

Marriage and Divorce

by Daniel S. Warner

Introduction...

We have received frequent requests to set forth this matter in the light of Divine Truth, and feel that we should do so. We have been looking to God for light and wisdom, and hope we shall be able to draw the lines where the Word does.

First, we find that marriage is a Divine institution. Matt. 19:6. Mark 10:9. "Forbidding to marry" is a "doctrine of devils." 1 Tim. 4:1-3 That the hand of God is even in the marriage of unsaved people is doubtless true to a great extent; but more especially does He join His own children in this holy bond. Let us now see

Who Are Scripturally Entitled to Marry...

Read 2 Cor. 6:14: 1 Cor. 7:39. Here we see that the Word of God forbids holy people to marry sinners. While the first of these scriptures prohibits yoking up with unbelievers in sect, or other organizations of men, it none the less forbids joining in marriage with unbelievers. We charge upon all children of God to observe these scriptures. By presuming to set aside the counsel of God in this matter, many have lost their salvation, and pierced themselves with many sorrows. Let not the father of lies tell you that you can find a happy life outside the Word of God, especially when you know what the Word teaches. The New Testament does not directly reenact the strict laws in Leviticus concerning the marriage of relatives. And yet it seems to be taken for granted that enlightened common sense, nature, and the Spirit of God forbid the union of near kin. Hence Paul denounces the man who had taken his father's wife, as a fornicator of the worst kind.

The law, in matters of food, marriage, and other things that affect human health and happiness, is based on good natural principles. And though that code is abolished, the principles remain unchanged. The Jew was forbidden the use of pork by a rigorous law. But Christians should, in general, abstain from its use, on intelligent health principles. So also the marriage of kindred, then prohibited by the Mosaic law, is now forbidden by the civil law, and the knowledge of the fact that blood relatives are more apt to be of the same temperaments, and the marriage of such are often attended with sad results. But we hasten on to the subject of

Divorce, Separation, Etc.

Having twelve different translations before us, we shall quote from those when they seem to render clearer than the common version. The first text reads thus, "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." Matt. 5:31, 32.

“Maketh her an adulteress.” New Version.

“Causeth her to be made an adulteress.” Rotherham.

It does not seem proper to say that a man, by putting his wife away, necessarily causeth her to commit lewdness. Hence we think the above translations more probably correct. “He maketh her an adultress.” Namely, he makes her such in the eyes of the people. Since the New Testament makes that sin, the only just cause of divorce, by a man putting away his wife, even though she were innocent, he exposes her to the public name of an adulteress. Hence the enormous sin in the sight of God, of thus treating an innocent woman.

Now take your Testament and read Matt. 19:3–12.

Bills of divorce were only allowed by Moses because of men’s hard and depraved hearts. But this was subversive of God’s original plan. Christ, having now come to change men’s hearts, no longer tolerates the putting away of husband or wife, save for the one cause.

“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.” Matt. 19:9.

By these words, any man that will marry a second wife, the former not being dead, nor guilty of fornication, is positively charged with the sin of living in adultery in the second marriage.

The question arises: If the woman is guilty, and is therefore put away, has her husband a right to marry again? So far as we know, if such right does exist it is found in the above text alone. And we do not remember of a single instance where a principle, or a rule is sustained by a single passage of scripture. But it is a fact that the New Testament throughout declares a person an adulterer if he marry a second wife while the first lives.

“For a woman that hath a husband 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. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: 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.” Rom. 7:2, 3.

This is the uniform voice of the Bible under the present dispensation. But let us look at Matt. 19:9 again. “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” The question that arises here is this: Does the exception extend both to the putting away of the guilty woman, and the marrying of another? Or does it only apply to the first. The construction, we think, would allow either conclusion. The language positively asserts that if a man puts away his wife, and she innocent of that sin, and marries another, he commits adultery. But whether, in case he puts away a guilty woman, he can lawfully marry again, the Scriptures elsewhere must decide. For the clause, “except it be for fornication,” may only justify the putting away. And in the absence of a single other text that teaches a person can marry while a former companion lives, we think it a violation of proper rules of interpretation to take such license from this text. If the Divine author of the Bible intended that we should be free to marry again, when a wife is lawfully put away, would not the Scriptures have inserted the

clause elsewhere? And would it not have made that one exception to the positive rule that man and wife are “bound by the law,” so long as both live? That Christ did not intend to give license to a man to put away his wife and marry again, may be clearly inferred by the effect His words produced on the minds of His disciples. Read Matt. 19:10–12. They were driven to the extreme conclusion that if there is no dissolution of the marriage vows until death, “it is not good to marry.” They rashly concluded that if a man must abide for life by the choice he makes, the marriage institution was too sacred to enter. “But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.” By this, and the following verse we see that the marriage law, under the New Testament is so high and sacred that the coarse and licentious cannot receive it. Unlike the Mosaic toleration, it is not accommodated to the “hardness of men’s hearts,” and lusts of the flesh. The transforming, and spiritualizing power of Divine grace is abundantly able to place men where they can live happy and contented, without the blessing of a human companion, if that be their lot. Hence all divorcing, save for the one cause, and all marrying of a second living companion, are inconsistent with the New Testament, and derogatory to the grace of God.

Let it also be remembered that the Vatican Manuscript, which is chiefly the basis of our Greek text, does not contain that clause, “And shall marry another.” And the Emphatic Diaglott leaves it out. Were not the uniform voice of the Scriptures elsewhere against such a proviso, we would perhaps take other manuscripts against the Vatican. But the latter being strictly in harmony with the Word throughout, is most likely correct. That a person should not marry again, even though a companion has been lawfully put away, may be inferred from the fact, that the sin of adultery is by no means unpardonable. And should a person guilty thereof repent, become saved, pure and virtuous, what is there to hinder a Christian husband forgiving and restoring such an one? Should not the duty of putting away an adulteress terminate, when the one put away is substantially changed from that character, to one of virtue, chastity, and piety? And if it be a Christian duty to receive back a restored companion, should not that person remain single in order to be able to do so, should the one put away become worthy? We are aware of the fact that this is not the teaching of the law. But in many things the laws of the kingdom of heaven are in marked contrast with the precepts of the abolished code, as Christ shows in Matt. 5.

We drop this point by asking two questions. Where is there a word in the New Testament that would forbid the reception of a truly saved and reformed wife? Second, Where is there a principle in the love of God and Spirit of Christ that would close a man’s heart and home against a companion, when returning, humbly asking pardon, and already forgiven of God and washed in the blood of Christ? Next, read Mark 10:2–12. Here we have again the same answer of Christ to the Pharisees already examined in Matt. 19. But here it is recorded that the disciples asked Jesus again of the same matter, to whom he thus replied: “And he said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” Mark 10:11, 12. Here both the man and woman are placed on the same footing. If either one puts away his or her companion and marries another, the law of Jesus Christ holds that person an adulterer, or an adulteress. There is no exception here. Next we call attention to Luke 16:16, 18. “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”

“Whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” Here is the preaching of the kingdom of heaven. It is in exact corroboration of the last text. Both declare that “whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another committeth adultery.” “Whosoever,”—that is a very comprehensive word. It means any person, under any circumstances.

Yea “whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another committeth adultery.” These scriptures do not allow of a single exception. Hence they emphatically prove that the exception in Matt. 19:9 was an interpolation, or only applies to the putting away, and not to the marrying another. To say that the above text teaches one condition upon which a person may marry another and not commit adultery, were to set that text directly against Mark, Luke and Paul, who all declare that there is absolutely no exception. But “whosoever” does so is an adulterer. Christ would not say by Matthew, there is one exception to the rule, and by Mark, Luke and Paul, declare there is no exception at all. The word of the Lord does not conflict. We may also reasonably conclude that if there were one condition on which a man could put away a wife and marry another without becoming an adulterer, the exception would have been mentioned in Rom. 7:2, 3 and 1 Cor. 7:39, in both of which it is declared that the marriage law binds as long as both live. “So then if while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.” So many clear declarations all emphatically teaching the same thing, must surely mean what they say.

Thus far we have given more special attention to the putting away and marrying another. Now let us see what the Word says.

About Marrying a Man or Woman Who Has Been Put Away...

On this the voice of inspiration is very clear and uniform. “And whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” Matt. 5:32. “And whosoever marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” Matt. 19:9. “Whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” Luke 16:18.

There is no possible chance to bring in an exception here. These declarations stand out positively and unqualified. If a person were to attempt to carry the exception in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 forward into the above clause in those verses, it would result in the following absurdity; namely, “Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced—except she be divorced for the cause of fornication—committeth adultery.” Any person can see that this were extremely ridiculous. It would give license to marry a woman that had been put away for lewdness, but prohibit the marriage of one put away innocently. It would also imply a privilege for the divorced adulteress to take another husband, but require an innocently wronged woman to remain single. Such would be an abominable law. There is no possible dodging the above declarations. Any man who, knowing these scriptures; will marry a divorced woman, while her former husband yet lives, is guilty of adultery; is a willful sinner and can never be restored to God’s power without repenting and undoing the evil. Much more wicked and hateful in the sight of God is a man who will defame, and put away an innocent lawful wife, to commit whoredom with a woman that is some other man’s wife.

We now come to the apostle Paul's instruction on this subject, 1 Cor. 7th chapter. Read the chapter through. "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. And unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from the husband: but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." 1 Cor. 7:8–11. Here are the positive commands of Christ. "Let not the wife depart from her husband." "And let not the husband put away his wife." No difference what lust may clamor for, what earthly courts may grant, what human laws may provide, or the devil himself may suggest. Let not the wife leave her husband, nor a man put away his wife. And all of satan's power nor man's devices together cannot set aside the authority of the Lord Jesus.

"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 a 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 sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife." 1 Cor. 7:12–16. What do these words mean? "Not I, but the Lord." Verse 10, "Speak I, not the Lord." Verse 12. In the first instance he simply repeated what was given in previous commands of the Lord, as we have seen in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the second instance he gave command by the authority of the Spirit of God, who was not only to bring to remembrance what Christ had commanded, but to "guide into all truth." The latter were just as really the commands of God as the former. See 1 Cor. 14:37.

"A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases." Namely, if their wife or husband has departed from them. But are they in such cases at liberty to marry another? By no means. Such must remain unmarried, or be reconciled to the husband or wife. 1 Cor. 7:11 To exclude all such loose ideas of the marriage bond the apostle says in the same chapter, verse 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."

Only death can dissolve the marriage covenant, and give liberty to marry another. And while the New Testament recognizes and counsels subjection to civil authorities it does not give any earthly king or court the power to set at naught its laws, and legalize marriages, where the Divine law forbids. Hence a man willfully and unscripturally married, is an adulterer in the sight of God, notwithstanding any legal sanction his money may have procured for him. Here then we have laid down the plain law of Christ on this subject. Not our views, but just what the Word says.

1st. A saint must not marry a sinner.

2nd. Neither man nor woman shall put away their companion save for the cause of fornication.

3rd. Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery.

4th. "Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

5th. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." And there is no partiality in this matter shown the man.

So we as Bible teachers must present the truth, and God will seal its authority.

Must All Unscriptural Marriages Be Dissolved...

Thus far we have plain positive commands and Bible teaching, and therefore may speak with authority. But if we turn to the Word for directions what to say to those who have more than one living companion, we find no clear command given as to what they shall do. If, therefore, we stop where the Word stops, no person on earth is authorized to positively say all must separate, nor yet can we give them license to live together. Here then we must leave each case in God's hands. Secret things belong to him. And where he has laid down no positive command for us to enjoin, he must have reserved the prerogative to himself, to convict each individual by his Spirit of their duty. Let it be understood then that we disclaim all authority to say to men and women in such case you must, or you must not separate. Such must get their orders from God direct. And we may safely say that no person in such marriage can keep salvation and victory while living in doubt and uncertainty of the will of God in their case, much less if living in conscious rebellion. The holy life is only maintained in the knowledge and the performance of God's will. And especially in a case of this kind will Satan buffet your souls and destroy your confidence without it is positively settled that you are living in the present will of God. Therefore let all who have gotten into this unfortunate entanglement, open your hearts and conscience before God, put your whole will subject to his will, and cease not to call upon God until his Spirit assures you of his will in your particular case. Duty lies in one direction or the other, and "they shall all be taught of God," led of his Spirit. Be sure and keep self out of the question, absolutely have no will or choice of your own. Let every earthly consideration be utterly discarded. Be ready to do that which, to your best judgment, would be most to the glory of God, and that which your conscience would most approve of in the day of judgment.

In the absence of a positive command to separate, or to live together under these circumstances, it is manifestly wrong to severely judge in the matter. The parties must clear their own conscience before God, and while they show the fruits of the Spirit of God, they are entitled to our love and confidence. But does not the perfect law of the Lord give us some general principle, or some ruling on similar cases from which we can infer the mind of God in this matter? Let us see. We know that where men have done contrary to the word of God ignorantly, after learning the fact, they are required to undo, and make right in all cases where it is possible to do so, when they come to a knowledge of the truth. But can men and women entirely undo the act of marriage? Can they castoff that bond of natural conjugal affection that has united their hearts? We think not, except it be by some unkind, and unjust conduct by which that love might be killed. And surely God would not require that. Again, if they have brought forth offspring, their union is still more irrevocable. We know that the practice of any sin cannot find pardon without its discontinuance. But knowing that God locates sin in the motives of the heart and will, it is very doubtful that God holds a person as living in actual adultery when married to a second

living companion, if that relation was entered into in all good conscience, sincerely supposing he or she had a perfect right to do so.

Again, there is a difference between going into a thing knowing it to be forbidden in the Word, and being now in the same: the step having been taken while in sin and ignorance. This distinction is seen in the word of God treating on the marriage relation.

We have seen that believers are forbidden to marry unbelievers. But if a man or woman gets salvation and having an unsaved companion must they separate? No. But, "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 a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 1 Cor. 7:12, 13.

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." 1 Cor. 7:14.

Here we see clearly that a marriage state which the word of God forbids the Christian to enter, now, being already bound in the same, he does not demand separation, but even forbids them to part from each other. And who can reasonably say that the same principle will not also apply to other forms of unscriptural marriage that have been ignorantly entered into?

Not only does our kind Heavenly Father have a regard for the affections that bind man and wife, and in his wisdom and mercy permit them to live together under circumstances that he forbids marriage to take place, but we also see that he tenderly cares for their children, and does not want to have them turned out and disgraced as illegitimates even though, through ignorance, there was an unscriptural union of parents. The union exists and they having children, it cannot be wholly undone.

And would not the Lord have the same kind regard for innocent children of parents who have married a second living companion? As the laws of the land legalize such marriages and the Protestant pulpit has lifted the standard no higher, general ignorance has prevailed on this subject. Therefore many have married a second companion without scruple. Many were unfortunately wedded the first time through youthful ignorance, or persuasion, and were soon abandoned. The law claimed to have dissolved the bond, and they have lived long and happily with a second, and brought up children. Will God now require them in every case to part, and bring disgrace upon their children? No. The principle already seen relating to another form of unscriptural union we think must have some bearing on this case also. But of course we only give this as inference and not as positive teaching or legislation in the case.

Again we find mention made of such a thing as men having more than one living companion, and such are forbidden to be ordained as elders and deacons, 1 Tim. 3:2, 12. Titus 1:6. But it is no where said that all such should be utterly denied the fellowship of the church of God, unless they dissolve the last marriage.

We maintain, therefore, that the scriptures, to say the least, leave us without any good ground to condemn all thus living, as sinners and adulterers in the sight of God; especially if they show the fruits of the Spirit of God in their lives.

The circumstance under which men and women have become separated from a former companion, and taken another, vastly differ. One has been abandoned without cause, another has wickedly departed from a lawfully wedded wife or husband without excuse. One has married again through spite and base lust, and is condemned for the act in his own conscience. Another out of pure motives, and without the knowledge of any wrong attached to the act. Surely the just God will not place both these cases under the same sentence.

This marriage relation is a very sacred thing. And he who undertakes to dissolve the same, assumes a fearful responsibility. Hence it appears that God who knoweth all hearts has reserved to himself the right to command his children in this matter, in all doubtful cases. However, there are many separations and marriage to another which are so manifestly wicked that the sense of justice that God has given all men must condemn the same, and all can see that repentance must lead to a retraction of the unholy deeds. While upon the other hand men have become separated and married again under circumstances that holy justice would blush to disturb them.

But Not Even Such Live Together As Brother And Sister Only as Brother and Sister After Enlightened by the Word...

It has been taught by some that persons who are unfortunate in the matter of having a divorced wife, and are married to a second, that if they live with her, they should live in celibacy. But we find no such directions in the Word of God. To take upon you such a vow, is but to go into bondage under the elements of the law. It gives place to the devil, to tempt, harass, and buffet the soul. All saints of God are taught by the Word and Spirit of God, and enabled by Divine grace, to live temperate, pure, spiritual minded, and abstinent in all things, to the full extent that God is glorified. And thus should they all live. Yea, “this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remains that both they that have wives, be as though they had none: and they that weep, as though they wept not.” 1 Cor. 7:29–31. How very forcibly those words come to us, upon whom the end of the world has come! But this holy life of self-denial should all be in the freedom of the Spirit and law of liberty in the soul, and not by binding yourselves under a slavish law which brings a snare, and usually works bondage and death. Flee from legality, and “live in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” If you are conscious that God forgives all sins of the past, and does not require you to separate, then live in the bonds of the Word of God as man and wife, and permit no man nor the devil to accuse you, nor put an unscriptural yoke upon you. “Whom the Son maketh free, is free indeed.” “Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.” Amen. But should a man or woman, through lust and treachery, leave a companion and children, after living together for years, and take another, justice and righteousness demand that he put away the late espoused, and return and render satisfaction to the wronged family.

And for a man or woman professing to be saved in the present light, to allow the devil to “transfer his or her love” from a lawful companion to another, is a sin and abomination in the sight of God, which no person can be guilty of without first having lost the grace of God out of the heart, and becoming a reprobate. And such will have to put away the unlawful wife or husband, and make complete satisfaction to the wronged one before any saint of God can have confidence in them.

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” Matt. 15:19, 20.

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” Mark 7:21–23.

“Now the works of the flesh are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Gal. 5:19–21.

And we are plainly told “that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Ver. 21.

We should not allow the fact that our merciful High Priest can forgive them that are “ignorant and out of the way,” to cause us to lower the standard of his Word one jot or tittle, nor in the least mitigate the guilt of the willful transgressor.

On the other hand, we should not stumble the souls of such as give evidence that God has forgiven their wrong steps in the kingdom of darkness, because his Word is inflexible toward them that sin knowingly. The Lord give us both wisdom and love, that we may properly balance the claims of justice to the law of the Lord, and pity to the souls of men. Amen.