

Marriage

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Please, please don't be put off by this title! In my experience, every time I have heard a sermon or message on the subject of marriage, it has always been given by a pastor or preacher who is married and who, outwardly at least, seems to have such an idyllic, obedient, perfect family. Indeed, most pastors believe that this is a witness in itself, and completely possible for the real Christian to attain unto, if he works hard enough at it. But, I have to disagree. Single people, and those in dysfunctional marriage situations, keep reading!

All I have ever heard from such preachers is a very light sermon on how nice, cosy married families (like the pastor's is outwardly) should love and forgive each other, and that's just about all there is in the message. Now, I agree we should love and forgive each other. But the problem I have is that there is nobody in this fallen world who lives in the ideal situation the pastor assumes. Not even the pastor himself, if he's honest. How are we actually supposed to cope in real situations? This is what we need to know.

For example, single people are told, "When you choose your life partner, make sure they are in the Lord." Well, yes, the Bible does teach that it is absolutely vital that true believers should only marry other true believers,

2 Corinthians 6:14

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

I have no problem with this instruction as such, but what about this part: "**When you choose....**" As if anyone has a choice out of several or even many! This sort of language is an example of not living in the real world.

Also, singletons, how many times have you heard the pastor say something like, "Some people have the gift of continence" - the implication being that such people can willingly remain single all their lives. Really? The fact is that there are so, so many single people out there who are longing for a life-partner, and know that they don't have such a "gift of continence." And I suggest this so-called gift doesn't exist at all. What good is such instruction to them?

We need to get away from such idyllic nonsense and face reality.

One of the most common verses preached upon with regards the subject of marriage, is:

Genesis 2:18

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

But this verse applies to before the Fall. It doesn't apply to us today, yet it is still one of the most common verses preached upon with regards the subject of marriage. Before the Fall, it was not good that man should be alone, so marriage was ordained and indeed commanded of God in those days. But not any more.

Similarly, we have instruction with regards our glorified bodies at the end of time:

Luke 20:34

The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

Some people think that this teaches us that a celibate life is of higher value than a married life. So they have taken this to mean that they should become monks, nuns or Roman Catholic priests, thinking, wrongly, that by doing this they are putting themselves in a higher, holier state than the riff-raff who gets married. But again, we can't apply these verses to this present evil world - they only apply to our glorified bodies, where we will all be single. So Moonies and others who believe marriage is eternal are all wrong too. Marriage ends at death.

Actually, I have in the past been puzzled as to why the Lord allows people to marry again after the death of a spouse. I have known of several examples of people who have been married for a very long time, their spouse dies, then within a year they marry again. I used to think that the first spouse must be sitting in heaven fuming over this, shouting, "You told me you'd love me for ever!" Of course the fact that the Lord allows remarriage after the death of a spouse proves that in heaven, we will be totally free from any of these emotional entanglements that so easily beset us in this life.

So, if we can't use the above verses to speak on marriage in this fallen world, what Scriptures can we turn to? Well, in the Old Testament, we have Moses. And what did Moses give us? Divorce. Christ tells us:

Matthew 19:8

Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

So we see that because of the hardness of our hearts, which came about upon all of us as a result of the Fall, the possibility of divorce has entered in.

There is a big split in the church on the subject of divorce and remarriage. I have met people on both sides of the argument. I remember meeting one person who seemed to bring up the subject all the time, arguing vehemently in favour of divorce and remarriage. I

found out later - guess what - he was married to a divorcee! Someone who has such an emotional attachment can't think rationally. I have also met people who are just as vehement against divorce and remarriage, and I can't help wondering if their marriages have had some incident in them which brings them to be so vehement in holding this conclusion (with this position, one spouse can commit adultery a thousand times and the other is bound to have them back). There are also other people who just blindly follow their denomination's position on the subject, of course.

This brings us to the New Testament. Which two New Testament characters give us all the information we need on marriage? Paul and The Lord Himself. Both were single, with no emotional attachment to anyone (God forbid we should speak of the Lord in that manner). So, married people, don't dismiss single people who try to help you. Don't ever think to yourself, "Single people, what do they know about marriage!" A lot actually, as they would be able to see things far more rationally than you can, whoever you are who are emotionally involved in a situation.

The most comprehensive chapter in the New Testament on marriage as it pertains to this present, fallen, evil world is 1 Corinthians 7. It would be a good idea to study this passage very carefully, whoever you are, because there is just as much instruction for single people here as for married people. I here only really skim the surface and bring out the salient points.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

Here we see that singleness and marriage are completely equal in status in this fallen world. It is good to be single, whereas before the fall it was not good. But to avoid fornication, marriage of one man to one woman (and no other combination) for life is also good, if a partner should come along in the Lord's providence.

vv.3-5

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Here we are, married people, instructions about how to contain and control yourselves within marriage. All good wholesome instruction.

vv.6-9

But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

This seems to imply that singleness is a better state than marriage, but this is not so. Paul is stressing that every man has his proper gift from God. Unmarried people, it is better off for you to stay unmarried because of the present distress (i.e. this fallen, evil world). Paul

expounds this more later. But if you have a partner and cannot contain, there is no advantage in staying single in such an instance. Your lack of being able to contain will get in the way of the work the Lord has for you to do. Get married and give each other their due benevolence.

vv.10-16

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. 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 an 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 a 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?

Here we have vital instructions for those who are in a marriage where one partner is a true believer and the other is not. This would never have happened before the Fall, it is a peculiar situation pertaining to a fallen world. This situation may have come about by various means. Of course, we are taught to only marry in the Lord, but we cannot see the heart, and people will make mistakes. Many will get involved with someone who is an unbeliever and think they can convert them by preaching the gospel to them. It doesn't work. Others will genuinely think their partner is born again, because they are zealous in the church and so on, only to find out later, after they have married, that their seemingly zealous partner gives up going to church altogether. I have seen all these situations in the church. Please don't get so emotionally involved that you can't see rationally and not be able to get out before it is too late.

But of course the most common way we end up in unequally yoked marriages is if two people got married whilst they were unbelievers, and subsequently one is converted. What to do in such a circumstance? Here we have the answer. Continue in the marriage. Let your light so shine before your partner that he or she may come to a true knowledge of Christ for themselves. Of course, only God can convert the heart, but you could very well be the instrument He uses.

But if the unbeliever can't stand living with a Christian and leaves and wants a divorce, then let them go. This is where divorce for wilful desertion comes from, but note it is only the unbeliever who can do this, the believer's responsibility is to keep the marriage going if at all possible, so that in the divorce the believer will come out as the innocent party. The Christian is never to instigate a divorce. If, however, they are being abused in any way, get out. Don't go back to an abusive situation. The Christian is called not to divorce, but they can separate if they have to. Note v.11 *"But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband."* Of course, if your unbelieving partner goes on to commit adultery, the believer is then free to sue out a divorce themselves anyway, as other Scriptures teach.

It is also possible to extend this example a little. What about marriages where one partner is more zealous for the Lord than the other? Surely this is a very common situation, in fact every marriage is included here! Again, this situation would never have existed before the Fall, but in a fallen world, everything is dysfunctional, including every marriage to a greater

or lesser extent. So that pastor, who had an outwardly idyllic marriage and family, who gives you such sweet sermons on what an ideal marriage you can have if only you listen to him; even he has something dysfunctional about his situation. We don't know what goes on behind the manse doors after all the congregation have left and the cheesy grins have been discarded.

vv.17-24

But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

When we are converted, we come from all sorts of different backgrounds. Some are servants, some free. Some are Jews, others Gentiles. Some are married, some single. Whatever position we are in, so long as it is a lawful calling, we are not to just give it all up now we've become a Christian. Of course, if we were in an unlawful calling before conversion, we must give it up. Maybe we were a prostitute, or worked in a betting shop. Yes, we would have to give all wicked things up, but every lawful calling we must carry on with, unless the Lord later on in our walk with Him calls us elsewhere. This is important. So many people, upon becoming a Christian, give up their "secular" jobs to "go into full time Christian work." As if a "secular" job is second rate. No it's not. It's just the same with our marriages. Buddha was a wicked evil man. He dumped his wife and family to "seek enlightenment." What a terrible thing to do! Whatever position we are in, we are not to leave it or change it in any way as long as it is lawful. Stay married to that horrible, selfish man. This might sound hard, but everyone under the sun has some sort of difficult situation to have to confront. It is a fallen world. We have to come to terms with that. Yes, some people will always have a better situation than others, but we are not to get jealous of anyone else. If we are truly the Lord's, He has ordained whatever position we are in, for our benefit, and He will look after us and keep us in it.

vv.25-31

Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

So, are we single? We should seek not a wife. Don't go hunting. Of course, if one comes along in the Lord's providence, all well and good, but we should not go actively, aggressively seeking for a partner. It's not worth it. Single people, please understand that marriage in this fallen world is not the idyllic thing it is cracked up to be, because of the Fall. I know plenty of people who have got married, and then find it was not the wonderful

thing they imagined at all. For example, maybe children come along, and the husband has to work long hours and is never at home, whilst the wife is at home all the time from morning till night with several screaming babies to take care of and no-one to help and no time off to think for herself. Single people, remember this! Do you really want to be burdened in this way? Married people, you know all this, you've learned it the hard way, but in whatever situation you find yourself in, don't seek to be loosed from your marriages either. Remember:

Psalm 127:3

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Whatever estate you are in, the Lord has put you there. Trust in the Lord and be thankful.

vv.32-35

But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

This again seems to imply that single people are in a better estate than married, because it states specifically that single people care for the things of the Lord and married people for the things of this world. But this still doesn't imply one is better than the other. Both have their own peculiar miseries. Single people, yes, I know you long for companionship in this world, but look at the extra time you've been given to care for the things of the Lord. Married people, I know you're burdened and have very little time for Bible study or prayer, but look at the privileges you have in this world. You have the human companionship the single person craves, and maybe you have children the Lord has given you to bring up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What a privilege! The Lord has given married people more responsibilities in this world.

vv.36-40

But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. 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. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

These last few verses seem again to strongly imply that the single life is better. But really it's not saying that. Both marriage and singleness are gifts from God and we need to see them as such. There are so many single people out there who long to get married, so much so that it's affecting their lives to a great extent. Hence Paul needs to give this special instruction to them. Think of a secular example. Say you are in the middle of a war and you need to flee quickly. A single person can just get up and go, whereas a person with a wife and family, can't just leave them, he is responsible for their safety as well as his

own. He can flee, but he would be a lot slower than someone with none of these responsibilities in this world. So a single person has many advantages. Friend, seek not a wife. If one comes along, good, praise the Lord, but because of the present distress, please, please don't worry about it. Maybe you'll never get married. That's a hard truth, isn't it. But it may be the sober truth in this fallen, dysfunctional world. I know you don't want me to say that, but, I'm sorry, it may, sadly, be true. However, you have such an advantage. Don't think you are being left out by the Lord, even when seemingly idyllically married pastors give endless sermons which are totally irrelevant to yourselves.

Matthew 19:12

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

So, this is the one chapter in the Bible where we have all the information we need with regards marriage and singleness. Let's trust in the Lord, whatever situation we're in, and He will guide us in the right way.

Arranged Marriages

We should never decide who to marry by seeing if we "fall in love" first. That's the way of the world. Our feelings are fickle. We must trust in the Lord's guidance, as in any other decision we have to make. In fact, in the Bible, most marriages are arranged by the family. This is the complete opposite of the way of the world, which waits until one "falls in love" first. Of course, if one doesn't have Christian parents, the Christian can't accept an unbeliever as a marriage partner, so in practice, they only have the Lord to trust in to arrange it anyway.

Genesis 6:2

The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

Choosing a wife by oneself is sin - this is especially so in this verse as the "sons of God" are the believers, who chose wrongly, because they chose the "daughters of men," who were the unbelievers.

Genesis chapter 24 is the story of Isaac meeting Rebekah.

Genesis 24:1-4

And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

Arranged marriages are the normal way for believers. Abraham didn't want Isaac to meet and marry a Canaanite, so he sent his servant away to his own kindred to find a wife for Isaac. Notice, he didn't send Isaac away, because the temptation would then be for him to stay there, as indeed Jacob, Isaac's son, did for twenty years.

Genesis 24:61-67

And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Rebekah knew in the Lord's providence that it was right to marry Isaac even before she had ever set eyes on him. That's trusting in the Lord.

Genesis 41:45

And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

In this case, Pharaoh arranged Joseph's marriage for him, as Joseph's owner.

Judges 14:1-3

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

It is the father's duty to get partners for their children, not the children's duty to go out and find anyone they fancy on their own.

Judges 21:18-25

Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin. Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; and see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty. And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they

caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them. And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Again we see that arranged marriages are the right way of meeting a possible partner. "Taking them wives" at dances is NOT the right way of meeting anyone.

In any case, what about our sinful natures? We all have a sinful nature. If someone thinks very highly of us, how can we have a proper view of our own sinfulness, when we are being confronted every day by our spouse telling us that we're quite nice really?!! God loves us without finding anything lovable in us at all. We find that impossible to do with each other - we always have to find something to love in a person before we can love them in return, especially before we marry them. This leads to the conundrum that we end up seeing something in a person that God does not see. That can't be right. So "falling in love" is not the right way to go about things. Having too high a regard for someone is at the very least denying our sinful natures (which is believing a lie, and against the ninth Commandment), or at worst is blatant, overt idolatry (against the first Commandment). Either way, it is truly and properly sin.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism includes in sins forbidden under the first Commandment:

....the denying or not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to Him alone.... (my emphasis).

The Larger Catechism includes:

....setting our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part....

Also, if someone thought too highly of me, I couldn't in all good conscience just sit back and lap it all up, much as my carnal nature would enjoy doing so. I would have to tell them that I'm not really like that. This would be purely for the sake of honesty and truth.

And then, "falling in love" the world's way, involves having some form of intimacy with someone before marriage to determine whether that person is the one we should marry or not. This is most assuredly wrong, because, if we come to the conclusion that it is NOT the person we should marry, we have then just been intimate with someone else's future wife, which is against the seventh Commandment.

In Genesis 3:16, God says to the woman, "*thy desire shall be to thy husband.*" Most commentaries take this to mean a wife's simple subjection to her husband; but that's a Creation ordinance anyway, not a specific punishment for sin (which is what this passage is talking about). The commentaries do say that it is an *inordinate* subjection here, a subjection with rigour, which I can understand, but I cannot help thinking there is also an element of *inordinate desire* for her husband too, i.e. a putting him too highly than she ought, and being enslaved by her feelings for him. This is against the first Commandment, a sore bondage, and, what's more, a result of the fall. This is not the Christian way of doing things. We should not follow the world.

Rather the Biblical way is using the tools God has given us for the normal way of guidance in everything else - i.e. the Bible, providence and prayer. The Bible tells us what sin is, so we can avoid it; providence and prayer determine all other ways not sinful. This is exactly the same method we use when we look for a job or every other major decision we have to make in life. God's will in the whole thing should be paramount.

There are several Biblical examples of powerful feelings of hatred after powerful feelings of so-called "love." This must prove to us beyond doubt that reliance on feelings is NOT the way to decide on who to marry:

2 Samuel 13:15

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.

Jeremiah 4:30

And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life.

Ezekiel 16:37

Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.

Ezekiel 23:17,22,28

And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them. Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side; For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated.

Nahum 3:6

And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock.

Revelation 17:16

And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Divorce and Remarriage

Introduction

The subject of divorce and remarriage is always a very emotive one, especially as people who take sides on the issue are usually themselves personally involved in some way, with their feelings or emotions completely clouding their view so that they cannot make a rational judgment. It is significant that all the Biblical instruction we have to go by on this matter comes from single men, i.e. Christ and Paul, who could proclaim the truth clearly, without any accusation of being biased or involved in any way.

We need to instil into people their responsibilities before God with regards their marriages. Marriage is never to be entered into lightly, and it is the duty of the church to instruct young people properly. All too easily today the church just sits back and allows two people to get married who "feel" like doing so, with no instruction whatsoever. It is a terrible indictment on all the churches when they are seen to follow the masses and believe that feelings are what true religion is all about. Their leaders will be answerable to God for this behaviour.

Church traditions

Although divorce is not referred to a great deal in the early church fathers, it appears that almost all of them rejected even the idea of divorce, let alone remarriage. It is argued that because this is the view of the early church, then this must therefore be the true interpretation of biblical thought on the matter. However, it is well known that the early church fathers were clearly wrong on other issues, such as their asceticism for example, and so other factors could have influenced them in their views on this subject. It is certainly **not** true to say (as we have heard it said) that the "orthodox" view for 1400 years has been to ban remarriage after divorce, as some people would argue. Even if this was the case, since when has the majority always been right? Ask Athanasius or Martin Luther.

Some of the early church fathers did indeed question this position. Origen allowed divorce and remarriage to avoid worse sin, and Jerome defended a woman who divorced her husband because of his adultery, and married another. Augustine, on the other hand, believed that marriage was indissoluble, and that there was at least a moral obligation that it should not be dissolved. It appears, however, that the Eastern Orthodox churches began to allow divorce and remarriage for a variety of reasons from the sixth century onwards.

The Roman Catholic church turned the institution of marriage into a sacrament. This put it on a par with Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is clearly not biblical to think of marriage in this way as it is not merely for the church (as the other two sacraments are), but a Creation ordinance binding on all men. The Roman church sees marriage as a union between two people for life, which no man can put asunder. To them, even divorce or separation cannot break this bond, and hence they do not sanction the remarriage of anyone whilst their spouse is still alive. Under canon law, however, a judicial annulment might be obtained. This does not mean that the marriage bond is broken, but it is rather a declaration that the marriage never existed. This is their "get-out clause," if you like. Other cases have shown that people could obtain separation from "bed and board" but, again, the separated parties were not allowed to remarry.

This idea that separation and divorce can never break the marriage bond is also the view of the Anglican church (at least officially), some of the stricter Anabaptist groups and the

Protestant Reformed Churches of America (PRC) (although, interestingly, the PRC only adopted this view as their leader Herman Hoeksema embraced it himself in the 1930s¹). Of course none of these groups would see marriage as a sacrament as the Roman church would, and most would see divorce (which they would equate with legalised separation) as legitimate, but only for adultery - neither party being eligible to remarry, as they would still be considered by the church as being “married” to their original partner until that original partner dies. There has however been plenty of opposition to this, in the Anglican church particularly. For example, Archbishop Cranmer proposed a revision of the canon law (which was never carried out) that would have included divorce for adultery, malicious desertion, prolonged absence without news, attempts against the partner's life and cruelty².

This was in line with the Reformers generally, who allowed divorce and remarriage under various circumstances. However, how much of this was due to an over-reaction against the Romanist idea of marriage being a sacrament is very difficult to determine. Not that much literature was actually written on this subject by the Reformers, presumably because there were far more important things to write about and defend in the heat of the situation that existed at the time.

We know that the early Reformed confessions of Saxony (1551) and Wirtemberg (1552) both mention the subject of divorce and remarriage, and both agree on remarriage after divorce for the “innocent party.”³ John Calvin was also of this mind. In criticising the abuses of the Roman church he says, “*Moreover, they frame degrees of kindred contrary to the laws of all nations, and even the polity of Moses, and enact that a husband who has repudiated an adulteress may not marry again.*”⁴ Note here that he saw Moses as teaching divorce and remarriage in such circumstances.

In 1560 in Scotland (the year of John Knox's reformation there), kirk sessions began to grant divorces, but in 1563 the Commissary Court was established in Edinburgh with jurisdiction over all Scotland in questions of marriage and divorce. From this court there was an appeal to the Court of Session, both these courts being civil courts. In 1573 an act was passed declaring that if either husband or wife deserted the other for four years without reasonable cause, and refused to return to co-habitation, this should be grounds for divorce. After that, divorce in Scotland was granted on proof of adultery or desertion of either spouse.⁵

The last hundred years particularly has seen a great increase in the number of divorces. It is now thought of as a fact of life that divorce must be allowed for any and every cause, otherwise we are limiting people's personal freedom too much, which, according to modern psychology, is the greatest evil. No longer is principle an issue, just as no longer do people believe in an objective truth, or an objective morality, i.e. an absolute right and wrong. The world needs to know once more that God is in the heavens, that there *is* an absolute right and wrong and that we shall all be accountable for every word we speak and every thought we think. Feelings will mean nothing in that day, rather, absolute truth and absolute righteousness will be the sole criteria God will use for judging every one of us, so we had better get it correct now, before it is too late.

¹Prof. Herman Hanko, “*For Thy Truth's Sake*” (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000) pp.382ff.

² ed. Walter Elwell, “*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*” (Baker Book House, Grand

Rapids, 1984)

³ ed. Peter Hall, *“The Harmony of the Protestant Confessions”* (Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, 1992) pp. 461, 468.

⁴ John Calvin, *“Institutes of the Christian Religion”* Book IV, Ch.19, para. 37.

⁵ ed. N. Cameron, *“Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology”* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993).

Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) is a distillation of the most important doctrines of Scripture made by one of the best conferences of Christian men that have ever existed together in one era, and, although only a human document, it can still be used to help formulate the biblical position on the subject. The two articles in question in the Westminster Confession, together with their proof texts, are as follows (Chapter 24):

V. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract.^a In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce^b: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.^c

VI. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage^d: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion, in their own case.^e

^aMatthew 1:18-20

^bMatthew 5:31,32

^cMatthew 19:9; Romans 7:2,3

^dMatthew 19:8,9; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Matthew 19:6

^eDeuteronomy 24:1-4

It is interesting to note at this point that neither the Savoy Declaration of 1658 nor the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 contain these two paragraphs, even though they contain the other four paragraphs on marriage from the Westminster Confession word for word. This seems to indicate that there was at least some kind of dispute over these paragraphs at that time. This might have been over the content of the paragraphs themselves, some people may have been wanting to tighten up a seemingly liberal view. However, it could also be possible that the dispute was simply about whether the subject of divorce and remarriage was a suitable subject for inclusion in a Confession of Faith at all, or whether it is more a case for inclusion in the Church Order instead, or indeed even left to the civil courts to legislate over.

Now, let us have a look at the teaching itself.

From these two paragraphs we see, firstly, that an actual act of adultery or fornication in and of itself does not break the marriage bond. All the Confession states is that it allows the innocent party to dissolve that contract, if they so wish. If they wish reconciliation instead, that's fine.

However, it is assumed by holders of the PRC/Anglican position that if the contract is dissolved, then both parties would be free to marry again. And this is consequently seen by them as an easy route to take for anyone who is simply bored with their spouse. All they have to do is commit adultery, then the innocent party can sue out a divorce and the guilty party can go off and marry someone else anyway. Contrary to such an opinion, this is not the Westminster position at all. The Confession does not explicitly state the position of the guilty party in any of this. However, it does state the position of the innocent party, i.e. that they are free *“to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.”* Now if both parties were allowed to remarry after the contract had been dissolved, why on earth does the Confession only mention the innocent party? Why not mention that both are free to remarry? I suggest that it is because the guilty party **is not free to do so**. The proponents of the PRC/Anglican view are quick to assume that the guilty party is free to remarry because the contract has been dissolved, but nowhere does the Confession teach that they are. Rather the guilty party is under the ban of the church from remarriage.

This is the position of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. There is nothing in their Church Order about this. Maybe when it was written they thought the Confession to be clear enough. However, their magazine has addressed the issue. In the February 1996 issue of the F.P. Magazine, for example, referring to the divorce of the Prince and Princess of Wales, we read: *“Given the confessed adultery of both parties, we do not object to the divorce, though it would be unscriptural for either of them to remarry.”* (of course this was written before the death of the Princess of Wales). Now, if the PRC/Anglican criticism about the Westminster position is true, this divorce **would** free them both up to remarry, hence we can only conclude that they would both be under the ban of the church (and the state in an ideal world) to remarry, by reason of them both being guilty parties. This is, after all, no different from the PRC/Anglican view, except for the fact that the PRC/Anglican view would extend the ban on remarriage to the innocent party as well. Remarriage of the guilty party is not an option in either view.

Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32

The scriptural ground for the Westminster position is based (amongst other scriptures) on Matthew 19:9:

Matthew 19:9

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.

The first half of this verse tells us:

(1.) Anyone putting away his wife for anything other than *“fornication,”* i.e. NOT for a valid reason (i.e. she is NOT a guilty party), commits adultery if he marries another, because technically he is still married to his first wife as the divorce is for an invalid reason, and therefore should not be recognised.

(2.) The presence of the exception clause then clearly infers by good and necessary consequence that anyone putting away his wife FOR *“fornication,”* i.e. FOR a valid reason

(i.e. she IS a guilty party), does NOT commit adultery if he marries again, as he is the innocent party.

The second half of the verse tells us that anyone marrying her that is put away commits adultery because:

(1.) If it was NOT for a valid reason (i.e. "*fornication*"), she would still technically be married to her first husband.

(2.) If it was FOR a valid reason, she is the guilty party and therefore under a ban from remarrying, so if she does marry again it would be classed as adultery.

With regards Matthew 5:32, the first half of the verse is different:

Matthew 5:32

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery.

In this case:

(1.) If the putting away was NOT for a valid reason, it would cause the wife to commit adultery (if she married again) because she would still technically be married to her first husband.

(2.) If the putting away was FOR a valid reason, using the same logic as above, we conclude that this does NOT cause her to commit adultery - which it doesn't of course as such, as the putting away does not cause the adultery because adultery has already occurred. The adultery causes the putting away. This shows that there is no blame attached to the man if he was to put her away for a valid reason (and indeed remarry, although remarriage isn't really the issue here). He is not **causing** her to commit adultery (if she should marry again) as he would be if the divorce was on invalid grounds; it would be her own sin alone if she remarried, and he would not be culpable in this case, as he would have been in the case of divorce for an invalid reason.

It has been pointed out that other similar verses appear without the exception clause, i.e. in Mark 10:11,12 and Luke 16:18. However, we must ask the question: How many times must something appear in Scripture to be authoritative? Answer: Once. (In fact the exception clause appears twice actually). The other two instances in Mark and Luke without the exception clause are simply giving the normal position i.e. no divorce "*for every cause,*" as the Pharisees had wanted to be the case. "*Fornication*" is the exception rather than the rule.

Some people argue that because the exception clause is where it is in the sentence, then it must only apply to the divorce and not the remarriage. However, to believe that changing the sentence order around would make a difference is not true. Any other way would make the passage grammatically awkward to say the least. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and shall marry another, except it be for fornication, committeth adultery" is very bad grammar. The exception clause applies primarily to the divorce, and the "*committeth adultery*" clause applies primarily to the remarriage, hence the sentence is naturally structured to reflect this.

Now, how long does a guilty party remain under this ban of remarriage? There are three possibilities:

(1.) Until the death of the individual guilty party themselves.

- (2.) Until the death of the divorced spouse (e.g. Diana, in the case of Prince Charles)
- (3.) Until a credible profession of repentance on the part of the guilty party (if ever).

Position (3.) is the most common one taken in a vast majority of churches today. The argument goes that as we are indeed to forgive others upon a credible profession of repentance in our everyday lives, then this should be the case here. However, one can easily see the large loophole that this position opens up, in that the more liberal ministers and churches could just ignore the ban on the guilty party completely and allow remarriage anyway (which, alas, most of them do these days). Many such people are following John Murray in this. It is this interpretation that people are reacting against when they criticise the position of the Westminster Confession.

Position (2.) is the correct one (this would agree with the PRC/Anglican view in fact). An article in the F.P. Magazine for March 2005 states: "*Mrs Parker-Bowles is now divorced but her former husband is still alive. Obviously Prince Charles is now free to remarry as his wife is dead, but his fiancée is not free to do so, and so the proposed marriage will not be scriptural.*" (This assumes of course that Mrs Parker-Bowles was not an innocent party in her divorce). So this is a very simple rule of thumb we have. The Confession states that the innocent party is to be treated "*as if the offending party were dead;*" so we can at least strongly imply (although technically it is not a necessary implication) that the guilty party is to be treated **as if they were still married**, in which case the guilty party may not remarry until their original spouse dies - even if that spouse has lawfully divorced and remarried someone else in the meantime.

It might be objected that God would never allow anyone to be in a position whereby they have to live "*as if*" something, when that something is not the case in reality. However, we do have Biblical precedent for this, albeit in a slightly different context:

2 Samuel 20:3

And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

Here we have David putting away ten of his concubines. Although this refers to divorce after polygamy, the thing to note here is that Scripture describes them after having been put away as "*living in widowhood,*" in other words "*as if*" their husband was dead (which David was not). So we cannot dismiss this idea as readily as some people would like us to do.

Deuteronomy 22:13-29

In Deuteronomy 22, we have a series of situations with regards various related subjects and how to deal with them practically:

- (1.) vv. 13-21 - a man whose new wife cannot prove her virginity.
- (2.) v.22 - adultery with a married person (see also Leviticus 20:10)
- (3.) vv. 23-27 - adultery with a betrothed person.
- (4.) vv. 28-29 - fornication before marriage.

In the first three cases the penalty if found guilty is stoning to death. The promoters of the PRC/Anglican view are quick to insist that this was the penalty in the Old Testament for

adultery, so divorce was not an issue, but (a.) why then is it that Moses allows divorce in Deuteronomy 24? And (b.) why then is it that Joseph, spoken of as a “*just*” man, sought to divorce Mary after he found Mary with child in Matthew 1:19? Surely, if he was a “*just*” man, as the text says, he would have sought to get her stoned to death. We see here in fact that Joseph had a choice, either to “*make her a publick example*” (which was stoning to death, after a fair trial by the public authorities), or to “*put her away privily,*” in other words, divorce. The Old Testament law always allowed the choice.

Note, in the fourth case above (4.), that the penalty for fornication where no married person is involved is **not** stoning. The greater penalty of stoning for crimes involving at least one married party, shows the seriousness with which a crime against the ordinance of marriage should be held.

In case (1.), the penalty for the man if found wrong about questioning his wife’s virginity, is that he may “*not put her away all his days*” (v.19). Note he is guilty of a crime, but not of adultery, rather the crime of giving a virgin in Israel a bad name. So stoning is not a suitable penalty for him, rather he is fined an hundred shekels of silver (payable to the father of his bride) and never allowed to divorce her as long as he lives. In case (4.), the penalty for the fornicator who lies with a virgin not betrothed is similar. He has technically not committed adultery as such (i.e. no married person is involved in the crime) and so is not stoned, but is fined 50 shekels of silver, and not allowed to divorce her as long as she lives. It seems here that he is forced to marry her, and on the face of it, it looks like a rapist is being forced to marry his victim, which seems rather unfair to say the least. However, comparing this passage with Exodus 22;16,17, we see that there was a way out of forcing the poor woman to marry if she did not want to:

Exodus 22:16,17

If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.

So a fine (payable to the father) could be imposed instead. The main point here is that in these two cases we have a specific statement that divorce would not be allowed all the man’s days, i.e. this is **a ban placed on a guilty party**. So the idea of the church being able to place a ban of some kind on one party and not the other has a scriptural precedent. In this case it is a ban on divorce, in our case in question it is a ban on remarriage for a divorced guilty party.

Note also, in cases (2.) and (3.) above, that the penalty for adultery is the same as the penalty for betrothal, i.e. stoning to death. Also, the parties in a betrothal are referred to with words such as “*husband,*” “*wife*” and “*married*” (see also Matthew 1:19). Hence we see that betrothal is treated in exactly the same way as marriage, the only difference between the two being that the parties have not yet officially signed a legal, public document or come into sexual union. This is interesting because some people argue (and many Strict Baptists argue this way) that the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 deliberately use the word “*fornication*” not “*adultery*” because, they say, it only applies to betrothal, and betrothal is the only state, in their view, from which one can get a legitimate divorce. But we see that the Bible makes no such distinction between betrothal and marriage with regards these things. Betrothal is not a “halfway house,” it is marriage in everything but the final contract being signed and the sexual union. In fact, in cases (1.) and (4.), not having divorce available to the guilty party after marriage is a penalty, not the normal position. The word “*fornication*” is used, not to provide a special case to refer to betrothal only, but to include many more sinful practices than just adultery, including

sodomy (Jude 7), incest (1 Corinthians 5:1), and uncleanness with single or married people (1 Corinthians 10:8). Does this include something “minor” (in the world's eyes), like finding a pornographic magazine in one's spouse's possession? Yes, indeed it does:

Matthew 5:28

Anyone who looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

But, as with any sin, we cannot legislate against thoughts alone; only when hard evidence comes to light can we go ahead and do something about it. Possession of a magazine of this nature could be used as that evidence, the only problem being that it might be difficult to prove this in a divorce court, as it would be difficult to produce witnesses, or proof that it hadn't been planted on the person without their knowledge and so on, but technically, yes, it is hard evidence of fornication and therefore could be used as just grounds for a lawful divorce.

Sexual union is the final stage in a marriage union, but it is not the whole of the marriage. Betrothal was equally as important, being everything else to do with marriage except for the final contract being signed and this union - i.e. it was a public, witnessed statement of intent to marry (and stay together), and public declaration of consent between both parties (Genesis 24:5-8; Genesis 24:57-58) and their parents (Genesis 34:4-6). All of these are necessary for a marriage to be declared valid. A marriage is not just sexual union alone, as can be witnessed by the woman of Samaria in John 4 who had five husbands, and the one she now had was not her husband (John 4:18). To have someone who is not her husband implies there is more to marriage than just sexual union, i.e. a public, official, recorded declaration of some kind must be entered into for the marriage to be valid.

Wilful Desertion

“*Wilful desertion*,” according to the Westminster Confession, is also legitimate grounds for divorce. Again, proponents of the PRC/Anglican view think this also makes the Westminster view a very “low” view of marriage, but the Confession is very careful. Firstly the main proof text is 1 Corinthians 7:15:

1 Corinthians 7:15

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

This only ever applies to an unbeliever “*wilfully deserting*.” Believers would not have this option. Then the divorce is not in the hands of the couple to just “decide” to do it. Only “*such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage*” and “*the persons concerned in it are not left to their own wills and discretion, in their own case.*” Of course, if found guilty, the deserter would be under the same ban of remarriage as if he had committed adultery, so again we have a suitable deterrent from doing such a thing. All this is a far cry from the easy divorce that the PRC/Anglicans would have us believe the Westminster view entails.

1 Corinthians 7:14

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.

In this scenario of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, the believer is not to try to get out of the marriage, as it is still a legitimate one, bringing forth “*holy*” seed indeed. So if the unbeliever is pleased to dwell with the believer then they should do so. However, if the unbeliever departs (v.15) then he or she should be permitted to leave. The word for “*depart*” here and in vv.10-11 is the Greek word *chorizo*, which literally means “separate.” Divorce is a completely different word, *apoluo*. This is used by some people to suggest that this passage is not talking about divorce at all. This is not the case however, as the word *chorizo* is the same word used for “*put asunder*” in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9 - verses clearly talking of divorce.

This is also implied purely from vv. 12 and 13 alone:

1 Corinthians 7:12,13

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 an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

These verses state that if the unbeliever be pleased to dwell with the believer then let them **not** be put away. This clearly at least **implies** that if the unbeliever is **not** pleased to dwell with the believer, then this would be a valid reason to put him/her away (i.e. divorce).

A person whose unbelieving spouse has wilfully deserted them, can therefore legitimately sue out a divorce, but this can only be done after the church has officially declared the deserter an unbeliever, i.e. “*as an heathen man and a publican*”.

Matthew 18:17

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

This would need to be done, because the duty of the believer otherwise would be to stay single or be reconciled to the husband as described in vv. 10-11. An unbeliever outwardly proves himself to be an unbeliever by refusing to listen to the church and the state warning him, and his subsequent excommunication - the church and state have no way of knowing or declaring him an unbeliever otherwise.

It is never up to either party’s will that the divorce goes ahead, it needs to be granted by the authorities. This is totally different to the divorce-on-demand mentality of today. The “*wilful desertion*” clause in the Westminster Confession gives church and state the power to divorce people, without it having to be for adultery, in exceptional cases, when an unbeliever insists on leaving. The deserted party would then of course be treated as a divorced innocent party and allowed to marry again, and the unbeliever who has departed as a divorced guilty party, under the ban of the church (and ideally the state as well) from remarriage.

What happens if the unbeliever, upon departure, insists on applying for a divorce themselves? They cannot have one, as the innocent party has done nothing wrong to warrant it.

Highest View of Marriage

It seems that the holders of the PRC/Anglican view tend to think of Westminster Confession people as having a very “low” view of marriage and they a very “high” one, whereas we would suggest it is the other way around. In the PRC/Anglican view, a man can commit adultery a thousand times, and his wife could do nothing about it and would be duty bound to have the cad back (the only other alternative being some kind of separation with no possibility of remarriage until the death of one of them, but even then they would still believe it is their *duty* to have them back if at all possible). The Westminster position on the other hand is that if one of the parties commits adultery once, the innocent spouse can (if they so wish) sue out a divorce straight away, kick the wicked adulterer out of the house, and put them under the ban of church and state from ever marrying again. **That** is a high view of marriage. That would make anyone think twice about adultery.

Objections Considered

1. Does this not make adultery the unforgivable sin? No. All it does is force on someone a ban on remarriage. This is not lifted even on a credible profession of repentance. The person has to live with this ban upon them until the death of the original spouse. We all have consequences of sin to live with. Maybe we used to be a bank robber and trapped our hand in a safe door, maiming it for life whilst in the process of robbing a bank. We could subsequently be truly converted and become a member of a church, but we still have to live with a maimed hand, gained as the result of our sin, for the rest of our lives. The same applies if in our unregenerate state we may have covered ourselves with tattoos etc.. The same also applies if we were a guilty party in a divorce. We could truly repent, and be accepted (back) into church membership, but we would still be under a ban of remarriage until the death of the original spouse. Being a “*divorced guilty party*” is a **declared state**, like being “*single*,” or being “*married*” or being a “*divorced innocent party*.” It is not a **sin** as such, so repentance is not able to extricate anyone from such a state (albeit it is the consequence of sin).

2. What happens if a “*divorced guilty party*” remarries whilst the original spouse is still alive, either in a state ceremony, or in a ceremony in another church with laxer views than that expounded here? The church should not recognise any marriage unless it is in keeping with its own laws. So, in the above example, the new partnership is unlawful in the eyes of the church, and the parties would not be recognised by the church as being married, but rather as living in adultery. The church can only recognise Biblically **valid** marriages, divorces and remarriages, not **invalid** ones entered into via the state or other laxer body which allows such things. So long as a certificate of marriage is signed and records are lodged after a public declaration, any valid marriage is deemed lawful by the church, even if it took place outside of the church itself. But unbiblical (i.e. invalid) marriages are not to be recognised by the church, e.g. in cases of polygamy, same sex couples, remarriages after invalid divorce etc. We are quite happy to say “No” to same sex marriages, so why are we not as forthright in condemning marriages of divorced guilty parties?

This again is the position of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, as stated in a “Protest re Family Law (Scotland) Bill 2005” sent to the Scottish Parliament, which includes the following: “*The Synod further protests the right and privilege of the Church to consider those aspects of this law which are at variance with Scripture teaching on*

marriage and divorce, as defined in the 24th chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, as unlawful for the purposes of ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction."

3. What if the spouse is no longer traceable? How do we know when they are dead, and so when the guilty party is eligible to remarry? It is not likely that this would occur in this modern age of record keeping. However, if the person *admits* to being a guilty party, we must try to trace the spouse by whatever means possible. If we fail to do this, they must, on their own admission, not be allowed to remarry until the death of the spouse can be proved. The death of the spouse must be proved before the ban can be lifted. If they lie, and *do not admit* to being a guilty party when in reality they are, and no record is available to say that they are, the church must treat them as it would an unknown polygamist. If a polygamist comes forward for marriage in the church, and the church is unaware of their being married to another person, the church must accept a credible profession, and admit them not only to church membership, but indeed to marriage. Banns are read in church, and records investigated, but if nothing comes to light they should be allowed to marry with the church's blessing. If, subsequently, the church finds out that they were a polygamist, or a divorced guilty party, (i.e. already had a spouse, or was "*as if*" they had a spouse), then the remarriage would have to be immediately declared unlawful, the church must then insist that the partners cease living together (otherwise it would be adultery), and the guilty party disciplined accordingly.

Conclusion

The correct position on divorce and remarriage therefore is that a guilty party after divorce is put under a church ban of remarriage for the rest of the lifetime of the original spouse, "*as if*" they were still married, even though the marriage contract has been dissolved by the divorce, and maybe the innocent party has married someone else.

Any other position than this, either on the one hand brings undue suffering to the innocent party by not allowing them to remarry when they have done nothing wrong; or on the other hand allows marriage of the guilty party in through the back door, and creates all kinds of difficult situations in the church, as indeed does every case of not disciplining sin after the biblical manner.