

A TIMELY QUESTION

As shown by recent correspondence, there appears to be a great amount of controversy among all sects of Christadelphians on the question of divorce and remarriage. The only real answer to the confusion which this subject has provoked must come from the straightforward commands of God and His Son. The simplicity of Truth can remove the veil which clouds this issue today.

Marriage, we are told, is a divine institution, a blessing ordained to Adam and to his faithful descendants:

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." *Genesis 2:24.*

This divinely ordained union was to speak to those possessing a spiritual mind of the greater union to come between Christ and His bride, The Ecclesia. Paul unfolds this figure in Ephesians chapter 5:23-31, part of which reads:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might present it to himself a glorious church..." *Verses 25,27.*

With such instruction from God to help us, what a denial of His word and teaching to break such a union - unthinkable to any who revere the God of heaven. Yet today, to the distress of some serious-minded Christadelphians, there is in that body, not only controversy over this question, but actually divorce among the members, accepted and approved by many. Their justification for this is based on a misinterpretation of Jesus' words - what has been termed the "exceptive clause":

"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." *Matthew 5:32.*

The simple meaning of Christ's injunction is: "Whosoever shall put away his wife..." does indeed cause her to commit adultery, unless, obviously, she is already guilty of this, as indicated by the words: "saving (or except) for the cause of fornication." If the wife were already guilty of adultery, the cause could not be laid to "putting away" - as it might in other circumstances. The full impact of Jesus' teaching is found in Matthew 19, in reply to the Pharisees' question:

"... Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" *Verse 3.*

Jesus' answer, and guide for us today, was:

"... Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,
And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?
... What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."
Matthew 19:4-6.

All those striving to be brethren of Christ will desire to receive and obey this divine instruction.

The present confusion leads inevitably to a further question: What is the position of one, having been divorced and remarried, who now understands and desires to serve God? Some maintain there should be a leaving of the second spouse, and a rejoining of the first. Also there is the proposition that the remarried one is now living in adultery, and must leave the present spouse, and live alone. What is the answer? Does it go back again to the words of Jesus: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"?

Clearly the divine record shows the impossibility of God's joining all in marriage. One must recognize that the world is without God, and as a general rule, neither understands the divine sanctity of marriage, nor what it is intended to show as a type. These God has not "joined." He joins in marriage only when the parties involved are believers. He also sanctifies the marriage of one coming to, or in the Truth, even though married to an unbeliever, as Paul makes clear:

"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."
I Corinthians 7:13-14.

Thoughtful attention to these basic commands simplifies any question concerning those who seek the Truth, either divorced or remarried. The position at baptism is that God gives sanction to the existing marriage. Any previous marriage has been contracted without God, and broken without His law; therefore, the parties are not accountable. Paul tells us:

"Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."
I Corinthians 7:24.

These considerations naturally lead to a further aspect of the divorce question. Is a believer who has been divorced prior to knowledge of God's law free to remarry now? Again, Jesus' words help us to recognize that remarriage of one who seeks the kingdom

of God is forbidden as long as the first spouse is alive:

"... All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 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."

Matthew 19:11-12.

A faithful believer, having been divorced prior to knowledge of God's will, and now recognizing the spirit of Jesus' words, would acknowledge the need to be a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake" - denying himself remarriage as long as the former spouse lives. Failure to uphold this perception would result in adultery, as Paul makes clear:

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband, so long as he liveth; ... 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."
Romans 7:2-3.

TO SUMMARIZE:

1. Marriage is a divine institution.
2. The world is without God, not understanding the sanctity of marriage.
3. God joins only those marriages where the parties are believers.
4. Divorce or "putting away" is forbidden to those who are believers.
5. In coming to the Truth, God recognizes the present marriage. Any previous broken marriage is one contracted in ignorance and without Him.

It is believed that any who are struggling with difficulties on these very pertinent questions in the world today, will be helped by considering these clear commands of God, and so may perceive the simplicity of His Truth. This is in contrast to the confusion, contention, and profitless speculation to which the human mind is so prone. As these points are weighed over, questions or comments may arise. If so, correspondence is cordially invited.

THE REMNANT OF CHRIST'S ECCLESIA

In the United States:

John A. DeFries
146 Gardner Street
Fredonia
New York 14063
U.S.A.

In the United Kingdom:

Dennis Lancaster
227 Moston Lane East
New Moston
Manchester M40 3HY
ENGLAND