with fearing her opposition, and as some who are not

of her communion also claim the same place as being holier and higher ground, I will look at her argument as given by the "Paulist Fathers" (as they style themselves) in a book lying before me. The question asked is: "Did not Christ Himself allow divorce in the case of adultery?" The answer is "No, He made no exception whatever." Then, after quoting Matt. 5: 32, the answer continues: "A man's duty to his wife is not thereby fulfilled" (by giving her a bill of divorce), "he is responsible for the adultery which his wife may commit, if he dismisses her for any other reason than for fornication." The truth of this depends on the distinction between "adultery" and "fornication," which we have already looked at. The writer does not at least ignore the exceptional clause, but now comes the real argument:

"The phrase 'maketh her to commit adultery' can only be understood on the supposition that the point at issue here is, not the rights and liberties of the injured husband *whose wife may commit adultery*, but rather the responsibility which the husband who dismisses his wife contracts in case she afterwards become an adulteress. She is not an adulteress before her dismissal, otherwise the phrase 'maketh her to commit adultery' would have no meaning."

Here we note the exceptional case is entirely ignored, it is not referred to at all; so that even if the woman

be put away for fornication (*porneia*: in this case inevitably adultery), she has not committed that for which she is put away till after she *is* put away. Such argument strongly confirms what it was intended to refute.

The case then stands thus: According to God's primal law, which nothing in Judaism can contravene, if a wife committed adultery she was to be executed (which surely involves putting away), but if put away *for any other reason* and she marries again, then she is made to commit adultery, and of that sin the husband who has divorced her bears the guilt.

But we gladly leave Rome, being well assured that all proud claims to superior holiness are themselves abominable to our God, and continue with Scripture; and there the truth is that there are conditions so mutually destructive that they cannot possibly exist together. For instance, "Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10: 21). Note the word "*cannot*"—it is an absolute impossibility. Yet surely it was not all impossible for a professing Christian of that day to go to an idol temple, eat and drink of the sacrifices, and then returning to the Church, sit amongst his brethren and partake of the Lord's table. That might be externally done—indeed, it is the very thing that he is rebuking—but in the sight of God, when

he went to that idol-worship he really did, by that very act, sever his relation with the Lord's table. It was a spiritual adultery, or fornication, and as such sundered the earlier relation altogether, as did the literal sin.

Similarly in 1 Cor. 6, a chapter in which the dignity and sanctity of the Christian's body is pressed: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What! know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith He, shall be one flesh." Here we are plainly told that (and mark it well) *an illicit relation has precisely the same effect as lawful marriage*. Thus the words, "What God hath joined together," can have no reference to certain marriages being made by God, but it is the effect of cohabitation—whether lawful or unlawful.* The be-

* This is met by insisting that God only marries two who are in virginity. We are told that: "True marriage, or *marriage of virginity*, is indissoluble! It originated in heaven, and no sin whatever or however bad can make twain that which God has made one flesh." That, as we have seen, is a mere statement that lacks all foundation in Scripture. That "true marriage" is only of those who have never been married before is nonsense. In Rom. 7 the woman is as truly married the second time as the first.

iever's body belongs to Christ, and is to be held holy as for His service, as being of His members. Not of course as being members of His mystic Body, but as being entirely at His service. Is it possible that they should be one with a harlot, and still in normal relation with Christ? It is impossible. But here, as in Rom. 7, there is a suggestion of that bond with, and dependence on the risen Lord Christ, which alone results in fruit to God, and Paul indignantly presses the impossibility of this when the body is taken away from Christ and made "the members of a harlot." It cannot be both "taken away from" and yielded to the Lord (Rom. 6: 13).

Similarly: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4: 4): they cannot exist together, in the sight of God the one destroys the other. Other instances might be given, but these will suffice to show

In this connection too is involved another strange mistake. The marriage of Deut. 24: 5 is said to be a "true marriage" because the wife is "new," which the writer supposes means "has never been married before," a first-hand wife, whilst in ver. 1 she is second-hand, and in ver. 2 third-hand! It is all based on a misunderstanding of the phrase: "When a man taketh a new wife." This does not refer to the state of the wife, whether she has been previously married or not, but to her being "new" to the man who takes her. The Septuagint makes this quite clear by translating, "And if anyone should have recently taken a wife."

that there are conditions so mutually destructive that they cannot co-exist, and thus the marriage relation with two different persons is an *impossibility according to God's order*, which is alone to govern our convictions. The later one *in itself* absolutely severs the earlier, as Deut. 24: 4 says clearly enough. Nor is fornication or adultery less heinous in the greater light, and so greater responsibility, of Christianity; and the plea that it has no radical and destructive effect on the marital relation is really unholy, however little that is realized.

Turning to Rom. 7: 1-4, the clear and single purpose of the Spirit of God here is to bring out, without permitting anything else to embarrass the argument, the complete severance of the believer from the law by the body of Christ. We must not argue from the silence as to the effect of adultery on the ordinary marriage relation, that it is left still in force. It is not the purpose of the inspired writer to discuss that here, and it is a misuse of Scripture so to deduce.

In the Epistle to the Corinthians chap. 5 does tell us of the greater leniency of the gospel. God does not direct the infliction of death, but the putting away from among themselves the "wicked person." It does not touch the relation between the parties who are married, but the relation of the Church to the sin and sinner.

In chap. 7 the believing wife is commanded not to depart from her husband, nor the husband to put away the wife, for both are Christians by profession: mixed marriages are dealt with later. But in ver. 11 it is possible that a wife has left her husband, if so, since she has entered into no other marriage, she must either return to her husband or remain unmarried. There has been no "fornication," and the bond remains unbroken; but to apply this to a case in which this gross sin has been committed is quite unjustified. It does not touch that at all.

But now we come to what does apply very directly. Suppose a convert already married to a heathen—and there may well have been many such in that large assembly of Corinth—ought the believer to go to the Old Testament, and turning to Ezra or Nehemiah, conclude that they must certainly leave their unbelieving partner? Or must they go back to the primal law of Eden and remain?

In the answer the change from, "Not I, but the Lord" (ver. 10), to "I, not the Lord" (ver. 12), is very significant, although too often overlooked. But it clearly means, and indeed says, that there is no need for any direct revelation from the Lord as to what is His will in such a case, since that will is evidenced by the position, in relation to Himself, of their children, and *all* the children of that union, whether born when both were in heathen darkness or when one

parent had accepted Christ. Let them look at their children and that will be sufficient to answer their question. Are they "outside," where Ezra and Nehemiah would have put them? Have they been sternly put away as in those days of law? Far from it; they are so clearly in a position of external acceptance that it is sure evidence that the unbelieving parent has—not indeed been made holy in himself—but has been sanctified in the believer; for the offspring of that marriage are evidenced as "holy" and "clean," as it is written, "Else were your children unclean, but now are they *holy*" (ver. 14). Nor does that mean that these are better than other children, or that they do not need the regenerating grace of God: as far as that goes they differ not one whit from all other children, but they are set apart from all Jewish and heathen children by being openly, formally, evidently accepted with the parent who now believes in the Lord Jesus, even though he or she may not have done so when the children were born—accepted in that external position on the earth answering to "the commonwealth of Israel" of old, as it is written, "thou and thy house"—the household sharing with its head in this place of privilege. This evidenced "cleanness" and "holiness" of the children, as being thus separated, really answers the question: let not the parents separate.

But suppose the heathen parent (ver. 15), unable or

unwilling to continue a relationship with the believer, should definitely abandon the Christian, what follows then? One can easily imagine if not directly told, how frequently that must have been the case in such a city as Corinth in those days. A man or woman could hardly frequent the worship of Jupiter or Venus, with the impure rites that accompanied it, and at the same time feel comfortable or at ease in the constant companionship of one whose life was a testimony against all that impiety, impurity and wickedness. Only where there was a very strong pure human affection, would a continuance of the relationship appear to be possible; and then let the believer be thankful, "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (ver. 16). Let the believer then never be the one to go away.

But nothing could be done with the unbelieving deserter: he or she must be permitted to depart, and the inspired writer turns to the forsaken one with the words, "A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace"—words that have been the occasion of much discussion, and therefore we must give them a little patient consideration. The first thing will be to forget for a time all our present modern conditions, and endeavor to throw ourselves back into the place, conditions, and needs of those for whom the letter was first intended, and by

whom it was first read. If we can get clear what it must have conveyed to *them*, we shall be in a position to apply it to our own day.

With the exception of a comparatively few believers in the Lord Jesus, the whole city was seething in idolatry and its accompaniment of licentiousness. Let us imagine a married couple, one of whom (we will assume that it is the husband) cleaves still to the idolatry in which he has been brought up, and definitely abandons his Christian wife. Anxious and perplexed as to her social status, questioning in what position this abandonment leaves her, whether she is still *in the sight of God*, bound to her former husband, she hears Paul's epistle read, and is therein told that she is "not under bondage," and the only question is as to what she would inevitably understand from those few words.

Were there no prejudices and predilections, no argument to be established, there would seem no escape from the plain simple sense of "not under bondage": the abandoned one was at liberty from what had up to this time bound her. And what could that possibly be in such a case, but that marriage-bond by which she had been bound to the deserting partner. My reader must allow me to press this, for it is precisely as is said in a case where there can be no possible question as to what is meant, for "the married woman is *bound* by the law to her husband as long

as he liveth, but if the husband be dead she is loosed from the law of her husband" (Rom. 7: 2); thus what death did there, abandonment does here, the bond is the same and the freedom from it is the same. In pamphlets recently received this has been challenged, and some insist that the sense is that the believer is not *bound* to compel the unbeliever to remain! But that would be little less than a taunt to a deserted wife who would naturally say: "He is gone already, nor have I any power to compel his return. To inform me that I am not bound to do what I cannot possibly do, tells me nothing." Another writes: "If one leaves, the restraint of his or her presence is removed; we have not then to consult the wishes or obey the commands of the one who has forfeited the privileges or abandoned the rights which personal presence gives." This put in other words, simply says we have not to consider the wishes, or obey the commands of one who, having definitely gone, no longer communicates his wishes or gives his commands!

There are two different words used in this chapter in Corinthians both translated *bound*: the first, "*douloo*" (and it is the one in ver. 15), has in it the sense of being bound as a bondservant to one who is *above* in the social scale. The other, "*deo*," is to be tied to something or someone on the same level, as in Rom. 7: 2, where the reference is clearly to the marriage relation. Thus the two words apply to dif-

ferent aspects of the same thing: the former (*douloo*) considers it *Godward*, as ever above; the other *manward*, as on the same level. Applying this distinction it would mean that it is *in the sight of God* that the abandonment has broken completely the marriage-bond; and as when bound the deserted partner could not re-marry guiltlessly, being free, he or she could.

This is so important that I give the testimony of some recognized devout scholars, who are universally esteemed for their spiritual insight.

C. J. Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, might well be expected to regard the matter from that ecclesiastical position. He comments thus: "‘Under bondage,’ a studiously strong word to enhance indirectly the inferential sanction of the apostle to the regarding of *the marriage as dissolved.*” "That the words imply that wilful desertion on the part of the unbelieving husband or wife is to be regarded as *setting the believing wife or husband free cannot reasonably be doubted*; whether one so set free is to be considered at liberty to marry again is more open to question, but the tenor of the words *seem in favor of the liberty.*”

J. N. Darby: "The brother was no longer bound to consider the one who had forsaken him *as his wife*, nor the sister the man who forsook her *as her husband*"—a complete dissolution.

H. Alford: "If the unbeliever wishes to *dissolve the union it may be dissolved.*”

C. Hodge: "This passage is the foundation of the doctrine that wilful desertion is legitimate cause for divorce.”

F. W. Grant: "He or she is not obliged to recognize any more *the relation as existing.*"*

There seems thus to be perfect unanimity with these at least, that the marriage-bond has been completely severed by abandonment; the departure of the heathen has put an end to it definitely. But the conditions of the time and place must be remembered, and it may be assumed as a moral certainty, that a heathen preferring such a polluted atmosphere as ruled in the idolatry of Corinth, with no check of conscience Godward, of social custom, or of self-control, would not have the slightest hesitation in forming another marriage tie with a more congenial mate, sharing his views as to idolatry and its accompaniments. But cleaving to the very letter of Scripture nothing is said as to this, *and the very abandonment by the heathen partner itself dissolved the bond absolutely in the sight of God*, and so left the deserted one free.

* It is true that Mr. Grant denies that this means the equivalent of divorce, as "the Lord Himself has decided," that there is but one ground for divorce, that is, I gather, that although not "under bondage" the deserted is not free to remarry in Mr. Grant's judgment. This is worthy of respectful consideration, as are all such; but how the bond due to the marriage relationship can both cease even to "exist" at all and yet be in some way maintained, it is very difficult to see.

In our day and country the conditions are so different as to make an unbiased, impartial and just application of this verse far more difficult, and needing the greatest caution and keenest discernment. We have no such avowed idolatry, and both partners may be, and probably would be, Christians, at least by profession. But notwithstanding these divergencies, the Scripture must have its sure application to-day, or it would be valueless, and that we shall agree is impossible; whence it follows that the Christian and heathen of old must have their counterparts in some husband and wife to-day: the *Christian* must find his or her present representative in one whose life evidences him or her as a true member of the Body of Christ, whilst the heathen deserter of Corinth must be represented, and that beyond any reasonable doubt or question by one whose conduct evidences him or her as being only a false professor, and really a wicked person whose fundamental wickedness is shewn by all the circumstances attending the very abandonment.

Thus in this third case we are cast entirely upon God in order to discern the true merits of the matter—that the forsaken one is quite guiltless: if there had been any form of private arrangement, this Scripture would bear no application whatever to such wickedness.

Our consideration of this subject would be incomplete if we omitted all reference to the Gospels of

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Mark (10: 1-12) and Luke (16: 18), in both of which the words, "Except it be for fornication," are omitted. From this some have deduced that the words in Matthew must apply to the *Jews only* (since that Gospel has admittedly a Jewish cast), and so the words can have no bearing on us, who are for the most part Christians from the Gentiles. The directions for us in such cases must be found in the Samaritan Gospel of Mark, or the more pronounced Gentile Gospel of Luke.

This might have some weight did it not go directly counter to the plain word of the Lord that tells us that it is not Jewish at all, but what was divine "from the beginning." This unequivocally takes away the application from Moses, and tells us that the marriage relation can be maintained only as it was begun, between one man and one woman only—this exceptional clause thus applies to the whole Adamic race.

The omission in Mark and Luke cannot possibly nullify this positive statement in the slightest. The words were spoken *to the same people* in all the Gospels that record them, whilst in Matthew and Mark *on the same occasion*, so that what those addressed understood in one case, they understood in all.

Another writes: "The oneness of holy Christian marriage is set forth by the heavenly marriage of our Lord and His Church, which is for all eternity." This is true, but not the whole truth. *True*, when the

Church is seen as composed of those only who are truly His people (as Eve was of Adam), indwelt and united to Him by the Holy Spirit. But not true in that aspect of the Church which is also recognized in Scripture, in that external profession which now assumes the place of being the representative of that divinely formed one, upon the earth. It is this church that being unchaste, and committing fornication, the bond thus broken is reprobated with strongest expression of loathing in the words: "*I will spew thee out of My mouth*" (Rev. 3: 16), and by the final judgment of Babylon the Great, that is, the unified "church" after the rapture of the true. There is thus a "harlot-church" as well as a chaste bride, and an adulterous man or woman can only be likened to the former.

But it is further urged: "Suppose the guilty partner (assume it to be the wife) repents, is she to find the door to her restoration permanently closed against her by her former husband having contracted another marriage? Does that accord with the forgiveness so strongly insisted upon in the Gospels? On this ground alone ought not the injured husband to keep that door of forgiveness open by not contracting another tie?" Christian hearts naturally feel the force of, and respond to such a plea, but the wickedness has two distinct bearings: against the husband *personally* and also as having completely sundered the divinely in-

stituted social relation, and completely eliminated the social position connected with that relation. As to the former—*forgiveness* there must ever be to true repentance, and that without any limit, to “seventy times seven,” nothing alters or affects that. But a restoration to a relationship that has been wickedly and effectually severed, a renewal of what has now no existence, is quite another thing. It may be that the one thus sinned against still retains such affection for his unfaithful partner as to await indefinitely for her penitence, and this may surely be the more excellent way. But in this again we have a vast difference from the law: the grace of the gospel permitting that return and reception which the law forbade; but if the husband has used the liberty that the false wife has forced upon him, and married another, such restoration is of course impossible; nor does that decrease the seriousness of the evil (*that* the gospel itself never does), but it does add to the deterrent motives for avoiding it. One can understand a Governor forgiving a man who had been faithless to a position of trust, but it would by no means follow that he would be again installed in that position—*forgiveness* does not involve that.

So to sum up in a few words, taking the Scriptures as a whole, there are three causes that in themselves sever the marriage relation:

1.—The decease of either partner, and this is the one normal rule, apart from the intrusion of sexual wickedness.

2.—The contravention of the seventh commandment, as directed against all forms of such wickedness.

3.—Such a definite abandonment as corresponds with 1 Cor. 7: 15, the deserter being as wicked as the heathen of Corinth.

Some of the pamphlets that have been circulated have appealed to experience as substantiating their contention, and whilst we know that it is not permissible to base doctrine on experience, it is permissible so to illustrate it, and it is by no means unknown that there are such cases as would come under this third head in which the distinct approval of God has apparently been experienced, in the deserted and re-married one walking with God as closely and humbly as anyone on earth, the whole family-life being one of genuine godliness and devotion, the children brought up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord—in a word, in its being an ideal Christian home. Is it *possible* to bring such under the stigma of “adultery?” Apart altogether from such experience the Scriptures themselves are perfectly clear, and only a distortion of them (however unconsciously and unwilfully done—a swing to another extreme from the shocking evils of divorce in these days) can make that to be still a “bond” which they plainly declare not so to be.

By the gracious words: "God hath called us in peace" (1 Cor. 7: 15), it would appear as if the Spirit of Christ foresaw the difficulties that would beset us and which might break our fellowship with one another, reminding us of His desire that we should continue in that unbroken peace in these cases. Nor am I aware of any Scripture that would place two clearly evidenced believers in the Lord Jesus (one of whom has divorced an adulterous partner) and who had been, with a good conscience, united in marriage, in the place exclusively reserved for wicked persons with whom not the slightest expression of fellowship is permissible—"no, not so much as to eat" (1 Cor. 5: 11)—and from which grievous position they can never, as long as both live, have any deliverance, but are forever subject to the most severe form of discipline known to Christianity. It is an anomaly that refutes and condemns itself, yet that is exactly what the mistaken teachings that have recently been widely distributed have necessarily resulted in.

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