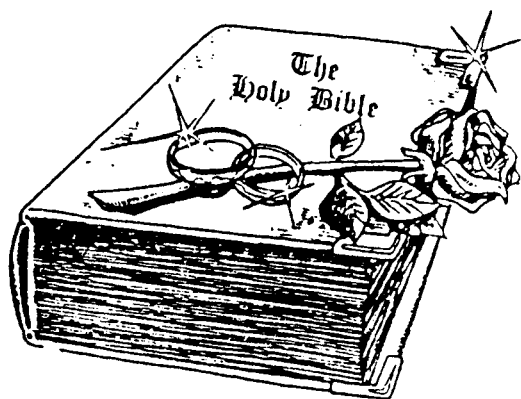


Preparing For Marriage



— H. P. Mansfield.

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Foreword

The contents of this book originally appeared in Logos in the form of a series of articles. Many requests were received to reproduce them in book form for the convenience of those who would like to consider the theme as a whole, and not as a serial, and this publication is the result.

We would like to have revised and added to the original articles but have not the time to do so. There are themes on the subject that have not been thoroughly considered herein; such as the binding relationship between Yahweh and the people He has called out of the Gentiles to comprise the spiritual Bride of His son. The contract of marriage, the voluntary vow that a couple make before their God as they take to themselves each other, is very similar in treatment to the covenant into which one enters with the Father and the Son at baptism.

Hence the lightness with which marriage is treated in the modern world is extremely distasteful to those who understand the solemnity of the Covenant in Christ, and realise that it is based upon the human experiment of marriage.

This is a theme, which, perhaps, the reader may attempt to follow through on his own account. For a consideration of the binding nature of marriage, we recommend that the reader consider Bible Teaching On Marriage by E. Wilson.

Because of the lightness in which the marriage vows are held by many today, we feel that it is important for young people about to embark upon the adventure of marriage to carefully count the cost; and to clearly understand that God designed it to be permanent, that divorce and remarriage are contrary to His will, and that the relationship He has established in instituting marriage must be maintained.

Contents

Preparing For Marriage	
On the Matter of Marriage	7
Is It Good To Marry?	13
Showing Restraint	22
The Debt Incurred in Marriage	28
To Unmarried, Widows & Married	34
The Lord's Instruction	40
Discussing Marriage With The Pharisees	50
Discussing Marriage With The Disciples	55
Mixed Marriages	61
If The Marriage Fails?	68
Seeking Peace In Marriage	73
When Vows Are Binding	80
The Status of Unmarried Sisters	84
Marriage Limits Freedom	89
Summary	94
Meditations On The Theme of Marriage	
Do Not Neglect Home	97
Irritating Partners	98
Respecting Experience	99
The Position of Wives	100
Parental Obligations	101
Whom to Marry	102
A Wife's Just Claims	103
The Bride of Christ	104
Marriage: Summary And Its Spiritual Significance	105

Preparing For Marriage

Marriage can either help or hinder the disciple of Christ in a walk to the Kingdom and Eternal Life. God is concerned with the marriage of His children; for He is concerned in their salvation. How important to listen to His voice, and accept His advice in the act of choosing a mate for life. He has spoken plainly.

“Man is for strength, judgment and achievement. Woman is for grace, sympathy and ministration. Between them they form a beautiful unit: ‘heirs together of the grace of life’.” So wrote R. Roberts in *The Law of Moses*. The law of marriage was established in the beginning, before sin obtruded. Adam was supposed to take care of his wife. She was a *helpmeet*; not an inferior servant but an indispensable, inseparable part of his life. She was given Attributes unique to her. She was given a body and a mind and a set of emotions unequalled by any man. And he was given a body and mind and a set of emotions unequalled by any woman. Adam and Eve delighted each other. They talked, walked and worked together, because they were united by something stronger than mere flesh. They spoke with God. God never intended man and woman to compete against each other; but to supplement what the other had, uniting both a common objective in life, and a common future that of eternity. That unity was destroyed by the serpent with its specious reasoning. So sin entered the world, and with it every problem including those relating to married life.

On the Matter of Marriage

"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman"
— 1 Cor. 7:1.

"Any marriage based upon the principles set forth in Ephesians 5 is bound to succeed. But, unfortunately, for a multitude of reasons, temperamental, personal, physical and otherwise, it is difficult for some to submit to the discipline required by Paul in that place; and so problems arise. What advice is to be given in such circumstances?"

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul answers certain questions that had been posed concerning marriage (v. 1). He states the facts clearly and frankly, and yet with such delicacy as to avoid offence.

His teaching is based on that of the Lord (Matt. 5:31-33; 19:4-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18) to which he directs the attention of his readers (1 Cor. 7:10). The statement recorded by Luke seems a general summary of the Lord's teaching. Luke's Gospel was written particularly for Gentiles, so that it stands on its own. Written at a time when marital unfaithfulness together with divorce and remarriage were common, it challenged the general concept of flesh regarding this matter: **"Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."**

The term *Whosoever* is all-embracing. It includes both Jews and Gentiles, disciples and non-disciples. It is a general statement of Yahweh's attitude towards divorce and remarriage, for the marriage laws are treated as universal in Scripture. God held

the Amorites accountable for their iniquity in that regard (as in other matters), and John Baptist openly rebuked Herod because of his marriage (Gen. 15:16; Mark 6:18). Neither were disciples of the Truth.

It is sometimes thought that Paul provides further concessions in the matter of divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7, but a thoughtful consideration of his words will reveal that they are in complete accord with those of Christ.

Care needs to be exercised in considering this matter. It is so often treated as an academic exercise by some who, untouched by the feelings and emotions that develop in such circumstances, tend to theorise upon the theme, giving scant thought to the way in which these "motions of the flesh" can blind the mind to the acceptance of any advice apart from that which the individual concerned desires to hear. Indeed, so strong are such feelings that those who may suffer the trauma of a broken marriage, are often unable to properly reason the matter out. The tragedy of their lives assumes such proportions as to adversely govern their thinking. In such cases they become prey to the suggestions of "concessions" that writers glibly set down, and that seem to promise relief to their feelings, but which, in fact, often make their state more difficult than before.

Noahic Times

In the world today, broken marriages, divorce and remarriage, or associations out of wedlock are becoming more and more common, and are leaving a trail of wreckage throughout humanity. The greatest social problems today erupt from broken homes, or where the marriage vow is taken so lightly as to be ignored when it becomes restrictive of personal liberty, or license. We are living in Sodomitic times when every form of moral perversion is openly paraded or secretly encouraged, and acts of moral impurity that one time would be treated as grossly criminal, are condoned and legalised.

That is the environment in which the Truth has to struggle for expression today. It is a matter of serious concern that Ecclesias are not coping with the problem. Within our small community, divorce and remarriage, and decline of moral standards are increasing. In many parts of the Ecclesial world

there is evidence of the break-up of the family unit such as is common in the world. Examples of child delinquency, disrespect towards elders, refusal to submit to uncomfortable discipline, are increasing. And much of this is related to the subject before us. It frequently finds encouragement from the parading of concessions by brethren whose ideas have been tintured by the philosophising of the world upon the theme.

We believe that the effectiveness of Ecclesial witness will drastically decline in power unless brethren recognise their responsibilities in this regard. We bear in mind that the Lord warned that **“as it was in the days of Noah ... of Lot ... so shall it be at the coming of the Lord”**. There was moral decline in the days of Noah and Lot. There was the weakening of the marriage vow, and the **“taking of wives of all which they chose”** (Gen. 6:2). Indeed, this was the primary cause of the Flood: not the violence or moral corruption of men of the world. Yahweh would have dealt with that quite effectively, without the widespread destruction that took place, if only the Ecclesia had been like Noah and his family. But when the sons of God so completely imitated the ways of men as to blur the contrast that should have existed, one thing remained: to wash the earth clean of its wickedness and to commence anew. So also in the days of Lot. And the Lord warned of the possibility of a repetition of this in the days of his coming. So we need to carefully heed this growing Ecclesial problem of divorce and remarriage and of family breakdown and take steps to challenge it.

Responsibility

The responsibility of advising those affected by such problems, is so great that it is with extreme reluctance that one likes to become involved. Certainly, no slick, quick answer is possible in any case; and equally true it is that proper advice can only be given when full details are disclosed, and careful and prayerful consideration is given to every problem, its cause and solution. Any marriage based upon the principles set forth in Ephesians 5 is bound to succeed. But unfortunately, for a multitude of reasons, temperamental, personal, physical and otherwise, it is difficult for some to submit to the discipline required by Paul in that place; and so problems arise. What

advice is to be given in such circumstances? Pity or sympathy might so influence one that the advice is not in accordance with the Word. We might be guided by the ideas of marriage counsellors who do not heed the teaching of Scripture, but only what appears convenient or desirable to the flesh. And it must be conceded that in spite of all the marriage and family counselling of today the world is in a worse condition of unhappiness in these areas of human behavior than ever before. Christ taught: **"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven"** (Matt. 5:19). In view of this warning, a tremendous responsibility rests upon would-be advisers that their counselling is in accord with the Word of God. Otherwise, it shall be held against them.

James also warns would-be teachers (as the word *masters* should be rendered in James 3:1) of the heavy responsibility resting upon them. He states that they will receive the "greater condemnation" if in their doctrine they lead others astray. Hence he would counsel them not to speak or to teach unless they are sure that what they say and teach are in conformity with the Word. For, he reasoned, the Ecclesial body is bridled or guided by the instruction of its teachers.

Paul On Marriage

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is not advancing any solution to a marriage problem that is at variance with the teaching of Christ. All he states is in accordance thereto. However, he is answering some personal questions posed by some who were in ignorance of what should be done in their personal circumstances. We therefore first summarise his answer:

Paul states that under certain conditions, celibacy for Christ's sake is an appropriate, or "good" thing (1 Cor. 7:1). In this he endorses the words of Christ (Matt. 19:12). However, he advises that in other circumstances, it is "better" to marry (1 Cor. 7:9). Again he endorses Christ's teaching (Matt. 19:11). He speaks very intimately of the obligations of marriage, the things to which it binds one, and which sometimes are difficult to fulfil by one or the other of the parties concerned. For example, Paul insists that the basis of true marriage is proper intercourse and each should respect the desires of the other in

that regard (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Marriage is not a matter of merely living together, but of enjoying the most intimate associations possible between two people of the opposite sex. The fruit of this mutual love and tender affection is the development of a new life in the form of offspring. And in that regard, it is quite significant that the same expression is used of intercourse as of the fruitbearing knowledge of Yahweh, (cp. Gen. 4:1; John 17:3).

Accordingly, Solomon sang: **"Lo! (Consider!), children are an heritage of Yahweh; and the fruit of the womb is His reward"** (Psa. 127:3). Children can cement a marriage, particularly if the parents mutually expend themselves to **"bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"** (Eph. 6:4). Where both parents unite in that endeavour the bonds of marriage will be more closely drawn.

Nowhere does Paul advocate a selfish single life, but one that assumes the responsibilities of a marriage union, either in celibacy as towards Christ as his bride (1 Cor. 7:32-34), or in the sacrifice of self in the consideration one owes to the other in the family circle. He sets the guidelines of successful marriage in his instruction in 1 Cor. 7:3-5 when matched with Eph. 5:22-25.

Paul taught that when married love is governed by divine principles the sensuous impulse is controlled and refined, and instead of being the source of untold curses to mankind, it becomes the expression of deep and intimate affection.

In Corinth, believers were divided between two dangerous extremes which took widely opposing attitudes on matters of sex and marriage. Some advocated the grossest license, probably on the pretence that liberty in Christ provides grounds for repudiating any restrictions of law. Indeed, Jude claims that some were explicitly teaching this (Jude 4). Others apparently harshly reacted, maintaining that every form of marriage should be avoided, advocating an extreme form of asceticism. Some claimed that their previous status of marriage was changed through baptism into Christ, and under such circumstances they were free to please themselves in their attitude to their unbelieving, one-time partners.

Paul restored sanity to this state of things in Corinth by teaching:

(1) Spiritual union with Christ is the highest ideal of matrimony. A baptised person is "espoused" to him and therefore is under obligation to submit to him.

(2) In regard to normal marriage relationships, under most conditions it is better to marry (1 Cor. 7:9).

(3) In marriage (whether or not both parties accept the Truth) the normal physical union is to be maintained, subject to the personal requirements of the Truth (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

(4) In that regard, however, self control is to be exercised by all (vv. 7-8).

(5) Marriage is designed to be permanent (vv. 10, 39).

(6) Remarriage in the case of separation by wife or husband (Mark 10:11-12) is not permitted (1 Cor. 7:11).

(7) If an unbelieving partner refuses to live peaceably and withdraws from the relationship, the believing partner is not bound to follow such in order to restore the marriage, nor is bound by the obligations that previously were associated therewith, and which might minimise his or her enjoyment of the Truth and association with the Ecclesia. Such are free from their previous obligations and can now give themselves without stint to Christ.

(8) However such are "bound by the law" as long as the partner lives, after which remarriage can take place. (1 Cor 7: 39)

(9) In the state to which a person is called to the Truth (whether married, divorced or separated) they are advised not to force a change in their state for such might violate the teaching of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:17).

This is Paul's general teaching and he now proceeds to elaborate with further details in answer to the questions posed him by the brethren at Corinth.

Is It Good to Marry?

"It is not good that a man should be alone; I will make him a help meet (fit) for him"
— Genesis 2:18.

"Marriage is very onerous and serious matter. A broken marriage can destroy the innocent partner spiritually and mentally.

The quality of a marriage, therefore can help or hinder in the battle of eternal life. It can lay the foundations for happiness or for misery."

Paul wrote the chapter before us in response to specific questions advanced by the brethren of Corinth. He prefaced it with the statement: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me ..." Obviously their queries arose out of his teaching concerning marriage, in which he had instructed them orally.

It is quite significant, therefore, that his reply first sets forth the moral benefits of a state of celibacy under certain conditions. He immediately puts marriage in proper perspective. This contrasts with the teaching often advanced today which sets forth marriage as the greatest objective in life. If a person lacks a partner it is treated by some almost as though he or she is a failure in the battle of life. Accordingly parents tend to become over-anxious in the matter, and so urge their children to seek a marriage partner at all costs, so causing them to become impatient, and to act without due thought and care.

And because it is obligatory (if Scripture is to be heeded) that marriage must be "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39), and our communities are so limited in size and scope, a spirit of competitiveness oft-times develops.

This needs guarding against.

Scripture teaches: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of Yahweh" (Prov. 18:22). Wisdom suggests the heeding of divine counsel in obtaining such a favour. An example is given in the mission of Eleazar in seeking a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24). In every move made to that end, he took Yahweh into his consideration, and made it a matter of prayer. Whilst we may not expect to find the same open guidance in our affairs as he did, the example he provides in the way he went about it, remains good for all time. The divine arm is not shortened that God cannot help now, as He has done in the past.

Benefits of Family Associations

It is damaging to the impact of the Truth upon some, frustrating to the persons concerned, and contrary to the spirit of the Scriptures, to over-emphasise the importance of seeking a marriage-partner. Quite often, and because the affluence of this age permits it, it results in many young people leaving home, deserting the Ecclesia that has laboured to help them, and doing very little for the Truth whilst they move from place to place "looking for a wife" or "a husband" as the case may be. "Flatting" with others so inclined, they lack the salutary discipline of a proper home life, and so the benefits of family life with the spirit of mutual consideration and self-sacrifice that it demands, are lessened. God is best served within and from the home circle, particularly when it is based upon the Truth (see Eph. 5:22-6:4).

A few years ago, the very economics of life would not have permitted single young people (particularly young women) to leave home, take a flat and enter upon an independent life as they do today. The lower wages then paid made them dependent on the family, and helped to unite parents and children into a family unit cemented by love. It also compelled each one to submit to the necessary restrictions of family life. Today children are told by psychologists and educationists that such restraints have unfortunate reactions. Their theories however, flout the natural laws of family-associations established by God. Their teaching has directly contributed to child delinquency, broken marriages, drug addiction, juvenile

crime, and the general unhappiness of this age of license. Despite all the frustrations that may be associated with family life, such an association contributes to greater enjoyment, more happiness, a closer bond of affection, and far less marital trouble than is generally experienced where the modern ideas prevail.

The principles set down in Scripture, of the submissiveness required of wives to husbands, the sacrificial love that husbands should show to wives, the respect that children should pay their parents, and the consideration and care that parents should manifest towards them, provide a foundation for greater happiness and satisfaction, than is the general experience today. I write as one brought up in a large family, often subjected to the disciplinary restraints of older members thereof, and definitely under the control of parents who were firm and unyielding in their requirements, but warm and self-sacrificing in the love they expressed within the family circle. The family was united in spite of petty quarrels, and acted as a unit.

Seeking A Partner

Moreover, in the search for a partner, it is not only obligatory to "marry in the Lord," but even within the compass of the Truth, to seek for one whom God would approve: one who can serve a nobler part than the mere providing of a comfortable home, or fleshly pleasures. In that regard, a love of the word, a desire to sacrifice for the Truth are excellent qualifications. Marriage with one who is not faithful to the requirements of the Truth is not far short of marrying outside of the Truth. Such an act is courting disaster.

In the matter of marriage, young people should never be in a hurry. They need to avoid being led into an unwise arrangement by self-deception. A man or woman is not in the Truth (whatever their claims may be) who does not believe and obey it; who has no fondness for it, who is not prepared to sacrifice in order to serve it.

Marriage is a very onerous and serious relationship. A broken marriage can destroy the innocent partner spiritually and mentally. The quality of a marriage, therefore can help or hinder in the battle for eternal life. It can lay the foundations

for happiness or for misery. Complete mutual confidence in each other is essential. A desire to help one another in spiritual development will not hinder the normal happy associations of life, but will aid to their fuller enjoyment. Marriage should be entered into with a clear and firm recognition by both parties that it is for life.

God is concerned in the marriage of His children, for He is concerned in their salvation. He clearly set before Israel who they might marry, and who they must not marry. He acted as a true and concerned Parent. Sometimes Israel disobeyed, as children will; but history shows that their happiness was bound up in accepting the restrictions that their wise Parent laid upon them, even in the matter of marriage. There is a greater guarantee of success and happiness in marriage if choice is made of a partner who adds spiritual virtues to personal appeal and attractiveness.

The Law set down the principle: "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:10). In pondering that command, we may ask the question posed by Paul: "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written!" (1 Cor. 9:9-10). To plough with an ox and an ass together was not only inefficient but could be cruel also. The ox and ass are of different sizes and motions, and to yoke them together would invariably cause friction, pain and discomfort. So it is when two are joined together in wedlock attracted only by physical considerations with no true amity in spiritual matters.

A partner needs to be selected who will co-operate in the most important functions of life: the service we all owe to the Truth. One may not be the equal of the other in his or her dedication to reading and study, but both can unite in mutual serving and sacrificing for the Truth. That mutual love for the Truth forges a spiritual bond that will stand the tests that invariably come with marriage. As Amos declared: "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Marriage Is Not The Greatest Thing In Life

It is not marriage, but service to God which is the greatest thing in life. Even in married life this should be recognised and acted upon. In fact, all who embrace the Truth are married in

the sense that they are espoused unto Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), and their greatest love and duty is to him, even above husband, wife or children (Luke 14:26). Therefore, Christ should take pre-eminence over any other consideration. That will not make a wife less attractive to her husband, but will add to her beauty, because it requires of her that she submit to him "as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). Nor will it cause the husband to neglect his wife, for he will show the same sacrificial love towards her as Christ has revealed towards the Ecclesia, and he gave up his life in his love for his bride (Eph. 5:25).

So there is something greater than marriage, and it is the duty one owes towards the Truth.

That is one reason, we feel, that Paul commenced this very important chapter by commending celibacy under certain conditions. He wrote: **"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman"** (1 Cor. 7:1).

He is treating with the reality of marriage.

The word rendered "good" is *kalon*. It signifies something that is excellent, morally good, and particularly appropriate to the circumstances. As a general statement and introduction to the whole subject of marriage, Paul states that it is good for a man not to marry, but, on account of fornication, let each have his own wife, and each have her own husband.

This is a clear statement, easily understood, free of ambiguity, and in conformity with Christ's expressed teaching. Throughout the chapter, Paul is writing inspired advice, and not necessarily commands, for the benefit of the Ecclesia in Corinth. This is shown by the expressions he uses. In v. 28 he writes: "I would spare you"; in v. 35: "for your profit"; in v. 38; "shall do better"; and in v. 40; "happier". All these terms refer primarily to the believers in Corinth, to their situation at the time, and in particular to the difficulties and dangers they had to face, and which are not fully disclosed to us. But, nevertheless, they constitute clear guidance for us today.

Notice that Paul does not call the unmarried state "good" in contrast to the marriage state as "not good". On the contrary, he commends marriage in the majority of cases. To remain unmarried, or to marry, are each "good", each in its own way. But the former is particularly "good" if a person's sole objective

is service to the Truth. In that case, for *a few only*, the unmarried state is better. And later, in the chapter, Paul tells us what is absolutely necessary to make it so (vv. 8-9).

But let any who by compulsion and not by choice, are unmarried – those who cannot obtain a partner even though they would like one – remember that marriage is not essential to the finest life in Christ. It may help to that end, but it is not absolutely essential. Paul, himself, was witness to that.

Notice, too, that Paul does not subscribe to the papal command to its priests. Indeed, in another place, he predicts that the command “forbidding to marry” would be a feature of the Apostasy that would arise (1 Tim. 4:3). Conversely he suggests to Timothy that deacons should be “the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim. 3:12). Such experience would add to their effectiveness in the work set them; though it was not absolutely essential, for, it appears, that Timothy himself was unmarried. To the Hebrews, Paul wrote: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4), and in other places, he elevates marriage into a valuable service to God (Eph. 5:24,31,32; 1 Tim. 2:15). Concerning young widows, he writes: **“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Timothy 5:14).**

Paul makes it perfectly clear that whilst a believer does good to marry, there is no stigma attached to the unmarried state, particularly when the brother or sister is prepared to use their liberty from earthly entanglements to recognise their association with Christ as a binding marriage, and seek to fill the void of the lack of a marriage-partner by service to the heavenly bridegroom in love. The unmarried have more leisure to attend to the things of the Truth. The married have responsibilities towards things temporal that can prove a distraction necessarily interfering with the time given to the Truth. A loving wife needs to occupy her mind very largely about her husband and children; and a loving husband about his wife and family. And whilst the truth is served by them so doing (see Eph. 5), there is a danger lest the claims of Christ, be neglected, whereas he should be far more to us than husband or wife.

Most Should Marry

At the same time marriage is the safer condition morally (1 Cor. 7:2). It is for many a great support and strength for the work to which they give themselves. The home influence is felt wherever a man journeys, often upholding him in good resolution, and animating him when despondent. It expands his sympathies. He tends to become more tolerant and understanding because he has learnt to share with others; and in the face of necessity has learnt the lesson of unselfishness. But marriage to be a help in that way must be established on divine principles.

Celibacy presents many perils even for those who are naturally qualified for it. Tendencies towards narrowness, selfishness, lack of sympathy, have to be carefully guarded against. Domestic life of the right kind can equip a person to better serve the Truth. Particularly when the home is made a sanctuary for the Truth.

Paul's words to the Corinthians were penned because of the "shortness of the times". He was referring to the state of persecution that prophetically he knew would follow. His words have particular application today. There is in truth a "shortness of time", for the Lord is at the door. Hence we need to put everything: marriage, family, home, business, in proper perspective. And that perspective is Christ's coming!

So, if young people find it hard to obtain a suitable partner, let them not worry unduly. Perhaps they will "find favour of Yahweh" and He will provide such (see Prov. 18:22). Make it a matter of prayer and of faith, let them also remember that in embracing Christ, they are "espoused" to him. Let them develop such a love for Christ that the labour they do in the service of the Truth fills the void and brings an enjoyment to life that will find its culmination at the marriage of the Lamb.

Paul's instructions complement those of Christ. To his disciples he had emphasised the permanency and responsibilities of marriage. They had responded that if marriage is so restrictive, so binding, then it is better, or more profitable, not to marry: **"If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry"** (Matt. 19:10).

The word "good" in this place is different from that used by Paul. It is the word *sumphero* which signifies "profitable" or

“expedient”. The Apostles, therefore, commenting upon the teaching of the Lord, suggested that if marriage is so restrictive, so binding, then it is better, or more profitable, not to marry. Profitable to what? To the requirements of discipleship, to the demands made upon the Apostles to follow Christ, going forth throughout the world to preach the Gospel. In the unmarried state there is greater freedom to act for Christ without thought for the needs of wife or home.

Those considerations, also, partly motivated Paul’s comment, as he states in 1 Cor. 7:32: **“He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord”**.

In reply to the Apostles, the Lord stated that there are some physically unsuited for marriage, some who are so completely dedicated to discipleship that they become “eunuchs for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor. 9:1,5; Isa. 56:4) for the very reason advanced by Paul in the chapter before us (1 Cor. 7:32-33). Such become, as it were, married to Christ. They give themselves with such dedication to the work of the Truth as to fill any void that may be created by their celibacy.

But apart from that, reasoned the Lord, “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matt. 19:12). What do these words mean? If there be no hindrance to a marriage, it is better to marry. In 1 Cor. 7:1-2, Paul endorses the advice and sets down his reason for doing so.

Notice that Christ advances three causes of hindrance: divorce; physical impotence; a life so completely dedicated to Christ (as was Paul’s) that marriage would seriously limit it.

There are very few indeed who can follow Paul in such dedication; and, indeed, this is not required of them. The other Apostles were married, and with the loyal and loving co-operation of their wives, set forth preaching the word. So Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 9:5: **“Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?”**

Hence whilst marriage is good, it is not essential to a life in Christ. But one thing is clear: in view of the teaching of Christ and Paul as to the permanency of the marriage bond the greatest consideration and care should be given to the selection of a suitable mate. Unfortunately the world has made divorce

easy, and has promulgated the unscriptural doctrine of trial marriages. In doing so it has opened the floodgates of evil that is destroying true love, that is turning humans into mere animals, and is breaking down principles of restraint in every avenue of life.

Showing Restraint

"But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment"
— 1 Cor. 7:1.

"The freedom Paul's celibate state afforded him, enabled him to give himself to the work of the Truth without consideration of a partner in marriage; but

Peter was "under bondage" to his wife, and hence had to take thought of her in any plans for the furtherance of the Truth. Therefore, Paul's "gift of God" was in one direction; and Peter's in another. Both provided examples for brethren to follow whatever state they might find themselves."

Paul was a very understanding man. He did not allow an ideal to blind him to the practical realities of a matter. The ideal in Christ is something to which one might aim, but not necessarily reach. It requires complete self-sacrifice, with all feelings sublimated to the requirements thereof, in order to do so.

And many things can stand in the way of success. Mental limitations, physical disabilities, habits that have so developed as to become addictive, circumstances of life, and so on. As Paul explained to the Corinthians: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7), in clay bodies of desire that often take possession of us in the most awkward manner, calling forth the words of Christ. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," and the warning of Paul: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Therefore, having made the recommendation relating to sexual restraint described in v. 5, Paul adds: **"But, I speak this by permission, and not of commandment"**.

The Greek word *sungnome* translated

“permission” signifies a concession, and it is so rendered in the *Diaglott*.

What is the concession?

Paul’s *command* is “defraud ye not one another”; his *concession* is the relaxation of this command as may be mutually agreed upon as a temporary measure for the purpose of more devout worship as expressed in v. 5. Paul is at pains to stress that such withholding is a matter of mutual arrangement and agreement, and must not be viewed as a command. According to Vine, the word *sungnome* denotes a joint opinion, mind or understanding, implying that it is something mutually agreed upon. A concession is an exception, and Paul now makes it clear, that normal requirements of service to God do not free a husband or a wife of his or her responsibilities to the other. Both are “under bondage” to each other in these matters, and are not to please themselves; the only concession, or exemption, being a mutual agreement to abstain for the purpose indicated.

Some imagine that once they have accepted Christ, they should rise above considerations of sex. The Bible does not teach this. Marriage was ordained in Eden, before sin entered the world, and the *command* given Adam and Eve at that time was to “subdue and replenish the earth”. This requirement is expressed in the very word used to define marriage: “a man shall *cleave* unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It would not be possible to express the nature of the union in stronger terms. There is no other word in Hebrew that could add any greater force to what is implied by that which is rendered “cleave”; it is to be *glued to*, to be *soldered*, inseparably *joined*. And when it is further declared that they “shall be one flesh”, it shows, that the first man and woman, *before sin entered the world*, were more than figuratively, or spiritually one. This is revealed beyond all dispute by Paul borrowing the very expression used in Genesis, “one flesh,” to describe a sexual union (1 Cor. 6:16). Such relationships, together with the considerations to be shown to the partner of a marriage, are part of the “bondage” that a man or a woman takes upon themselves in the married state.

The exception, or concession, to the requirements of the bondage is that previously described by Paul in v. 5.

Restraints of Marriage

Paul pursues the subject of intimate marriage relationships with a refined reticence and delicacy of expression which is a great contrast to the crudity of so-called sex education today, and particularly that which is often advanced in the schools for the enlightenment of impressionable young teenagers. He now suggests that the ideal is not the cessation of marriage, nor the abandonment of its more intimate aspects, but the self-mastery of sex, and freedom from temptation in that regard. He declares: "For I would that all men were even as I myself" (v. 7).

There is general confusion as to the significance of this statement. According to some readings of the Greek text, the conjunction "for" should be rendered yet. Paul was unmarried. Does that mean that he would that all remain unmarried? By no means, for he has already stated that it is profitable for some to be married (v. 2). And the expression *all men*, includes all, whether married or not. He would that both married and unmarried be like he was. This does not relate to a state of celibacy, or living in that way though married, but to complete sexual self-mastery and self-control. All should strive to be continent, to be restrained, in such desires.

Paul, certainly, was not married at the time he wrote these words (cp. 1 Cor. 9:5). Some believe that he had previously been married, for marriage was regarded as a duty by law-abiding Jews. A rabbinical precept declared that a Jew who has no wife is not a man. Accordingly, it is thought that Paul was once married but had been widowed. It is inferred from his comment to "the unmarried and widows" that he classed himself among the latter. It matters little whether this suggestion is true or not, for, in any case, Paul was "married" unto Christ (2 Cor. 11:1-2), and his devout love for his Lord occupied all his considerations. He was utterly dedicated and devoted.

Others of the Apostles were married, and were like him in their personal control and dedication to the Truth (1 Cor. 9:5). Self control is valuable in the married state as it is in the state of celibacy. It is necessary if the recommendation of v. 5 is to adopted.

Developing Self Control

Some have a gift of self-control greater than others. The expression "would" in this verse is from the Greek *thelo* "to wish" or "desire". Paul's use of the term is tacit recognition that all have not the gift of restraint in these matters. Therefore, if Christ is to be served properly, each should take heed to that fact, and guard against any evil habit developing. The Apostle's warning in v. 2 shows that he realised that such is possible. Hence, for some, marriage is desirable, and they can better serve the cause of the Truth with the aid of a loving and understanding partner.

However, such partners are limited. There are some who cannot find one suited for his or her needs, or, because of circumstances, are not free to marry even if they found someone who is willing. What are they to do? Paul indicates the answer by describing continence as a gift of God: "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (v. 7).

Let us first interpret the passage. The word "proper" signifies one's own possession, and signifies "his *own* gift of God". These gifts vary. Paul had the gift of continence to such an extent that he best served the Truth in a state of celibacy; Peter, on the other hand, possessed a gift of God in his wife (1 Cor. 9:5; Prov. 18:22). The freedom Paul's celibate state afforded him, enabled him to give himself to the work of the Truth without consideration of a partner in marriage; but Peter was "under bondage" to his wife, and hence had to take thought of her in any plans for the furtherance of the Truth. No doubt he received the utmost consideration and co-operation from her, but, nevertheless, it did impose limitations. Therefore, Paul's "gift of God" was in one direction; and Peter's in another. Both provided examples for brethren to follow whatever state they might find themselves.

The Greek word rendered "gift" is *charisma*, and denotes a gift of grace, and therefore, a gift of God. He is the "Giver of every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17), including those that enable brethren to better face up to the problems, frustrations, and trials of life. Paul classes among the gifts available from Him that of continency. This charismatic gift of self-control is valuable both in the married as in the single state. But how is it

derived? The miraculous gifts of the Spirit are not available today because of the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit power as bestowed upon the Apostles at Pentecost. But there are "gifts of grace" (cp. Rom. 12:6) that do not depend upon the effluence of the Spirit from heaven. For example, Paul told the brethren in Rome, that he longed to visit them in order to "impart unto them some spiritual gift" (Rom. 1:11). How was he to do that? Obviously through his instruction of the spirit-word. Spiritual education was the means he would adopt to develop that gift. Again, the Atonement is described as a "gift of grace" (Rom. 5:15). How is it granted? Obviously by instruction.

The teaching of the Word, therefore, is a means of imparting gifts from God to those who seek Him. Even the gift of continence, of self-control, to which Paul refers. As the mind is filled with the Word, and faith is developed thereby, a person's attention will be directed Godwards and Kingdomwards instead of selfwards, and he will find added strength to battle against the flesh. It is acknowledged that the difficulties can be great, and for some greater than for others. But the answer to the problem is in the study of the word, prayer to the Father, and filling one's life with activity in the Truth.

Prayer and the word will not be sufficient in themselves. A person who finds his state a problem to himself needs to seek activity as well. He must rigidly control his thoughts (and this can be done by filling his mind with "things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely" and so forth), and give himself to the work to be done. He needs to become positive in his approach to his weakness, and endeavour to get on top of it. To allow his mind to linger over it is fatal, for soon it will dominate all his thoughts. We live in an age of frightful immorality, when the printing press is used for the widespread circulation of the most suggestive material, well calculated to feed the mind with the most evil desires. And invariably thought is precursive to action. Pornography is rife and permissiveness is widespread. Moreover, there is a form of humanist philosophy that actually teaches that it is wrong to deny oneself if a consenting partner is available; and this is circulated among academic institutions, often with Governmental approval. In consequence, licentiousness is on the increase, children out of

wedlock are common, immorality is considered by many as normal. This was the problem in libidinous Corinth; it is the problem facing Ecclesias today. Ruthless determination in crushing such desires is necessary if one is to conquer them. And with the means at our disposal any weakness can be conquered. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). And faith creates a living reality of hope, presenting the future to our minds as something true and tangible (Heb. 11:1). With the mind constantly directed towards that glorious consummation, and with personal determination aided by prayer, the word and personal activity, we will obtain a "gift of God" that will enable us to conquer whatever circumstances of life may trouble us.

The Debt Incurred In Marriage

"But 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"
— 1 Cor. 7:7.

"There needs to be a sharing in many directions: the upbringing of children, the truth in the home, the ambitions and ideals of life. The husband has the responsibility of providing the normal needs of life; and the wife has the responsibility of loyally supporting him in what he does".

With great delicacy and understanding, the celibate Paul set down for the guidance of the Corinthian Ecclesia what each partner to a marriage owes to the other. His words are practical, providing an insight to marital responsibilities outstanding in one unmarried. He writes frankly so that there is no misunderstanding of what he means, and yet delicately as to give offence to none. What he recommends flows on naturally from his warning of v. 2: "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath no 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".

The RV has *her due* instead of "due benevolence" reading *opheilen*, "due", instead of *eunoia*, "good will" or

“benevolence”. *Opheila* signifies a debt that is due to another, as in Matthew 18:32; Romans 13:7. As a debt that is due, Paul instructs that it should be paid to the one who claims it.

It is clearly obvious that Paul is referring to sexual intercourse between husband and wife. His recommendation is that such intimacies should continue though one or both parties to the marriage have embraced Christ. Indeed, he declares, to do so is a debt that each owes the other, and therefore both are bound to pay. It may be that one or other of the partners in a marriage may be so lifted up by lofty ideals in Christ as to feel that such action is no longer becoming. Paul makes it clear that such a thought is not in keeping with the very purpose of marriage as designed by God. Each partner in a marriage has an obligation, a debt to the other, and payment should be made. It is part of the “bondage” to which one submits to in marriage, and so long as it continues, the debt should be honourably acknowledged.

Marriage Preceded the Fall

God designed marriage in Eden before sin entered the world; hence the relationship of a man to his wife, and vice versa, is part of that “very good” state that then existed. Moreover, the very expression used in Gen. 2:24 denotes the most intimate of relationships: “A man shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh”.

Two expressions in that statement are deserving of attention. They are *shall cleave* and *one flesh*. No other word in Hebrew could add more force to what is implied than that rendered “cleave”; it signifies to be glued, to be soldered, inseparably joined. And when it is further declared that they “shall be one flesh,” it implies that the first man and women were more than figuratively one; they became physically united as well. This is shown beyond any doubt by Paul’s usage of the same expression in 1 Corinthians 6:16 to denote intercourse.

Therefore, before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve were invited to enjoy the closest physical intimacy possible between two married persons. That still remains the case today. Paul wrote: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”.

There is nothing debasing or evil in normal marriage relationships when conducted properly. On the contrary, the intimacy permitted can become the physical expression of the tenderest affection. Nevertheless, the debt due to each partner in a marriage may dictate the need for restraint on the part of one, as well as that of consideration of the feelings of the other. Paul gives no scope for demands in such relationships. The bond is one of mutual consideration. In that regard he introduces a very important rule of conduct. Whereas elsewhere he upholds the headship of the husband, and requires the submission of the wife, in regard to these relations, here he sets both on the same level, both have equally lost their authority or right over their own body, both have transferred that authority equally to the other.

This means, that in the requests for payment of the debt, the greatest consideration and thoughtfulness needs to be extended by each to the other. One cannot assert authority over the other, for there is an equality there that does not appertain to other relationships.

Extremes To Be Avoided

In Corinth, Paul faced two extremes. There were those who were claiming that "liberty" in Christ allowed them to act as they desired. They turned liberty into licence, and were prepared "to do evil that good may come" (Rom 3:8). He already had acted against a blatant case of wickedness as described in chapter 5. On the other hand, there was in evidence a false asceticism which went to the other extreme and demanded total abstinence in the married state as in other things. Paul dealt with this in writing to the Ecclesia in Colosse (see Col. 2:21).

Of course the debt due to one another in the married state is not limited to the relationships dealt with in this chapter. There needs to be a sharing in many directions: the upbringing of children, the truth in the home, the ambitions and ideals of life. The husband has the responsibility of providing the normal needs of life (Exod. 21:10); and the wife has the responsibility of loyally supporting him in what he does (1 Pet. 3:5-6). But in these matters the husband should assume the greater authority. Peter summed up the matter: "**Ye husbands,**

dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

The word "knowledge" is from the Greek *gnosis*, and denotes a state of understanding developed from enquiry or investigation. It suggests that the husband does not please himself, but by enquiry ascertains the needs of his wife, and seeks to satisfy those needs as he dwells with her. He is told to recognise her as the "weaker" vessel, and therefore should assume the greater responsibility in the household, whether it be the management of its affairs, the home policy as far as the Truth is concerned, or the correction and guidance of the children. As the "weaker" vessel, she is in need of help and protection. She, on her part, contributes that grace, warmth, sympathy and ministration to a home that gives it its real flavour and character. In such a marriage, the beauty and femininity of the bride is matched by the strength and masculinity of the husband, so that both provide what the other needs, and learn to co-operate each in their particular fields.

In doing so the husband renders "honour" unto the wife. The word does not merely express the idea of holding her in esteem, for it is from a Greek word that expresses something of greatest value for which a price has been paid. His bride is a man's most valuable possession and the price he has paid for her is the price of his freedom. He is no longer his own exclusively. He has incurred a debt that will continue as long as life. He has voluntarily assumed a state of bondage in marriage, as the convert to Christ does in his baptism (Rom. 6:16). As a bachelor he could please himself; now, in his plans, whether they be for the Truth, the home, or in business, he must take into account the debt due to his wife.

Binding The Marriage Together

If these simple principles are carried out by both parties, a marriage will not flounder. Its success depends largely upon mutual consideration, a thoughtfulness for each other. When two persons are brought together in such a close relationship as husband and wife, friction is bound to occur sometimes, due,

mainly, to impatience on the part of one or the other, or lack of communication between both.

Why do marriages drift apart? Because the simple rules laid down by Paul in Ephesians 5:21-33 are not properly carried out. Instead of being submissive, the wife gives herself to nagging. Instead of being self-sacrificing in his love, the husband becomes overbearing and demanding. Both are breaking the commands of Christ; both are contributing to the breakdown of the marriage, even if, for sake of appearance, they continue to live together.

Very often, a marriage needs something outside of the two parties concerned, in order to succeed. The Truth provides those who have "married in the Lord" with a third party to the marriage. If both parties give themselves completely to the work of the Truth the marriage will be cemented together through the mutual interest that husband and wife have in the Truth. As they work together in its service, they will learn to love together, for each will be dependent on the other.

Children, too, provide another binding link. However much the parents may argue with one another, let them be united before the children, and as one in the policy of upbringing. Many a marriage has been kept intact by the mutual love for the children. Hence, an aid to a successful marriage is to find a worthy object outside of each other that will unite both in a common endeavour.

Waiving The Debt For A Time

Paul advances one exception for the temporary waiving of the debt: **"Except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to prayer and come together again, that satan tempt you not for your incontinency"** (1 Cor. 7:5).

The exception is for religious worship. This is similar to the command under the Law (Exod. 19:15). On such occasions, temporary abstinence is desired that wholehearted dedication may be given to worship. By such abstinence both recognise the greater claims of God. They love Christ more than husband or wife. Paul, of course, is speaking generally, and therefore makes no reference to sickness or other circumstances that might likewise make such abstinence desirable. On those occasions, however, abstinence is a matter of necessity;

whereas here he is writing of a voluntary waiving of the debt due to each other. But notice that he recommends the resumption of such relationships at the conclusion of the time.

Let sisters remember that it is personality not appearance that gives real beauty (see 1 Pet. 3:1-6); let brethren remember that responsibilities to wife and family curtail the freedom that, as bachelors they had for other things, including the work of the Truth. Let both attempt to carry out the will of God according to the terms and conditions laid down in the Word (Eph. 5:22,25), and no snags or hidden rocks will irreparably damage that marriage. If a marriage is in danger, *both* are contributing to it, and *both* must make effort to solve it. The wife must ask herself, Am I submissive? Do I care for his welfare? and the husband must ask himself, Do I overlook failings as Christ does in his love for his bride? Am I prepared to die for her? If the questions are answered truthfully and frankly the replies will be illuminating!

We have never known a marriage problem to arise in which both parties have not contributed to its development. The mutual accusations seldom tell the whole story. In this, the Bible is eminently practical in its advice and instructions. Though unmarried Paul wrote by divine inspiration, and so was able to advise in a plain straightforward manner, free of humbug and of an idealism that is impractical in its outworking. In an age when unhappiness abounds because flesh is turning from the sane teaching of Scripture, and humanity acts like animals instead of reflecting the "likeness of God", Paul's words need both to be pondered, and acted upon. The implementation of them will add to the happiness of the home and the greater fervency of our worship.

To Unmarried, Widows & Married

"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"
— 1 Cor. 7:8-9.

"Whether it is best for a person to marry or otherwise is up to the individual. Some lack the 'gift' referred to by Paul in v. 7 and therefore, for them, marriage is better. Some find the celibate state difficult to maintain. In that case, 'Let them marry' advises Paul. His statement is simple and to the point".

The advice of Paul in v. 7 is repeated in the verse before us. However, the context shows that whereas v. 7 related particularly to brethren, the same advice is now repeated to the unmarried and widows.

He says that it is "good" for such to remain unmarried. The word in the Greek is the same as that used in v. 1, and, therefore, we direct attention to our exposition of that verse. This teaches that there is no stigma to be attached to the unmarried, and there should be no minimising of service to the Truth in order to obtain a partner in marriage. Indeed, under certain conditions, a greater dedication to the Truth can be rendered by those who remain single.

So Paul's advice to the unmarried and widows is for them to remain as they are. Instead of imagining their lack of a marriage partner reflects adversely upon their status, or permitting others to imply this to be so, let them recognise that there is nothing wrong with it. In fact, as a basis for greater dedication to the service of the Truth (cp. v. 32), it is "good". The liberty of the unmarried can be used to advantage in Christ. Hence Paul's advice is similar to

that of Christ's as recorded in Matthew 19:11-13.

Notice the tact with which Paul expresses his opinion. He does not *command* the unmarried or widows to remain in that state; he leaves the decision entirely to them. He does not even write, "You *ought to remain* even as I". This is a matter of personal, individual determination: "It is good to abide even as I". But he leaves the decision entirely up to the individual concerned.

One thing is sure, however, Paul would not advocate any one neglecting the work of the Truth in order to seek for a husband or a wife; he would not have them going from place to place with that purpose in mind, be they young or old. Service to the Truth will be the first concern and priority to the earnest follower of Christ. Everything else will be made subordinate to that: even the selection of a partner in marriage.

Exception

But as Christ earlier remarked when giving similar advice: "All cannot receive this saying" (Matt. 19:11), so now Paul. He exerts no moral pressure on the believers. Whether it is best for a person to marry or otherwise is up to the individual whether male or female. Some lack the "gift" referred to by Paul in v. 7 and therefore, for them, marriage is better. Some find the celibate state difficult to maintain. In that case, "Let them marry" advises Paul. His statement is simple and to the point.

Where a physical marriage is out of the question, perhaps because a partner cannot be found, or a person is not in a position to marry, the antidote to a lonely life is to throw oneself into the work of the Truth in the many avenues opened to both brethren and sisters. To fill one's life with activity provides a solution to many a problem. In that way, all can marry: by devoting themselves to Christ. That, really, is the "good" that opens out to "the unmarried or widows".

The Greek tenses in the verse before us are very expressive. The statement "to marry" is an aorist denoting a single, definite act. On the other hand, "to burn" (see v. 8) is in the middle case, and the present tense, and denotes "to burn in oneself" implying a recurrent condition. If that be one's state, and there is no hindrance to marriage, "it is better to marry" declared Paul.

It should be noted quite definitely, that marriage in this context, is not set forth as the lesser of two evils, but something that is "good" in the circumstances described. Elsewhere Paul defines marriage as "honourable in all" (Heb. 13:4), and he is not setting that principle aside here. God designed marriage in the beginning, and provided Adam with Eve that she might be a help suited to his need. The majority will find the marriage state more conducive to the development of Christlikeness than the state of celibacy to which Paul refers, and concerning which, Christ declared, is only for the few. Nevertheless, Paul's counsel to the unmarried reveals how one can cope with that form of life if compelled to do so through any circumstances. One must have, or must develop, the gift of continency to comply with the conditions he sets down for the unmarried, and few can rightly claim to be in that category.

All of which emphasises, that when one makes a choice for marriage, the greatest care should be exercised that the partner concerned will contribute to the greatest objective in life: service to Christ. Marriage is for life, and those who find it imperative to marry must recognise that fact, and work towards it in the marriage state.

The Married Believers

To the married in Christ, Paul expresses not an opinion, or word of advice, but a command. And the command has the authority of Christ: **"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"** (v. 11).

First note the change in Paul's words. Previously he tendered advice: "I speak this by permission, and not of commandment" (v. 6); "I say" (v. 8). In those cases, the individuals concerned had to make up their own minds. But now there is a change: "I command". This is a directive that must be followed.

And in the statement that follows, Paul sums up the teaching of the Lord in regard to marriage and separation. **"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"** (v. 11).

In this summary of the Lord's teaching (for that is what it is) Paul orders that a wife be not separated from a husband, and that a husband send not away his wife. Neither wife or husband in the Lord should disrupt the other and thus destroy the marriage in which they are joined. They have a responsibility to each other as Paul clearly outlines in Ephesians 5:22-33, and when his exhortation is carried out, there is no possibility of a marriage breaking up.

Marriage Laws in Apostolic Days

In the verse before us, Paul mentions the wife first as "departing from her husband". As today, the Roman state law and custom, granted either party the right to take the initiative in dissolving a marriage. In addition it made distinctions between the marriages themselves. Marriages between slaves had no legal standing (or permanence) whatever. There were not a few slaves (7:21) in the Ecclesia in Corinth. Marriage between a freedman (one released from slavery) and a slave had a low legal standing. In general, during this period of Roman history the permanency of marriage unions was exceedingly uncertain.

The marriage laws of Rome had once been marked by singular purity, and the marriage tie defined as "a union which involved a man and wife in inseparable life". Under the old republic, the national conscience would have been shocked by the freedom of divorce that ultimately prevailed; but the contagion of immorality spread so rapidly during the later republic, that the perpetual obligation of marriage was no longer heard, and men felt no scruples in putting away their wives. Seneca gives a vivid picture of the nation's degradation by writing that the highborn ladies of his day calculated the year, not by the consuls, but by their husbands.

And the same applied to Jewish custom. In that regard, the times in which Christ lived upon earth were very evil. The whole principles of morality were out of joint; and Christ had not only to deal with men as he then found them, but to provide also for all future contingencies. Among the Jews marriage had come to be regarded almost entirely as a civil contract. The nuptial benedictions, in which the Divine origin of marriage was set forth, and God's blessing solemnly invoked

upon the union, sank altogether into a secondary place. Divorce was common, and lightly considered in the School of Hillel. One extremely prominent rabbi claimed that a man was justified in putting away his wife if he saw another who surpassed her in beauty.

It is to a similar state of immorality that the world today has declined. Divorce is common, de facto associations are frequent. In South Australia, for example, adultery is no longer considered by the authorities as a legitimate cause for divorce, the only cause recognised being the irreparable breakdown of the marriage. That means, if one or other of the parties of a marriage wants to dissolve the union, all that is necessary is to desert the home, and after a few months a divorce will be granted. In its attitude to the marriage state modern society is declining to the degradation found in Sodom.

Prevalence of Divorce

In a booklet issued by an Ecclesia in USA, the following statement occurs:

"Today, we see the progression of divorce statistics, a fulfilment of Christ's prophetic utterance: 'As it was in the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the son of man be' (Matt. 24:37). Lest the reader think we have an unduly pessimistic outlook, we quote divorce statistics of the USA for the past few years, and draw the reader's attention to the rapid increase in the numbers as the years pass. We are advised that similar conditions prevail in England (and Australia — HPM).

In 1870 there was 1 divorce in 34 marriages.

In 1900 there was 1 divorce in 12 marriages.

In 1940 there was 1 divorce in 5 marriages.

In 1950 there was 1 divorce in 4 marriages.

In 1966 there was 1 divorce in 2 marriages.

In 1968, in the Orange County, California, there were 9,700 marriages, 8,700 divorces.

"Of these divorces granted under laws invented by man, which are in violation of divine law, one half occurred within the first six years of marriage: a period when adjustments are normally made by people of discernment. We are confident that this rapidly accelerating divorce rate, heralds the imminent re-appearance of Christ, who is to judge the world in righteousness; taking vengeance on those who have failed to obey the gospel call, to repent of their sinful ways; a command which went forth 1900 years ago, addressed to all men everywhere" (Acts 17:30).

The sad feature about the above statistics is that as the prevalence of divorce has increased in the world, so it has risen within the Ecclesia of God. Obviously the impact of the world about us is influencing those within the brotherhood, and care needs to be exercised. There is a need to re-state the teaching of

the Lord towards this subject, and to appeal to individuals and ecclesias to take stock of their attitude in regard to this subject. On the eve of Christ's coming, we cannot afford to be indifferent to his requirements in regard to any matter, particularly that of marriage. Our relationship to Christ and to Yahweh is treated as binding as a marriage contract, and what He expects of our attitude towards the one is what He requires of us towards the other. Hence the importance of this theme.

The Lord's Instruction

"I command, yet not I, but the Lord,
Let not the wife
depart from her
husband . . . and let
not the husband put
away his wife"
— 1 Cor. 7:10-11.

"The Lord not only had to deal with men as he found them, but to provide also for all future contingencies. He refused to capitulate to the general laxity regarding divorce, and, in his teaching, restored marriage to its original standing as established at creation."

Paul gives a *command* concerning sisters, and claims that it is endorsed in the teaching of the Lord. What was Christ's teaching regarding divorce and remarriage? Confusion exists in the Brotherhood concerning this. In the past, this fact was not so critical as it is today, because divorce and remarriage were not so prevalent then as now. But the attitude of people in that regard has completely changed, as the statistics in the previous chapter demonstrates. Divorce and remarriage are becoming so common as to almost become the norm.

And the attitude within the Brotherhood in regard to this subject reflects, in measure, that of the world. Nevertheless concern is being expressed in many parts of the Ecclesial world as marital problems increase. A tremendous responsibility rests upon those whose advice or guidance is sought in such matters, to correctly set forth the sound instructions of the Word. Better to remain silent than to give wrong advice. James wrote: "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers) knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1).

He continues to stress the responsibility resting upon those who claim to be teachers: "If any man offend not in word (*logos*, doctrine), the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body" (v. 2).

In this reference to the "whole body" James describes the teacher's influence on the Ecclesial Body. Teachers are expected to instruct the Ecclesia in true doctrine, as the term "word" signifies in this place, in order that the truth may develop a maturity (rendered *perfect*) that will soundly guide the Body. Generally an Ecclesia will hearken to advice given that is clearly based on the Word; but it may hesitate to do so if it is merely an expression of a person's own opinion.

Unfortunately, a divergence of opinion is expressed as to whether divorce and remarriage is permissible for believers. Much of it has no endorsement by the Word in which Yahweh has clearly let it be known that "He hateth putting away" (Mal. 2:16).

In view of this dogmatic statement what care should be exercised! Will Yahweh tolerate advice that negates His teaching on a matter He has expressed Himself so definitely? Let us act with circumspection and care in this matter. We may well be called to account if we do not. The Lord warned the leaders of his day: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven . . ." (Matt. 5:19).

Among the things he commanded in context with this warning, was his teaching on divorce and remarriage.

Paul claims that his statement as follows sums up the Lord's command: "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" (1 Cor. 7:11).

Note that this is not an expression of opinion, but a *command*.

It will be found in full accord with the teaching of Christ given at a time when morals were at a very low ebb. The Lord not only had to deal with men as he found them, but to provide also for all future contingencies. He refused to capitulate to the general laxity regarding divorce, and, in his teaching, restored marriage to its original standing as established at creation.

The morals of this age have deteriorated to the low level manifested in the days of Christ. And as he, in his teaching repudiated the sophistry of current rabbinical teaching, so it is the responsibility of the Brotherhood, as the multitudinous Christ, to reject the teaching of the world today if it conflicts with the Word.

Teaching Unsustained By The Word

Some amazing claims have been made regarding marriage. For example, in view of the scriptural definition of marriage as that "What God hath joined together . . ." it has been urged, that if it can be shown that a marriage is not God-motivated, the wedding is invalid, and the union, in fact, does not exist.

That was the reasoning adopted by one party in communication with us. The writer had married out of the truth, and the marriage had floundered. Could it be said of such a marriage that God had joined the two parties together? He believed his marriage was not a real union, claiming that it was not based upon the Truth and therefore he was now free to marry. He quoted other brethren in support of his claim.

But the teaching "What God has joined together . . ." does not mean that God is personally responsible for every marriage that takes place, but rather that marriage, in general, is a divinely-designed union for life.

True enough, in marrying out of the truth, this correspondent had broken God's law, and God would not be pleased with his action. But having entered into a vow of marriage, he was obligated to keep to it on the authority of God.

Precedence for this statement is found in the binding nature of the commitment Joshua entered into with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:19). That union should never have been made, for it violated the express commandments of Yahweh (cp. Deut. 7:2). But having been made on a solemn vow it had to stand. The marriage vow is just as binding, and the reiterated teaching of Scripture is that vows must be kept (Num. 30:2; Ecc. 5:4-5).

Another correspondent asked whether baptism changed the status of a divorced person permitting the right to remarry. The suggestion was made on the ground that his baptism had blotted out his past life.

But where is the Scripture that teaches that baptism frees a

person of responsibilities entered into before submitting to it? On that teaching, we could wipe out debts, or any binding agreement that is unsatisfactory to us. True, baptism symbolises death to the old way of life, to the "old man of the flesh", but it does not wipe out the past in the way suggested.

A person may have formed an evil habit before coming to a knowledge of the Truth, but his baptism will not break that habit. It remains to be conquered.

He may have entered into a marriage commitment that he has since found to be an embarrassment. Does his baptism free him of his obligations? By no means. In fact, the truth will cause a person to more clearly recognise the need to carry out obligations which, perhaps, he could legally avoid.

When Onesimus came to a knowledge of the truth and was baptised, did it dissolve his obligations to his slave-owner master, Philemon? By no means. Indeed, Paul sent him back to his former state, though he would have liked to have retained him in his service (Phil. 13).

What baptism does is to provide a cover for sins committed. It does not open the way to legitimately sin! Nor does it wipe out an existing fact. The divorced convert may have children. Where did they come from? Are they not the fruits of a real marriage? Can he say his previous marriage and divorce have been wiped out when the fact and fruits of the union are there in wife or children? Baptism deals with the reality of sin; it does not treat it as a fiction.

It is true that baptism blots out sin, but in what did the baptised person sin? In his marriage? By no means. Then it must have been in his divorce. Now if the baptism blots out the sin, it blots out the divorce, and the baptised believer remains committed to his original marriage.

Christ, in his teaching, did not limit his restrictions to baptised believers. In speaking to Jewish people who had not then accepted his Messiahship, he declared: "*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. 5:32). The pronoun *whosoever* is all embracing. It is not limited to baptised believers, but embraces the world at large, including those to whom Christ was addressing.

Who To Marry?

If the argument is right that baptism blots out the divorce or the previous marriage, and the candidate for life eternal is free to marry, who is he to marry? Obviously only one "in the Lord". And can those in the Lord legitimately marry a divorced person? Not if Christ's words are true. His teaching was endorsed by the Law for it prohibited a priest to marry a divorced woman (Lev. 21:7). This prohibition is very strong, and has a direct bearing upon our subject, for in Christ a person is accounted as having been called to the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). This again, endorses the words of Christ and of Paul. In the case of a high priest, the Law was even more stringent (vv. 10-14), for he must not marry a widow either. He typed Christ whose bride is a virgin (2 Cor. 11:2).

Finally, what would Paul's advice be to the divorced person who has remarried, or accepted Christ not having remarried? His instructions are: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called . . ." (1 Cor. 7:20). This is his advice, and it is sound.

Christ's Actions Regarding Marriage

Now, how did Christ deal with the frightful laxity that was evident in the days of his ministry? Recognising, as all great moralists have been quick to do — only, of course, they do so with an infinitely inferior appreciation of the truth — that the purity and sanctity of marriage is the foundation of all national virtue, he must have turned his thoughts at once to the need of a reformation. It was most likely the very urgency of this matter which led him to choose the occasion of a marriage feast for the early exhibition of his divine power. We are not told what part he took in the ceremony; it is enough for us to know that he graced it with his presence: and none can doubt that the benediction which he gave to the bride and bridegroom at Cana of Galilee must have impressed the guests with a new and sacred sense of its forgotten dignity.

Moreover, his teaching confirmed his action in attending the marriage feast. His doctrine drew his hearers back to the time of man's innocence, and showed that the original law of

marriage was of lasting obligation: the one unchanging standard of true, Christlike living. These are his words: "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:6-9).

Again, when his questioners countered their understanding and application of the legislation of Moses, he said, "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

The Lord placed in the forefront of all his teaching the original conception of marriage in the divine Mind as the final court of appeal for the settlement of doubt and perplexity. Having made this clear, he then proceeded to explain the part which Moses had taken. What seems to underlie the few words which have been preserved to us, when expanded by the light of history, is something of this kind: God designed that man and wife should live together in an inseparable union; but owing to the working of sin in the world and in the hearts of men, and its complete subversion of divine principles, the ideal was lost. Contact with surrounding nations infected the chosen people so grievously with immoral and profligate habits, that, to save the whole fabric of Jewish society from falling to pieces, a code of laws adapted to the changed conditions of life became necessary. Moses became the channel by which this was delivered unto them; but so far from "commanding" the Israelites to take a lower standard than God had originally set people, he merely suffered, by way of concessive legislation, certain relaxations of the primal law. Indeed, he not only did not "command" men to put away their wives; he interposed every possible obstacle in their way of doing it, thus clearly showing his attitude.

These two facts, namely, that the Lord went back at once, when confronted with the question of divorce, to God's purpose in the beginning, and that he pointed out that the motive for a subsequent modification could only have been temporary and provisional, create a very strong presumption that, in any laws which he would lay down, he would resort to

the first legislation before sin entered the world.

A careful consideration of all that he said and of the attendant circumstances has left upon the mind a strong conviction that he did precisely what was to be expected, and upheld the perpetuity of the marriage bond.

The Exceptive Clause

In his discourse upon the Mount, the Lord declared: **"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).

This is generally described as "the exceptive clause"; the exception being the only cause recognised by the Lord as justifying "putting away" a wife.

However, it should be noted that v. 31 does not relate to the teaching of Moses. The Lord carefully discriminated between the Law and what the Pharisees were teaching. When dealing with the provisions of the Law he prefaced his comment by the statement: **"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time"** (vv. 21,27,33). When comparing the teaching of the Scribes, or their usage of the Law, he merely declared: **"It hath been said . . ."** (vv. 31,38,43).

Accordingly let it be noticed, that Moses never said: **"Whosoever shall put away his wife . . ."** He limited the putting away to those who are guilty of some "uncleanness" (Deut. 24:1). Therefore, the Lord's comment involves the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, not Moses in the Law. He limits any such action to one guilty of "fornication" or unchastity. And he makes no provision whatsoever for remarriage after such an action.

Nor does Moses. True it is that the A.V. of Deuteronomy 24:2 says concerning the wife sent away: **"She may go and be another man's wife"**. But the Hebrew does not express it that way at all. There is no comparable words for either *may* or *wife* in the original. The verse is better expressed: **"If when she is departed out of his house, she go and become another man's.."**

Such an action is treated as most irregular. And shown to be such by the action of this "other man". The statement of

Deuteronomy continues: **“And if the latter husband hate her and write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house”.**

Why should he “hate” her? Because he is tired of her in similar manner as Amnon “hated” Tamar after he had satisfied his lust on her (2 Sam. 13:15). But “hate” is never given as a legitimate ground for divorce, only *uncleanness* or sexual impurity (Deut. 24:1). Therefore the Hebrew of this verse implies that the action of the woman in forming this new relationship does not constitute a regular marriage. The word “husband” is *ish* in the Hebrew, a word that is more frequently rendered merely as *man*, though it is also sometimes given as husband. But it is highly significant that the context of this verse, when referring to the “first husband” (v. 4) uses a different word, *Ba'al* (lord). Hence the Law, in this place, seems to clearly distinguish between the relationships of the two men in the woman’s life: one is merely *ish* the man of her choice; the other is *ba'al*, her lord and husband.

Moreover, a most important clause is added to the Law in v. 4. Supposing the second man in her life dies, **“Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife”.** This important legislation means that if she had not entered into an association with another man her true husband of v. 1, could relent and take her back. The Law, therefore, is teaching, that in the case of uncleanness discovered in a woman properly married, her lawful husband could send her out of the house; but he could also take her back again, so long as she did not become another man’s. That is something like Yahweh’s treatment of Israel. He drove the nation (described as His bride — Isa. 54:5) from the house, but He is going to take her back again in due time, after she has learned her lesson. And that seems to be the intent of Moses’ words in Deut. 24:1-4. The action taken against the wife in whom has been found some uncleanness is disciplinary, and could be with the object of reforming her, and receiving her again.

This conclusion is objected to on the grounds that the only punishment for adultery and the like was death. But whilst the penalty of death in such cases could be demanded if the husband required it, he did not necessarily have to demand it, or publicly accuse his wife. Neither David nor Bathsheba were

put to death, and in fact references to the imposition of such punishment are conspicuous by their absence. The action of Joseph towards Mary indicates what could be done. When it was discovered that she was "with child," he "being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matt. 1:19). He was going to act in accordance with the provision of Deut. 24:1, until told of his mistake by the angel.

It needs also to be clearly seen, that the Law of Moses, whilst legislating regarding the process of a "bill of divorcement" does not recognise the right of a woman to remarry. Her association with "another man" is not treated as marriage, but as an action that "defiles" her. It is so described in v. 4: **"Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled . ."** This term signifies an adulterous union (see Gen. 34:2; Lev. 18:20; Num. 5:13,14,20). Normal co-habitation between a legitimately married couple is never so described. Quite the contrary. Children are "a heritage of Yahweh" (Psa. 127); and when marriage is legitimate, it is described as "honourable, and the bed *undefiled*" (Heb. 13:4). It is obvious, therefore, that the second marriage was not considered legitimate in the sight of God, whatever it may have been in the sight of man through "the hardness of their hearts".

Christ, in complete conformity with the spirit of the Law, prohibited divorce except for one reason, and gave no authority for re-marriage when that had taken place.

The exceptive clause is again mentioned in Matthew 19:9: **"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"**. From this it is argued that the exceptive clause would permit remarriage on the part of the innocent partner in the case of a divorce for adultery. But this conclusion does not conform with the statements of Christ elsewhere, nor to the best texts of the passage before us. The R.V. marg. renders it differently, as do many other renditions of Scripture. For example, *The Diaglott* in accordance with the *Codex Ephraem*, *Coptic Version*, and other Greek manuscripts render the verse: **"But I say to you, Whoever dismisses his wife,**

except on account of whoredom, causes her to commit adultery; and he who marries the divorced woman, commits adultery”.

This rendition is in agreement with the Lord's earlier statement; it is supported by Greek manuscripts, and obviously expresses the intent of his utterance. Otherwise, his teaching becomes contradictory.

This interpretation of the words of the Master prohibits remarriage after divorce, and would stress the importance of his followers keeping their marriage vows, and so conforming to the conduct of those called to be priests in the Age to come.

Discussing Marriage With The Pharisees

*"It hath been said,
Whosoever shall put
away his wife, let him
give her a writing of
divorcement: but I
say unto you . . ."*
—Matt. 5:31,32.

**"One thing is certain,
entirely beyond dispute,
and that is that when
Christ spake on the
subject free from any
Jewish theory of
marriage as was pressed
upon him by the
Pharisees, he drew
attention to the state of
things at the beginning
as being the criterion of
true Christian marriage.
This implies the
indissolubility of
marriage".**

The Law of Moses strictly prohibited a priest marrying a divorced woman. It is obvious, therefore, that whatever is meant by "the exceptive clause" of Matthew 5, cannot apply to those who are called to be priests.

In his discourse on the Mount, the Lord corrected the false teaching of the Law adopted by the school of Hillel in its treatment of marriage, and the light way in which divorce was thought of by its teachers. Christ warned his hearers that, under the Law, for a layman to put away his wife apart from fornication and to remarry was to commit adultery.

His words, therefore, had particular significance for those under its jurisdiction, and should be understood in that light. It is significant, that though Mark and Luke both record some of his teaching on this subject, they do not repeat the "exceptive clause" contained in Christ's discourse on the mount. Why the omission? Because Matthew wrote particularly for Jews, whilst Mark and Luke did so primarily for Gentiles. Gentiles were never under the Law, and hence its provision did not apply to them.

The Lord's Teaching Compared

The Lord spake on the subject of marriage and divorce on four different occasions, and three of the Gospels have preserved some portion of his teaching. The first of these, included within the discourse on the Mount, was considered in our previous chapter.

His second utterance is recorded with certain variations by Matthew, Mark and Luke. It was called forth by an attempt on the part of a company of Pharisees to test his position in reference to the two leading Rabbinical schools, one of which admitted divorce only upon moral grounds, while the other allowed it for any cause according to the will of the husband.

Here is his statement in full as recorded by the three accounts. The words in brackets and bold face are those omitted from Mark's account; those in *italics* contained in Mark but omitted by Matthew; the remainder is in both accounts: "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife (**for every cause**)? *He answered and said unto them. What did Moses command you? They said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.* But Jesus said unto them, *For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.* Have you not read that He which made them from the beginning of creation, 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 two shall be one flesh. So that they are no more twain but one flesh? What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. (**They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 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**)".

Luke's record of the teaching of Christ is brief and to the point: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery, and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18).

Why The Accounts Vary

Now when these passages are severally and minutely considered, a serious difficulty is apparent. Matthew seems to represent the Lord as teaching that the marriage bond may be dissolved on one condition; Mark and Luke provide no such concession. They represent the Lord as teaching in the most explicit manner that marriage is absolutely indissoluble.

How can this apparent discrepancy be reconciled? The common method of doing it has been to maintain that it was obviously intended that we should read into Mark and Luke the exceptional condition noticed by Matthew. But, in fact, this creates greater difficulties than it removes.

For, originally, these three records did not go out under one cover, as today. They were written and published for different classes of disciples, and circulated only by slow degrees. Thus, Gentiles, receiving the records of Mark and Luke, would understand that marriage is absolutely and unconditionally incapable of dissolution while life lasted; and yet they were entirely deceived, if the suggested method be the true one.

What is the solution? We have briefly referred to it in previous chapters. It is that Matthew wrote especially for Jews, and recorded the Lord's correction of the widespread teaching of Hillel, whilst Mark and Luke had Gentile readers primarily and mainly in view.

A few illustrations will serve to substantiate this. Matthew's account is cast in a completely Jewish mould. Perhaps the most forcible external witness to this is that the evidence strongly suggests that it was originally written in the Hebrew language. Further, the Law and the Prophets are constantly referred to: the fact that Jesus is the Messiah of Jewish prophecy is strongly and repeatedly enforced; his genealogy traces the Lord back to Abraham, the father of the faithful; and a knowledge of Jewish places, customs and teaching is invariably assumed.

In Mark and Luke this is changed. There are distinct indications of a Gentile purpose in the minds of the writers. The Jewish features of Matthew recede into the background; the Messiah of the Jews is advanced as the Redeemer of the human race; his genealogy is traced back to Adam in order to connect him with all the nations of the earth, and so on.

Accordingly, the so-called "exceptive clause" finds no

mention in Mark and Luke. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that it finds mention by Matthew only to correct the mistaken viewpoints of current Jewish thought, and not as a guide to his followers, not to be acted upon by the Ecclesia, whether Jewish or Gentile.

One final point here. It should be kept in mind that whatever may be thought of the "exceptive clause," it did not apply to women. There is no warrant at all in Scripture for a woman to divorce her husband. And, moreover, nothing is mentioned regarding remarriage.

The Conclusion

In Matthew 19, the Lord answered the Pharisees by teaching that marriage was designed as a permanent union. In reply to their further question, he declared that divorce came from sinfulness, and actually violates nature inasmuch as it divides that which is intended as "one flesh".

Today, in the world, conditions have deteriorated to a similar condition as existed in the first century. Divorce only needs one reason: breakdown of the marriage; and divorcees feel quite free to remarry. The danger is that such an environment is having an adverse affect upon the brotherhood. At one time, those who taught that divorce and remarriage are permissible in view of the exceptive clause, limited it to adultery, and cases were few and far between. Today that is no longer the case. Brethren and sisters are claiming the right to separate, or to divorce and then remarry, for the most trivial reasons. Unfortunately, case-histories of such are multiplying through the Ecclesial world.

This totally disregards the will of God and Jesus Christ. How can a sister separate from her husband in the truth, or the latter divorce his wife, and claim that they are carrying out the injunction of Ephesians 5:22,23,25-27? Is it not obvious that in doing so, they are breaking the commands of Christ? Instead of condoning their action in any way, should not they be required to "come together again"? We are cognisant of the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 7:15, and will treat with them later, but as a basis for our consideration, we list the following facts, as revealed in the Word:

1. Marriage is a divine institution established at creation.
2. It is designed as a permanent union, and therefore man should not seek to sunder it.
3. Priests under the Law were not permitted to marry a divorced woman.
4. That same restriction for mortal priests will operate under Christ in the age to come.
5. As called to be priests, Christ's disciples are related to that same prohibition.
6. In explanation of Moses' concession, the Lord showed this was granted only to lay Israelites because of hardness of heart (the prevalence of sin). The exceptive clause related more to nullity of marriage (for something of a premarital failing that had not been obvious previously Deut. 24:1) more than divorce, as understood today.
7. It was an exclusive Jewish provision for lay Israelites and did not apply to the priests, nor to Gentiles. As such it has no application to the Lord's baptised followers.

One thing is certain, entirely beyond dispute, and that is that when Christ spake on the subject free from any Jewish theory of marriage as was pressed upon him by the Pharisees, he drew attention to the state of things at the beginning as being the criterion of true Christian marriage. This implies the indissolubility of marriage. It reveals that God sealed marriage with His divine authority, and placed the act of human consent beyond the possibility of lawful change. Hence it revealed marriage as a work of God, which must not be capriciously or lightly entered into, or dissolved. Christ placed to the forefront of all his teaching the original conception of marriage in the Divine Mind as the final court of appeal for the settlement of doubt and perplexity on the part of his true followers.

Discussing Marriage With The Disciples

*"And in the house his
disciples asked him
again of the same
matter. And he saith
unto them ..."*
—Mark 10:10-11.

**"It is significant that
when the Lord
instructed his Apostles,
he made no mention of
any exceptive clause,
but elevated marriage to
the status granted it by
Yahweh in the
beginning".**

Christ's instructions to the Apostles concerning divorce and remarriage differed from his reasoning with the Pharisees in several important particulars. There is no contradiction in this, for his disciples are called to higher standards of conduct than other men.

Following his discussion with the Pharisees regarding remarriage after divorce (Matt. 19:1-9), the Lord, in company with the Apostles, retired to a house (Mark 10:10). There, in the privacy of the home, and free of the distractions of Pharisaic controversy, the Apostles again advanced the subject. Mark records: **"And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter . . ."**

There evidently was something about his concluding comment with the Pharisees that concerned them. Did the exceptive clause apply to them, seeing that it was only incorporated into the law because "of the hardness of men's hearts"? His answer was specific: **"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).

The statement is clear and unequivocal. No "exceptive clause" at all; but a higher ideal than that given the Pharisees as befitting their higher status as his disciples. Surely, if the exceptive clause applied to the Lord's disciples, this was the time to advance it. They were not like the Pharisees, disputing about the interpretation of the Law, but seeking the Lord's guidance on this subject to pass on to others who would be drawn by the Gospel. The "exceptive clause" was granted under the Law "because of the hardness of men's hearts", but should the Lord's followers be guilty of such "hardness"? What is the standard of conduct, the ideal of life, set before them as such? Christ's answer showed the Apostles that they were no ordinary men. They were equivalent to the priests under the law, who were not permitted to marry a divorced person, and who were subjected to other restrictions in their marital life.

A Strange Addition

There is a remarkable addition to the Lord's comment to the disciples that strongly implies that his teaching "in the house" took the matter beyond the provisions of the Law, and was intended to provide the teaching that the Apostles would carry to the Gentiles.

It is the statement, "And if a woman shall put away her husband". Such an action on the part of a wife was not permitted under the Mosaic Law nor Jewish Law. Indeed, Josephus makes the point: "With us it is lawful for a husband to do so (put away his wife), but a wife, if she departs from her husband, cannot of herself be married to another, unless her former husband put her away" (Jos. Ant. 15,7,10).

The explanation of this Jewish distinction is that the wife was regarded as her husband's property. If she did not remain faithful to him, he could have her stoned; if she did not meet up to his expectations, he could send her back to the house from whence he had taken her. But the wife had no corresponding rights; hence a difference was made between the estimate of the infidelity of the one in relation to the other.

This distinction did not apply among other nations, however, and therefore, the Lord's answer to the Apostles took in the needs that would arise when the Gospel was preached to

Gentiles by them. Among those nations, a wife could divorce her husband, and so the Lord legislated in the matter, bearing in mind that ultimately his questioners would be sent into all the world to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15).

The effect of the Lord's comments seem to have staggered his Apostles.

Firstly, the absence of the "exceptive clause"; and secondly, the comment relating to a wife divorcing her husband. At that stage, they had no realisation that the Gospel would be preached in all the world, but that changed later.

The Apostles' Comment

As they pondered the Lord's comment, the Apostles replied: "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10).

This comment was made on the basis of the teaching of the Master in relation to marriage, and the high level to which he elevated it. Both husband and wife have a responsibility towards each other, irrespective as to the condition of the marriage. Both must remember that when they betrothed each to the other, they made their vows before Yahweh. And those vows should be kept, whatever the circumstances, otherwise they will be held accountable to God.

Every marriage has its moments; and the attitude that one partner should manifest towards the other, in spite of anything that may happen, is that which Yahweh manifested towards His bride (Ezekiel 16). He bore long with her, in spite of her unfaithfulness, pleading with her to return to her original state.

The marriage vow taken before God is binding. A marriage unites two "for good or ill, in health and in sickness, until death doth part, or the Lord doth come". Made before God, and endorsed by God, that binding vow should be maintained even if the first love for each other, and the early excitement of marriage, have waned. Marriage limits activity, sometimes in regard to the Truth's service, because the married man has to consider his wife and family in all that he undertakes to do. Paul makes this comment: "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" (1 Cor. 7:32-33).

What did the Apostles mean by their comment in Matthew 19:10?

The word rendered "cause" in v. 3 ("Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?") is *aitia* in Greek; and concerning this word, *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says: "Usually the word carried the sense of charge, accusation, blame, indicating the responsibility and guilt which attaches to an act".

The Apostles reasoned that if marriage is so restrictive that a man cannot put away his wife and marry again when the accusation against her can be proved, it would be better to remain single. They recognised that the standard set by Christ was so high, the law so severe in its obligations, that fearing when there should be no possibility of putting a complete end to the union, its trials and temptations might prove unbearable, they suggested that, under the circumstances, the wisest course would be to abjure marriage altogether.

In the answer which Christ gave, there is not the slightest hint that they had exaggerated the force of his teaching, or that they had found the right solution to the difficulty. Celibacy has often been embraced, and under differing circumstances men have accepted it; sometimes from a natural tendency to a single life; at other times from physical necessity, or from a desire to be able to serve God without distractions. But it must be a purely exceptional condition: the majority of men would be true to the law of their being, and not forego the marriage state for which God had designed them.

The Lord made this perfectly plain in the conversation that followed. In the beginning, marriage was ordained by God on the basis that "it is not good that the man should be alone . . ." (Gen. 2:18). Accordingly, immediately following his conversation with the Apostles, Christ went out of his way to bless the fruits of marriage (vv. 13-15).

In addition, he pointed out, as Paul did likewise, that it is a good thing for some to marry (see also Prov. 18:22): "All men cannot receive this saying (i.e. that it is not good to marry), save they to whom it is given" (v. 11).

The word "good" signifies *profitable*. Perhaps the Apostles had been contemplating a celibate life in order to give

themselves more completely to the work of the Truth. Perhaps they thought that discipleship was so binding that they could not render the "due benevolence" to their wives that normally would be their responsibility, and hence, not being free agents because of the binding restrictions of marriage, it was better to remain single.

Indeed, this is implied by the Lord's answer: **"All men cannot receive this saying (i.e. that it is more profitable in service to the truth not to marry), save they to whom it is given"**.

There are some so completely dedicated to discipleship that they become "eunuchs for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 9:5; Isa. 56:4), and in 1 Cor. 7:32-33 Paul sets forth the reason. But this is beyond the capability of others, and for them marriage is both desirable and helpful. Indeed, some can serve the Truth better in the marriage state than otherwise. For them the wisdom of Solomon is true (Ecc. 4:9-12), and the words of Bro. Thomas in *Elpis Israel*, pp. 47-55 appropriate.

Paul taught that "marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:40). When marriage is enjoyed in the terms of Eph. 5:22-23, it becomes a very real blessing, and a most helpful contribution to the Truth. The experiences of family life can assist in the relationships of Ecclesial life. The relationships of husband to wife; of wife to husband; of parents to children and children to parents, can teach much in our relationships in the Ecclesia and to the Father. Parents can appreciate the love of their heavenly Father a little more as they contemplate the sacrificial love they show for their children; and the hurt they feel when family quarrels erupt should teach them to avoid such in the Ecclesias.

To the Apostles, Christ concluded with the statement: "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it". His words signify that where the restrictions of vv. 9, 11, 12 do not apply, men should marry. He endorsed the teaching of Gen. 2:18, and taught that men should not fight against the Law of nature in that regard. There is no contradiction between his teaching here, and that of Paul in 1 Cor. 7:26; for the Apostle's words were governed by the circumstances of the times: the "present distress".

To summarise, it is significant that when the Lord instructed

his Apostles, he made no mention of any exceptive clause, but elevated marriage to the status granted it by Yahweh in the beginning. Where no restrictions exist, such as divorce, and where a person needs the companionship of a helpmeet (as most do) it is good to marry. And that teaching of the Lord is endorsed by Paul in his account to the Corinthians.

Mixed Marriages

"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".
— 1 Cor. 7:12.

"Mixed marriages are certainly not ideal, and a great amount of tact and understanding is required to make them work. But with the blessing of Yahweh and the exercise of personal thought and care they can be quite successful, as many cases reveal".

Paul claimed that his instructions to the Corinthian brethren were in accordance with "the command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:10). He summarised the whole matter in the following words: **"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"** (v. 11).

There is no place in that statement for an exceptive clause. And according to Paul, it constitutes a summary of the Lord's command regarding marriage. Certainly, when Christ discussed the matter of marriage and divorce with his Apostles, as distinct from doing so with the Pharisees or Jews generally, he likewise made no provision for remarriage.

The alternative, according to this teaching, is to either remain unmarried (if separation has occurred), or to humble oneself to seek reconciliation with one's partner.

Mostly, marriages are disrupted because one partner has become tired or dissatisfied with the other, and seeks consolation, or companionship elsewhere. This may be

disputed by those who find themselves in that state, but a ruthless examination of motives will reveal that this is so. True love will cause one to overlook the failings of the other, and will seek every way to make the marriage work in spite of any disturbances. If love wanes it is necessary for one to take steps to recapture his "first love" (Rev. 2:4). A husband (or a wife) owes it to himself and to his partner to do so. To do otherwise, and ruthlessly snap the ties of marriage, is to jeopardise one's future in the kingdom; for a marriage vow is a solemn undertaking before Yahweh, and He is very specific in the importance of paying one's vows. To avoid doing so is to risk the possibility of being held to account: **"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay"** (Ecc. 5:4-5; Deut. 23:21-23).

A marriage vow is for better or worse, in health and in sickness, till death intervenes, or the Lord doth come. A person may vow to his own hurt, but it will contribute to him gaining the Kingdom if he keeps to his word in spite of circumstances (Psa. 15:4). A further fact, that should be solemnly borne in mind, is that the doctrine of the Atonement is worked out in human relationships. A wife is to be subject to her husband "as unto the Lord"; and the husband is to love his wife as Christ "loved the Ecclesia, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Christ *died* for the Ecclesia: that was the measure of *his* love! Let husbands test their attitude towards their wives by that standard! The Ecclesia is expected to be in obedient subjection to Christ: which is the measure of its love! Let wives examine their attitude to their husbands accordingly! Paul's handling of this subject reveals that the requirements of the memorials on the Lord's table, need to be worked out in the home. If they are not, the parties concerned may be held guilty of eating and drinking unworthily (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Where those principles are observed there will be found no place for divorce, let alone remarriage.

That is the conclusion revealed in the instructions of Paul as he endorsed the commandment of the Lord.

Causes of Marital Strife

In these days of stress, and because of the weakness of the flesh, marriages sometimes sour. Many things can contribute to that happening. Discontent is a fruitful source of it. The modern world is built upon covetousness. Most advertisements in the Press are designed to stimulate the thought that life is not worth living unless you are able to exceed or outdo your associates or familiars in material possessions. A young married couple can be seduced by such appeals, and hanker too much after this world's goods. Then, because of the cost involved, they decide that they cannot afford a family. Unconsciously they place good quality carpets, expensive labour-saving devices, or a standard of luxury-living such as their parents never had until late in life, on a higher plane than children, which the Scriptures describe as "the heritage of Yahweh" (Psa. 127). They claim that "there will be time for them later". So everything is sacrificed to making life more luxurious or comfortable. This, of course, requires money, and the wife takes an outside job. In consequence, husband and wife return home both tired, and their mutual exhaustion erupts in irritation. No proper meal is prepared, no warmth of welcome is apparent, and because she is in receipt of an adequate income, she manifests no real sense of dependence upon her husband. These features, so common in modern living, create serious problems in married life.

Every marriage will have its crises and difficulties. When these arise, as they invariably will, it is helpful to have a third love, to which both can turn for help. A third love, outside the two principals of a marriage, can help it succeed when it seems lost.

Children can provide such a love. The very miracle of life that both have shared to create; the affection that both parents have towards their offspring, can help hold a marriage together when it is in danger. The Truth can provide a mutual third love. If the home is built on it, and mutual faith has been stimulated by the reading of the Word together, it will provide an outlet for both in times of such need.

But what should be avoided like the plague, and what often is indulged in at the risk of marriage relationships, is the retailing of the faults of the other to those outside of their relationship.

There is a tremendous wisdom in the command of Paul: "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath". If a disagreement arises, clear it up before going to sleep!

There is also the need to communicate. But "communicate" does not mean merely to express in word, but rather in action. A wife says to her husband, "I love you!" when she goes out of her way to do him a service that costs her something to perform, but which she knows will please him. And a husband "communicates" when he acts similarly. Little sacrifices of love communicate one to another more eloquently than do words. They help to cement relationships so strongly that they will stand the stress that comes in moments of difficulty.

In the light of Paul's teaching it is wise to recall that when friction develops in a marriage, and it is in danger of falling apart, if the Lord's will is to be observed, alienation will mean celibacy. The alternative is "remain unmarried" or "be reconciled". Let it also be remembered, that although two may be separated, in the sight of God and the Ecclesia, they are still married, and therefore they have responsibilities towards each other. For "what God hath joined together let no man put asunder".

On Mixed Marriages

Another question advanced by the brethren of Corinth in their communication to the Apostle (see 1 Cor. 7:1) was the matter of mixed marriages. Regarding that problem he could not advance any words of the Lord, and therefore wrote with the authority of the spirit which he possessed (see v. 40).

His comment: "speak I, not the Lord" (v. 12) does not mean that what he writes is mere personal opinion, but that Christ had not openly expressed himself concerning mixed marriages, as he had regarding divorce and remarriage between couples in the Truth.

In Corinth some were concerned as to their marital status in view of one only accepting the Truth. Seeing that marriage with the alien is against the commandments of Christ, should acceptance of the Truth be followed by severance of such a bond? The cases that the Lord dealt with related to Jews, in which husband and wife belonged to the Jewish faith; Christ, therefore, had no occasion to pronounce on the sort of case

that Paul had to treat among the Corinthians. He does so as one having divine apostolic authority: **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"** (vv. 12-13).

This instruction is so clear as to require little comment. However, it should be noted that Paul mentions the consent of the unbelieving persons only, that of the believing parties being taken for granted. It may be that the unbelieving partner is so bitter against the Truth as to demand divorce or separation. But usually, this will only occur, because of the tactlessness of the believing partner. There may be an over-anxious desire to force the truth on to the other which could result in greater opposition. It could be that the believing partner's involvement in the work of the Truth results in neglecting the unbelieving partner.

Care should be adopted to avoid such occurring. In fact, a husband or a wife should become a more thoughtful, kindly and loving partner as a result of the Truth.

That is the point that Peter makes in treating with the same subject. The A.V. is most unfortunate in its translation of the words he used. It renders: "if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (1 Pet. 3:2). Firstly, the definite article is lacking in the original, and his advice should be rendered: "They also may without a word be won . . ." That is, without any undue nagging, or even monotonous and persistent hammering home of the Truth to the unbelieving partner. Instead there is a possibility of them being "won by the conversation of the wives". Here, again, the translation is unfortunate. The term "conversation" should be rendered *living*. The unbelieving husband should be agreeably surprised in the change that has taken place in his wife, for she has become more loving, warmer, sympathetic and attentive to his wants than ever before.

By so doing she is preaching the Truth in the most effective manner, and one most likely to appeal.

The word "dwell" is from the verb *oikeo*, and signifies to "house" together, with the implication to *cohabit*, and so to

maintain the marriage relation in its complete manner. Mixed marriages are certainly not ideal, and a great amount of tact and understanding is required to make them work. This sometimes is not fully appreciated in those homes where both have embraced the Truth. But with the blessing of Yahweh and the exercise of personal thought and care they can be quite successful, as many cases reveal. They demand a greater measure of personal sacrifice, and inevitably a greater limitation of activities than where both partners have embraced the Truth. This needs to be understood by the believing partner, for it is beyond the scope of the unbelieving one to do so. He or she does not understand the need of separation from participation in things previously indulged in, and loving care and understanding must be expressed in explaining the reason for the change. A person, generally, is easier led than driven!

This is certain: mixed marriages are as truly marriages as other unions are, and the believer (because he or she has the responsibility of demonstrating the Truth in action) is duty bound to render to the other the due benevolence which one may expect in a marriage. Paul does not forbid such unions, as, of course, he does not advise them (see v. 39). But as they existed then, and continue to do so today, his instructions and advice should be borne in mind by such, and applied as circumstances permit.

Sanctified By The Believer

Instead of seeking doctrinal reasons for disrupting such a marriage, a proper view of this type of marriage discloses proper reasons for leaving it intact. Paul shows that instead of the believer being made unholy by this marital union, the unbeliever is made holy.

This is not a spiritual state before God, but has relation to the legitimacy of the marriage. The A.V. renders that the unbelieving husband (or wife) is "sanctified by the wife" (or husband). But the word rendered "by" is *en* and here relates to the husband in *his relations with his wife*. Though the believing wife has changed her state before God by her baptism, her unity with her husband has not been disturbed thereby. He is still holy in his relations to her, still separated from all others, in the

unique position he holds as husband in relation to her.

But more than that, the marriage is holy before God; made so by the believing partner. It can be God-blessed as a result, so that the unbeliever in relation to a believing partner, is likely to receive greater blessings than he or she deserves.

And the marriage being legitimised before God, the children are considered the proper fruits of such a union and not as illegitimate. Moreover, as special care will be shown towards the offspring of the children of God particularly at Christ's return, they will benefit thereby: "Else were your children unclean (that is considered illegitimate if the marriage is not a genuine one): but now are they holy" (v. 14).

Such is the state of a mixed marriage when the unbeliever is prepared to dwell in peace with the believing husband or wife. But that is not always the case, as is considered in the next chapter.

If The Marriage Fails?

"And 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".
— 1 Cor. 7:15.

"In the marriage bond, a husband or a wife is not free to please themselves; they are bound to take into consideration the will or desires of the other party. They are "under bondage" to wife and family, and ecclesial appointments must be governed, and limited, accordingly".

In Christ there is a vast change in one's relationship and attitude to normal things. Paul wrote: **"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (lit. creation); all things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"** (2 Cor. 5:17).

In Christ past sins have been forgiven; the previous way of life has been completely altered; "old things", such as one's previous ambitions, hopes, desires have been modified or abandoned; and a process has commenced that if maintained will result in a change of nature at his coming.

The basis of this change is dedicated obedience to the principles of Christ. We will submit to whatever he wants irrespective as to what others might think or do.

Marriage Is For Life

But a believer's marriage relationship is not severed from his unbelieving partner on the occasion of baptism. "What God hath joined together..." relates to marriage whether outside or inside the Body of Christ. In his discourse on the Mount, the Lord used an all-embracing pronoun: *"Whosoever shall put away his wife..."*

(Matt. 5:32). And those to whom he taught this had not then accepted him as the Lamb of God. In line with this teaching, John Baptist bluntly rebuked Herod because of his unlawful marriage (Matt. 14:4); which argues the universality of God's law in relation to marriage. Therefore when the Lord taught: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder", he was not referring to individual marriages as being specifically arranged by God, but of marriage in general. It is ordained of God, and once entered into must not be broken.

Therefore a marriage contracted before baptism is binding, and should be kept intact even though only one party of it has embraced Christ. We mention this because some have reasoned, and even agitated, that such a marriage is not binding, because it is not specifically arranged by God. We reiterate: Christ's words, "What God hath joined together . . ." relates to marriage in general, whether in or out of Christ.

When Peace Is Disturbed

Paul's words in 2 Cor. 5:17 above, reveal that the Truth demands a complete change in the pattern of life. This can create problems where only one party in a marriage accepts Christ, unless the greatest tact, consideration and understanding love are displayed towards the unbeliever. The believing partner of such a marriage is not at liberty to please himself or herself in Ecclesial involvements, as much as may be the case when both are united in a common belief. And it should be recognised, that in such circumstances, it is more difficult for a believing wife, than it is for a believing husband; for, after all, the husband should govern the home. As stated earlier, Peter has some very wise words regarding the conduct necessary in such instances (1 Pet. 3:1-8); and Micah, too, advocated the greatest discretion in certain situations (Micah 7:5). There is often a tendency to unwisely press the principles of the Truth into the unwilling ears of an unbelieving partner; or to so imperfectly express them as to inflame a state of greatest irritability. This can result in irreparable friction arising, developing into irreconcilable antagonism and even hatred. So "a man's foes become they of his own household" (Matt. 10:36).

When this is pressed to the extreme, the result can be the

complete disruption of the marriage, in which the unbelieving spouse may positively refuse to continue in marital union with the believer. It is, of course, the greater responsibility of the latter to avoid this if at all possible, to go out of his or her way to "seek peace and pursue it", to endeavour by a greater sacrifice of loving ministration to cement the marriage bond more closely. In Christ, a husband or a wife should witness to the Truth by showing more consideration and understanding than otherwise. Where this is prayerfully done, most often the marriage will be preserved, and possibly the unbeliever ultimately won over to the Truth. In almost every case otherwise, which has come to our attention, the believing partner, by indiscretion has compounded the problem. In other cases we have known of the unbelieving partner accepting the Truth after twenty or more years of faithful effort on the part of the other.

If the marriage irretrievably breaks down because the unbeliever simply will not accept any change in the believer, and abandons the marriage, Paul's advice is "let him depart" (1 Cor. 7:15). The verbs are durative and denote a continuous action. The unbeliever departs, and keeps himself apart.

It may happen, of course, that the unbeliever leaves only temporarily, in a fit of pique, and then, repenting, returns. In such a case, reconciliation should be readily extended. Paul is not referring to such a case. He has in mind one who leaves, and does not return. And, moreover, in describing him as *the unbelieving*, he is clearly showing that it is the Truth that has caused the unbeliever to depart, and so terminate the marriage. It is his refusal to accept his wife's responsibilities to the Truth, that has caused the rupture, and not because she is making demands on him which go beyond what Christ would have her do.

Not In Bondage

When the unbeliever departs because of his opposition to the Truth, "let him depart", advises Paul. The marriage is terminated; let it remain thus. Do not seek to restore it by compromising the Truth. Let the believer accept the situation, and by dedicated service to Christ, fill the void created by effective and satisfying labour in his cause.

Paul declares: "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases".

Does this mean that the believer is free to marry? Some reason that way, but in doing so, they set Paul against Christ. For Christ clearly set forth to the Apostles his teaching concerning marriage and divorce (Mark 10:10-12). Even to the Pharisees he disclaimed the licence claimed by flesh in regard to divorce and remarriage: "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 5:31-33; 19:8). If it is reasoned that the expression "not in bondage" implies liberty to remarry, who is the deserted wife or husband to marry? Obviously, another believer! And would not that mean that the believer would be marrying a divorced wife, or husband, as the case may be? And would not Christ's strictures apply in such cases? Does not Paul elsewhere teach that "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" (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2)?

The context of 1 Cor. 7 reveals what is meant by "bondage" in the case. In the marriage bond, a husband or a wife is not free to please themselves; they are bound to take into consideration the will or desires of the other party. Paul has made that clear in vv. 3-5 of this chapter. He reverts to it in v. 33: **"He that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife"**.

Marriage limits a person's liberty in every way, even in the work of the Truth. Each party to it is bound to help the other, and even to submit to the other at the expense of self. Marriage makes demands from which one may prefer to be freed, but the vows having been made before both God and man are binding. They cannot be lightly snapped by those who are called to sacrifice self to perform the will of God.

Even when both are united in the faith, husband and wife have responsibilities to each other that may limit the work in the Truth that one or the other might rejoice to do. A brother may feel drawn to preach in distant parts, but his first care in such a case is to his wife and family. The wife may enjoy entertaining, but she is bound to consider her husband's reaction to such. How often have some pleased themselves in

what they have elected to do (even in what they believe to be for the cause of Christ), and have been faced with disruption in their own family circle.

In marriage one cannot please oneself at the expense of the other. If one does not wish to submit to such limitations, he needs to give himself to a life of celibacy "for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. 19:12). Most, however, find the comfort of home, and the loving ministrations of a wife, great aids to a better service to Christ. But, whether we like it or not, when we enter the marriage state, we voluntarily limit our freedom to please ourselves. We are "under bondage" to wife and family, and ecclesial appointments must be governed, and limited, accordingly. Many hurtful problems arise in the marriage relationship of believers when this is not recognised, and the husband wrongly claims his right to please himself in what he wants to do. In real marriage in the Truth, however, the understanding companionship of such as Aquila and Priscilla sets the standard of husband and wife co-operation in its service and labour.

But in the case where an *unbeliever* (one who repudiates the Truth) departs, the one that remains is not bound by the marriage tie to make provision for the one who has left. The abandoned partner has been freed from such responsibilities. He or she is not bound to seek reconciliation at the expense of the Truth, or to submit to impossible demands as the price of living together. The one forsaken is at liberty to serve God in fulness of belief with complete dedication unhindered by the restrictions that the marriage state inevitably demands. That being the teaching of Paul, the person in such a condition should regard it as proper so to do. Those accepting Christ have been called to a peace with God, and should treasure that above all else, including "peace" in the home, as Paul proceeds to teach.

Seeking Peace In Marriage

*"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. 7:16.

**"The believing spouse
must come to terms with
the fact that though the
home might be united in
marriage, each spouse
has a different standard
of morality: one based
upon the Truth, the
other in repudiation of it.
But because marriage is
a divine institution, and
does not allow for
divorce and remarriage,
some means must be
devised to bridge the
gap".**

After advising that if the unbelieving partner refuse to allow the believer freedom of worship, and wantonly terminates the marriage by deserting his spouse, the latter should "let him depart", for "a brother or a sister is not in bondage in such cases", the Apostle sets forth the reason for this: "God has called us to (or in, Grk. *en*) peace" (1 Cor. 7:15).

Peace is the objective of the Gospel. A person embracing it is granted peace with God and Jesus Christ (John 14:27; Rom. 8:1). Because of this the preaching of the Gospel is described as "preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). Having experienced the benefits of such, it is the obligation of believers to extend it to others as much as they are able: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

In marital relationships, a believer is "in bondage" to his unbelieving spouse to seek that peace in every way possible, short of compromising the requirements of the Truth. This, of course, may limit the service he or she can render the Ecclesia. The seeking of peace will certainly curb any tactless, argumentative pressing of the

elements of the Truth on the unwilling ears of the one who has refused it. To do otherwise will increase the state of irritability that can contribute to serious disruption in the home. There is nothing more calculated to destroy a marriage than a nagging wife, or an overbearing, dictatorial husband, endeavouring to force his or her new-found beliefs on the other. To persist in such endeavour will not contribute to the peace to which the believer has been called, but to a condition of irascibility that will fracture the marriage beyond all hope of healing.

The believer must remember that he or she is still married, still in bondage to the other partner of it, with all that that means, including the surrender of the body (v. 5). A believing wife (or husband) will, indeed, try to win over her unbelieving spouse, and first will do so by drawing his attention to the Truth that has captured her. When that fails, or, perhaps, has been contemptuously, or angrily, rejected, the effort will still be made, not by constant, monotonous and irritating preaching, but by endeavouring to preserve the marriage by an increase of loving consideration and service. That is the point clearly made by Peter: **"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands: that if any obey not the Word, they also may without the word (see the Greek) be won by the behaviour (not conversation!) of the wives; while they behold your chaste behaviour coupled with reverence"** (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

But if in spite of the manifestation of every loving service that personal affection and the Truth demands, the husband (or the wife) angrily terminates the marriage by deserting his wife, "let him depart", counsels Paul. And adds: "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us in peace". The implication of this is that the believer is not under bondage to sacrifice the cause of the Truth to bring about a reconciliation. Having been called "in peace" with God, having attempted to hold the marriage together "in peace", the desertion of the disrupting party will allow that peace to be enjoyed without let or hindrance.

A Question Answered

Paul then answers an implied criticism of his advice: **"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy**

husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

The believer may feel that by avoiding Paul's advice, or by compromising the Truth a little to placate the angry unbelieving partner, an opening may occur for saving his or her spouse. Sometimes believers develop a sense of guilt that they have not done sufficient on behalf of the other, and may grieve themselves unnecessarily that proper opportunity has not been taken to present the Truth effectively. Shall offers of compromise be made to preserve the marriage? This presents a test: who is loved most? Husband, wife, or Christ?

Paul, recognising the danger that in trying to preserve a marriage under such conditions, the believer's hold on the Truth might be jeopardised, answers the implied question as cited above, which can be paraphrased to read: "How do you know whether you will save your husband (or wife) by so doing?" No guarantee of success can be made by the deserted spouse seeking out the one that has departed. Whilst, obviously, the latter will only return if the Truth is set aside in some way. That would mean sacrificing peace with God for peace in the home, and so risk eternal life. Therefore, any "coming to terms" must be done before the unbelieving partner has angrily stormed out of the house. Afterwards it is too late.

To reason otherwise is to challenge the basic fact behind Paul's statement, namely the work of salvation is a work of God, and it will not be accomplished by a believer compromising the Truth. Hence, when an unbelieving spouse is so stubborn, difficult and unreasonable as to refuse to live with the other in peace, and so abandons the marriage, Paul's clear, direct advice is, "Let him depart!" Forget the matter. Give yourself to the work of the Truth, enjoying the peace with God in which you have been called.

Paul's Advice Today

Conditions today are vastly different to what they were a few decades back. The demands of the Truth are subjected to greater pressures than were then the case. It is so complex, economical factors so different, problems so much more diverse, as to result in additional strains that put the best of marriages under test and stress. In addition, the world no

longer considers the marriage bond as sacred before God, and actually teaches that such restrictions are harmful. Because of this, divorce is increasing to such a degree as to be considered of minor significance. Therefore, when the normal problems of every-day marriage are increased by one spouse embracing the Truth with its demands on separateness and sacrifice, the greatest care is needed to preserve it. The believer owes it to the unbeliever to render a greater measure of affection and self-sacrificing love, seeking to understand the viewpoint of the latter, and finding tactful words of love to express the new point of view suddenly adopted. Every attempt will be made, every personal sacrifice given, to forge more completely the bond of marriage. As an illustration of such a need, consider the fate of two vessels that are loosely tied together resting on the ocean. They are quite safe whilst the sea is calm; but let a storm arise, and soon the pounding waves will crash one against the other to their mutual hurt and ultimate destruction. In such conditions, they would be safer completely apart. However, let them be joined together as one and they will balance each other, riding the waves in unison and safely.

Marriage is like that. The relationships need to be brought as closely together as is possible. The two are one, and must mutually strive to that end. Each will sympathetically understand the moods of the other, and affectionately seek to help in times of need. A close bond will be forged that will be found of immense stabilising help in times of storm. In certain circumstances a tactful silence is as gold. Christ provides the perfect example. He "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. 12:3). It is written of him: "A bruised reed shall he not break; and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isa. 42:3). His work was one of restoration, not destruction, so in meekness he went out of his way to help the bruised. He did not quench the "smoking flax". As the priest had to trim the wicks in the golden lampstand that the light might burn brighter, so, in a figurative sense, the Lord helped his disciples to shine forth more brightly with the light of truth. He did not discourage them even though they obviously were in the wrong. With skill and patience he set about stimulating what dim light was manifested.

So in our relationships one with the other. We have a

responsibility to assist others to be strengthened against the bruising that life might give them; and to develop what little light they might manifest. This needs skill, patience, and prayerful faith. In marriage problems, every case seems different, and the formula for one will not necessarily succeed in another. But one fact is clear. The believing spouse must come to terms with the fact that though the home might be united in marriage, each spouse has a different standard of morality: one based upon the Truth, the other in repudiation of it. But because marriage is a divine institution, and does not allow for divorce and remarriage, some means must be devised to bridge the gap. Mutual affection can do it, the needs of children can strengthen it, an understanding consideration can assist it. But for the happiness of all concerned, and in obedience to the requirements of Scripture, the attempt must be made to do so.

Consideration must be given to the difference of conditions today than to those in the days of Paul. In his days, women had few rights recognised by men or the State. Today, women's rights, and children's rights have turned morality upside down. For example, parents can be prosecuted for disciplining their children in certain regards; teenagers have the "right" to leave home, and "flat" with others; children in primary schools are taught to become independent of their parents. In short, the principles expressed by Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 are often not legally binding; and the authorities can direct and order otherwise. Parental discipline is no longer maintained by Law; persons are allowed to do "what is right in their own eyes".

We have known cases, where the Children's Welfare Department has ordered parents to stop harrasing children to attend Sunday School or meetings, and have threatened to take them from the home unless the order is obeyed. A child over 13 years of age has the "right" to say which parent he or she desires to live with in the case of a broken marriage. Hence, if one or the other of the parents insists upon standards that are waived by the other, who proceeds to "bribe" the child with liberties or with money, the time could come when the children will leave the disciplining one for the laxity of the other.

In a marriage break-up today there are often legal

complications that did not apply in Paul's day but which must now be taken into account. How is the property to be divided up? If one partner retains possession of a jointly-owned house, what legal rights does the other party possess? And whilst, of course, the believing partner would not use litigation, the unbeliever might have no such scruples.

Material rights are perhaps the least important of the issues involved.

Who is to have custody of the children? Generally the Law will view more sympathetically the request for custody of the unbelieving partner of a marriage, who claims that religion has destroyed the unity of the home, and complains that children are being forced against their will to comply. In fact, the law prefers it when Paul's command to bring up children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) is ignored. Even if custody is given into the charge of the believing spouse, access to the children will often be granted the unbelieving parent. And that can create unpleasant traumatic problems that can fester like a canker, and finally result in the children drifting from the Truth.

Hence every attempt should be made to preserve a marriage whilst serving the Truth. Firmness, affection, and Scriptural education are necessary factors in binding children to faithful parents and to the influence of the Word. We must try to make our children *love* the Truth rather than forcing them to accept it. A careful supervision of their schooling companions and the friendships they establish will pay dividends. Above all else, be warm and enthusiastic towards the things of the Truth.

Great care, and much patience are required to avoid irrevocable false moves. Some have terminated marriage "because of the Truth", only to find that they are not suited to a celibate life, and so their problem is accentuated rather than solved. Frequently they then emotionally involve others in their problems. On the other hand, a believing wife might depart from a hostile home environment (though such would be against the advice of Paul — 1 Cor. 7:12-13) because it is interfering with her worship, but she must bear in mind, that if she has taken on the responsibilities of a family, she has not the independence to please herself. She may have to abandon the children to the hostile influence she is leaving. Certainly she

would lose custody of the children if the unbelieving parent elects to demand it.

Great care must be taken that the Truth is not compromised, but within the circle of that requirement, every attempt must be made to preserve both the marriage and the relationships involved therein as far as the children are concerned. Sometimes an intermediary can assist solve a marriage problem, but in most cases, the solution is with the immediate parties concerned. True, genuine love is usually a tremendously binding factor in most marital relationships. Paul's advice, carefully followed in faith, will provide the means of greater happiness now, and eternal life in the age to come.

When Vows Are Binding

*"Let every man abide
in the same calling
wherein he was
called".
— 1 Cor. 7:20.*

**"The obligations entered
into before baptism are
just as binding
afterwards. Those called
to the Truth are to
"abide with God"
whatever their state may
be in which the Truth
found them. If a believer
truly "walks with God"
he will find strength to
overcome every
problem."**

At v. 17, the Apostle extends the principle he has laid down in regard to marriage to include other matters relevant in his day. He wrote authoritatively, setting forth teaching which he had proclaimed in all Ecclesias as an Apostle divinely empowered so to do: **"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 Ecclesias"** (1 Cor. 7:17).

The word "distributed" signifies *divided* or *apportioned*. Each one called has been granted grace or favour, and this has been extended to him or her in the condition they were in when the Truth found them. This includes their marriage state at that time. The Apostle has already discussed the question whether a husband or wife ought to separate on account of a difference in religion, and has stated that the marriage should be preserved if possible. He now declares that the general principle there laid down ought to rule in other areas: that a person accepting Christ ought not to seek to change his condition or calling in life in those regards, but to remain in the state in which he was found when called.

This answers many problems that have troubled some. Supposing a person has been divorced and remarried, should he terminate the second marriage on accepting Christ? Paul's answer is in the negative. God has called him in that state, and in that state he should remain. On the other hand, should he have been divorced, and not remarried, the question as to whether he is free to marry is also in the negative.

The burden may seem heavy to some, but the way to life is not easy for any. Every person, whether married or unmarried, has a burden to bear (Gal. 6:5). Some, because they have not been able to obtain a partner have had to live a celibate life who would desire it otherwise. Others have gone through the distressing trauma of a marriage breakup.

Whatever the circumstances, let the believer fill his life with Christ, and he will find the strength to maintain his state before God. What may appear impossible in one's own strength is not so with the aid of God (2 Cor. 4:6-7; Phil. 4:13).

So important was the principle cited above that the Apostle taught and ordained it in every Ecclesia.

The Principle Illustrated

In summarising his teaching on marriage, the Apostle stated: "As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk". In the context of our subject, we understand this to mean that whatever his marriage state (whether married, unmarried, divorced and remarried), do not go out to change it.

This is an important principle, and one that is sometimes defied. Some have accepted Christ in order to gain a wife or a husband. The Truth has been used as a means to that end; which surely is not pleasing to God. There have been instances of divorcees, embracing the principles of the Truth, and then seeking to change their marital state.

And their seeking has sometimes been encouraged by others.

Paul advanced examples to illustrate the principle stated. He taught that both Jews and Gentiles, on coming into covenant relationship with Christ, are to ignore whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised. Circumcision, though the token of the Abrahamic covenant, was but a mark in the flesh, and the principle to be observed is "the keeping of the commandments of God". As is stated in *The Book of Maccabees*

(1.1.15), and in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (12.5), some Jews underwent a surgical operation to remove the sign of circumcision. Should a Jew do this on embracing Christ as a protest against Judaism? Or should a Gentile convert submit to circumcision because of his endorsement of the hope of Israel? The answer is No! Paul reiterated the statement made in summing up his conclusions regarding marriage: **"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called"** (v. 20).

He next advances the cases of freemen or slaves. Brethren were not to unduly concern themselves with their social state as such, although, if believing slaves could secure their freedom legitimately, they were advised to do so. Indeed (see *The Epistle of Philemon*), the Apostle sent Onesimus back to slavery after he had escaped therefrom. His action showed that believers cannot evade their responsibilities because they have accepted Christ.

Is The Past Ignored?

Some have reasoned that baptism blots out every obligation of the past, and therefore, if a person was divorced before embracing Christ, he is now free to remarry. But the Apostle never reasons in that way, but rather counsels that the obligations entered into before baptism are just as binding afterwards. In Christ, a slave is Christ's freeman, and a freeman is Christ's slave, and that is all that really counts, for whether bond or free, all in Christ are bought with a price (v. 23).

And so the Apostle again sums up with the same statement: **"Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God"** (v. 24).

Those called to the Truth are to "abide with God" whatever their state may be in which the Truth found them. If a believer truly "walks with God" he will find strength to overcome every problem.

When Vows Are Binding

The Scriptures do not treat vows lightly. They teach that Yahweh will hold a man or woman accountable to any vows made. When a man or a woman proclaims a marriage vow, they do so before God. They have vowed before Yahweh that they are irrevocably united in marriage, until death parts them or the Lord doth come.

If the marriage is terminated, they break their vow to each other. But more importantly they break a vow made before God.

On that basis, the person divorced and remarried before baptism should remain in the state the Truth found him or her, because of the reasoning of the Apostle in this chapter, and because of the renewed marriage vow made.

Will God keep a person to a vow, if the vow is opposed to His will? Yes, He will. That fact is shown in the solemn agreement entered into by Joshua and the Gibeonites. The Israelites were solemnly warned against entering into covenant relationship with the Canaanites, but Joshua was tricked and deceived into doing so with the Gibeonites. The Israelites "asked not counsel of Yahweh" (Josh. 9:14), and so fell into the trap of their own making. However, God kept them to their agreement, even though against His will. Joshua was compelled to keep his word given those Canaanites.

So with the case of a person divorced and remarried before baptism. Some have taught that it is necessary for them to terminate the relationship; but we see no warrant for that in Scripture. The union of marriage was forged in ignorance of the law of Yahweh concerning divorce and remarriage, and the relationship should be sustained, even as Joshua was compelled to keep to his agreement with the Gibeonites. There were doubtless some of the believers in Corinth in that condition (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11), but nowhere does the Apostle counsel the severance of such a marriage. He teaches that in every instance marriage should be preserved, if the other party is willing to continue the relationship. The Apostle sums the matter up in the words: "As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all Ecclesias".

The Status of Unmarried Sisters

"I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be".
— 1 Cor. 7:26.

"Young brethren and sisters need to recognise that the gaining of a partner for life is not the greatest attainment. The measure of their love for Christ is the all-important thing."

The concluding verses of the chapter provide Paul's answer to the final question posed him by the brethren of Corinth on the theme of marriage. It concerns the status of unmarried sisters. In vv. 25-35 the Apostle considers the subject at length, and then, in vv. 36-38, he provides a concise answer.

In answering the question posed him, Paul shows that in Christ, the unmarried state is not inferior to the married state. In fact, the unmarried person's freedom provides opportunity for greater service to be rendered to Christ.

At the same time, he warns against a false asceticism which may consider the sexual feature of marriage wrong. And he fortifies his answer with other relevant considerations.

That the brethren had written posing the question, and so hinting that it was a problem among believers in Corinth, is made clear by the opening comment of v. 25: *"Now concerning virgins . . ."* On that theme the Lord had given no specific directives, so Paul advances his judgment as an inspired Apostle.

As such his words are as authoritative as

those of the Lord.

First, he lays down a general principle (v. 26). But the rendering of the A.V. can be misunderstood. He is represented as writing: "I *suppose* therefore that this is good for the present distress...." The word "suppose" might suggest that the conclusion is open to dispute, which is not the case. Hence a different word should be used.

The word "suppose" is rendered *declare* by *The Diaglott*. Paul is rendering a judgment, and hence a stronger word than "suppose" is necessary. Moreover, the conclusion is not directed to male believers to the exclusion of females as the A.V. suggests.

Next, the statement is made: "Let a *man* so to be"; whereas, in fact, his words are not limited to those of the male sex. The word rendered "man" is *anthropos*, and relates to a human being, male or female, without reference to sex or nationality. Hence Paul is directing his words firstly to the unmarried of both sexes.

He advises his questioners that it is good for a person, whether male or female, "so to be". What does he mean? He means that they, and we, should act according to the advice already given, as well as that which follows. In v. 8 he declares that "it is good" for the unmarried if they "abide even as he"; that is, remain unmarried; subject, of course, to certain considerations such as are expressed in v. 2. He repeats this in v. 27: "**Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife**".

These words are interpreted as though *luis* and *luo* invariably signify divorce. That is not so. The words signify a *loosening*, and can relate to an avoidance of responsibilities, a separation, even death. A brother "bound" unto a wife, is not to seek avoidance of the responsibilities resting on him; or to so act as to drive her from the home. If the wife is an unbeliever, he must recognise what is due to her, and play his part to that end.

Again, a brother may be "loosed" from a wife, and be in a position to remarry. This could result in the event of an espousal falling through, as Joseph contemplated doing in regard to Mary (Matt. 1:18-19), or through death. Under such circumstances, Paul advised, "Seek not a wife". Howbeit, if the state of the widower be as expressed in v. 9, it could well be to

his spiritual advantage if he does marry. Similar advice applied to virgins, but in every case Paul would warn, no matter how desirable marriage may seem to the infatuated mind, "such shall have trouble in the flesh". They will find that marriage adds to the responsibilities of life, and therefore to the problems incidental to a walk in the faith. His advice was designed to "spare them" from this trouble (1 Cor. 7:28). Paul looked realistically at marriage, and reminded his readers of its obligations, problems as well as its joys.

Whilst opposing the asceticism mentioned earlier, Paul's words can also constitute a warning for the unmarried against becoming over-anxious relating to their marital state. His advice is good; and much evil would be prevented if it were heeded today. Young brethren and sisters need to recognise that the gaining of a partner for life is not the greatest attainment. The measure of their love for Christ is the all-important thing. However, instead of heeding the Apostle's advice, there generally is manifested an over-anxiety to obtain a marriage partner, even at the expense of the best service to Christ. Whether or not the partner will assist in the development of spiritual qualities is frequently overlooked. In their search for a mate, young people drift from country to country from city to city, and from Ecclesia to Ecclesia. They become unstable and restless in the frustrating quest, and often an unsettling influence in the particular Ecclesia in which they have taken temporary refuge.

In this they are sometimes aided and abetted by "match-making mammas", who urge their sons and daughters along a course that oftentimes spells disaster both in this life and that which is to come.

Let a different attitude be adopted, and they will discover a happiness and a satisfaction (and perhaps a partner!) that presently eludes them. Let them give themselves to the Truth in the Ecclesia that has brought them to spiritual birth, and allow Yahweh to mould their future.

The Book of Proverbs declares: **"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of Yahweh" (18:22).**

To obtain "favour of Yahweh" we must allow Him to govern the circumstances, and in faith await His direction. Paul

declared: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Let those who desire a partner, who find life hard and lonely without one, make it a matter of faith in action and of prayer, and by labouring for Christ in the Ecclesia, wait for the favour of Yahweh to develop the opportunity. This is the implication of Paul's advice, as the context of his words clearly shows.

For The Present Distress

But does not Paul limit his advice because of prevailing conditions, because of "the present distress"? His words are good for any time, but particularly for the time of the end. The Ecclesias then were approaching a most difficult period of persecution, that reaches its climax with the overthrow of the Jewish State. Followers of Christ were considered as a sect of the Jews by many in Rome, and treated accordingly. The difficulties of persecution were accentuated within family groups. A wife or a husband, seeing a loved partner suffer, or their children brutally ill-treated would suffer more keenly than those who were not so tied to others.

But the term "present distress" can also relate to the "tribulation" which believers in every age experience as the moulding influence of God upon their lives is felt, shaping them for the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). It constitutes "present distress" in contrast to the happiness and joy of the future.

A person embracing Christ enters upon a pilgrimage of sacrifice and pressure. There is a need to "count the cost" in that regard, and recognising what he may face, take steps to meet it. The problems he will experience can be accentuated by marriage, and so Paul reasoned, he should bear this well in mind when contemplating entering that state.

The Time Is Short

Behind all these considerations regarding the question of marriage and non-marriage there lies the attitude of believers towards all the transient temporalities of this earthly life. Whether married or not, the time is short, the signs show that Christ is at the door: **"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" (vv. 30-32).

Paul would have us never lose sight of the purpose of our call, and particularly so at times when it is obvious that great changes are impending. That was the case, then, when the Mosaic age was closing, and would terminate in a time of great trouble and persecution; it is the case today, when, quite obviously, we are living in the time of the end.

In such circumstances, marriage, mourning, rejoicing, buying, selling, personal ambition and so forth must be made subordinate to the Truth. Of course, these things should always be subordinate to the Truth; but that is even more needful as it becomes clearly obvious that the end is approaching. What is the use of building up material resources when it is clear that but a short time remains for them to be enjoyed? How foolish it is to bend all our energies to "heap up treasures mixed with woe", for the benefit of the tax collector. In Paul's day, he laid it down that there was a benefit in the fathers "laying up for the children" (2 Cor. 12:14), but it would appear that we are so near the coming of the Lord, that our children will not benefit by any such accumulation of treasure.

This is the warning of Paul. Marriage, tears, joys, purchases, the whole world of earthly things; we may have them all, use them all, experience them all, but for how long? They belong to the fashion of the present world, and therefore are transient, about to pass away. Paul advised, that in using the things of the world, do not abuse them. Always bear in mind the temporary nature of them: "the world passeth away".

Paul would have us to be uninvolved, "without carefulness," awaiting the coming of the Lord.

Marriage Limits Freedom

"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".
— 1 Cor. 7:34.

"Paul does not teach that marriage is essential to a life pleasing to Christ; instead he places it in its proper, subordinate position, and leaves it to the individual to adopt the course best to himself. Peter was married; Paul was not; and both served the Truth well."

The final verses of 1 Corinthians 7, summarise Paul's general answer to the questions posed him by the brethren of Corinth.

Though the marriage state would appear desirable to most, and can be an aid in rendering better service to the Truth, or greater obedience to the commands of Christ, Paul emphasises that it does of necessity, limit one's freedom. He states this clearly as he gives in order advice to unmarried and married brethren, unmarried older sisters, unmarried younger sisters, and finally, married sisters whether old or young (vv. 33-35).

He points out the essential difference between married and unmarried in regard to their service in the Truth. The unmarried are at liberty to give their time as they desire, sacrificing as they will to the service of Christ. But the married have responsibilities towards their spouse and family that they are in duty bound to fulfil. And those responsibilities must not be evaded on the excuse of serving the Truth. To do so is to run foul of other commandments of Christ. For example, to the Ephesians (Ch. 5:21-6:9), Paul stresses

that a person can serve Christ in the way he conducts his personal affairs. Indeed, one of the wonderful features of the Truth, frequently overlooked, is that it elevates the everyday things of life to the status of divine service. God is served and a witness to the Truth provided, by the way the home is managed, or an employer obeyed, even though such have not accepted Christ.

The ideal, as far as home-life is concerned, is the utmost co-operation by each member, with husband and wife occupying their particular spheres of activity and authority, and the children in submission thereto: "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). The wife is called upon to be "in subjection" to her husband; and the husband is required to manifest the same self-sacrificing devotion to her as did Christ towards the Ecclesia (Eph. 5:22,25). When that is the case, marriage is an advantage in the service of the Truth; when it is not the case, it adds to the difficulties of the way.

Paul sets that principle out in his reply to the Corinthian Ecclesia. "I would", he wrote "have you without carefulness" (v. 32). His advice is that brethren should so conduct their lives as to be relieved of anxious care as much as possible. There are anxious cares incidental to marriage that are not encountered by those who are single, and they include marital relations and responsibilities: "how he may please his wife" (v. 33). A brother free of such can devote himself more completely to Christ.

The same applies to a sister in the truth: **"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"** (v. 34).

Paul has already stated that the married woman has not power over her body (v. 4), whereas the unmarried woman is not so restricted. She can be separated unto Christ, both in body and spirit; that is, she can give herself completely in every way to the work of the Truth. The married sister does so, but in a different way. She serves Christ by serving her husband and family, so that it is not a matter of neglect of the Truth, but of a different form and sphere of service. The married brother and sister are limited in their Ecclesial activities by the needs of the family.

Paul Endorses Christ

Paul thus endorses the teaching of Christ who declared that there are those so dedicated to the preaching of the Truth that they “make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake,” and added: “he that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matt. 19:12). In other words, such dedication is a voluntary undertaking made with full acceptance of the Creator’s declaration: “It is not good for a man to dwell alone”. There are very few who can give such single-minded devotion to the Truth as Paul manifested. Most find marriage a help both in that service as in obeying Christ in other spheres. Nevertheless, marriage inevitably limits freedom to give oneself to preaching or similar activities. And Paul clearly makes that point. The unmarried need have only one care: how to please Christ. The married has to take into consideration his spouse when engaging upon any work, recognising that in observing such limitations, he needs to do so with the objective of pleasing Christ.

Certainly Paul does not teach that marriage is essential to a life pleasing to Christ; instead he places it in its proper, subordinate position. Therefore, circumstances must guide a person in such matters. Paul leaves it to the individual to adopt the course best suited to himself. Peter was married; Paul was not; and both served the Truth well. Accordingly, Paul wrote: **“This I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely (i.e. seemly), and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction”** (v. 35).

The Apostle refused to “cast a snare” upon the brethren. He refused to set down legislation that must be obeyed in spite of circumstances, for differing conditions cause different reactions. The matter of marriage is not one of sinning or of avoiding sin, but as to what is of greatest spiritual advantage. Marriage is not a sin, nor is the desire for such, wrong, whereas to avoid its responsibilities when married would be wrong. The main objective in life, whether married or unmarried, is to aim to attend upon the Lord. Paul’s advice was designed to that end.

Paul's Advice to Young Sisters — vv. 36-38

In vv. 36-38, Paul considers the case of a young sister who desires to marry but is restrained by her father from so doing: **"But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely towards 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" (v. 36).**

The RV follows the term "virgin" with the word *daughter* in italics, and this is endorsed by other renditions. The instruction, therefore, does not relate to a man betrothed to a maid but to a father refusing permission for his daughter to marry the man of her choice. Paul's advice is that if a father thinks that by so restraining his daughter, he may contribute to illicit conduct on her part, he should let her marry.

The term "the flower of her age" relates to the most desirable time of marriage, when a young woman is considered at full bloom. In those days this was assessed at about the age of twenty. The expression "need so require" relates to her ardent desire for marriage.

On the other hand, Paul commends a parent that remains constant in his attitude to his daughter, urging her to dedicate her life to the Truth, and not be over-anxious in seeking a partner. This may or may not be the best advice to give, depending upon the individual, the conditions, and the circumstances. They are all summed up in the stated provision as "having no necessity," that is, no particular desire in the daughter to marry.

Therefore Paul strongly advises against the action of parents urging their daughter to seek a husband. However, this, again, is subject to the individual and conditions. So he summarises: **"So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better".**

Much frustration and suffering are avoided when parents and children follow the Apostolic counsel.

General Conclusion

The last two verses summarise the Apostle's teaching, and here he *does* legislate: **"A 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" (v. 39).**

There is no scope in that dogmatic statement of the looseness of marriage that is a feature of modern life; a philosophy that is invading Ecclesias. The requirements of Scripture restores marriage to the sacred union designed in the beginning when it was ordained by Yahweh for the purpose of propagating the race, and providing a Redeemer.

Paul concludes: **"But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment; and I think also that I have the spirit of God".**

The expression, "I think..." is an understatement made for the purpose of emphasis. In all his advice, Paul was influenced by the spirit; he *knew* and directed with the authority vested in him.

Summary

This concludes our treatment of 1 Corinthians 7. We have written because of the growing laxity in marriage relationships throughout the world which is having an impact upon some Ecclesias. We live in an age of permissiveness, and are inclined to accept standards that one time would be refuted. We warn that it is easy to open the floodgates to a tide, but difficult to close them when the river becomes a rushing torrent. And as we live in the epoch of the return of Christ, the time of the setting up of the Judgment Seat, we need to exercise care lest we succumb to the tendencies of the age, or influence others along a course that can end in tragedy. Though we may have already stated some of the following, we again provide a general summary of Paul's teaching on marriage, as epitomised in the chapter before us:

- He states the facts clearly, frankly discussing the issues, and yet with such delicacy as to avoid offence. His teaching is based on that of the Lord (Matt. 5:31-33; 19:4-12; Mark 10:7-12; Luke 16:18), to which he directs his readers (1 Cor. 7:10).

- Under certain conditions, celibacy for Christ's sake is appropriate (1 Cor. 7:1; Matt. 19:12); in other circumstances, it is "better" to marry (1 Cor. 7:9; Matt. 19:11). He insists that the basis of marriage is proper intercourse, and each should respect the desires of the other in that regard (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Nowhere does he advocate a selfish, single life, but one that assumes the responsibilities of a marriage union, either in celibacy as towards Christ as the Bridegroom (1 Cor. 7:32-34), or in sacrificial devotion of husband and wife towards each other, emulating Christ's example in marriage (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:21-25).

- When married love is governed by divine principles, the sensual impulse is controlled and refined, and instead of being the source of untold curses to mankind, it becomes the expression of deep and intimate affection: the fusion of two designed to produce a "new life" (see the similarity of the expression "know" in Gen. 4:1; 1 Sam. 2:12; John 17:3).

- In Corinth, believers were apparently divided between two dangerous extremes which took widely opposing attitudes on matters of sex and marriage. Some advocated the grossest licence, probably on the pretence that liberty in Christ provided grounds for repudiating any restrictions of Law (Jude 4). Others apparently

violently reacted to this, and maintained that every form of marriage should be avoided, advocating an extreme form of ascetism. Paul restored sanity to these extremes by teaching:

1. Spiritual union with Christ is the highest ideal of matrimony (Eph. 5:30-32).
2. Under some (indeed most) conditions it is better to marry (1 Cor. 7:9).
3. In marriage the union of complete intercourse should be maintained subject to the requirements of service to the Truth (vv. 3-5).
4. Self-control should be exercised by all (vv. 7-8).
5. Marriage is for life (vv. 10,39).
6. Remarriage in the case of a separation or divorce by wife (Mark 10:12), or husband (Mark 10:11) is not permitted (1 Cor. 7:11).
7. A widow or widower is permitted to remarry subject to the restrictions of 1 Cor. 7:39.
8. Marriage with an unbeliever should not be disturbed (vv. 12-13).
9. If the unbelieving partner is violently opposed to the Truth, and separates, do not prevent him doing so (v. 15).
10. A correct deportment on the part of the believer-partner in a divided marriage will save most marriages, and weld the couple into a more satisfying union (1 Pet. 3:1-8).

Exhortation

Christ is at the door; the time is short; let our eyes be firmly fixed on that great future, and we will derive the strength to overcome any problem of the present, and enjoy the greater association of the Divine immortal marriage of the Age to come.

Meditations On The Theme of Marriage

The following Observations and Meditations have been culled from various sources and sometimes amended to conform to the theme and requirements of this book. As we have done this, and are not quite sure of the authorship of all the articles included, we have taken the liberty of making them anonymous. The first article shows that the marriage bond and the Gospel bond are similar. A person embracing Christ, does so in a spiritual union that anticipates the final marriage: "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). The loyalty and love that should be shown to Christ should be reflected in marriage relationships. Human relationships illustrate the Divine relationships into which men and women are invited to enter with God Himself, seeking a marriage union with His Son. The importance of marriage between a man and his wife, is illustrated by the importance of the union entered into with Christ through the Gospel.

Do Not Neglect Home

Zeal for the enlightenment of the alien must not overbalance our zeal for the edification of the ecclesia. Before we think of carrying the Gospel into the "regions beyond", let us be sure that we are doing our duty in regard to home, and home, be it remembered, applies not only to our meeting-places but to our own households. "Let the children first be fed," said Christ. What is more painful than to hear brethren and sisters complain that their leaders are always away? What is more grievous than to be told that certain brethren are flying hither and thither to preach the Word of Salvation, whilst their own little ones are neglected, or worse still, are delivered over to strangers to be fed with the poison of the apostasy? The two cases differ somewhat, but neither is right. Some of us, who are leaders and engage in preaching, would do well to give thought to this matter. We are too apt to over-estimate public work, and under-estimate private effort. But a little honest reflection (with vanity and self-esteem out of the room) will soon cure us of our mistake. Supposing we are not needed to lecture or exhort on particular occasions, is not our presence in our meetings an influence for good? It ought to be. And will not a passing word, fitly spoken to this one and that one, be a source of encouragement and strength? Yea, may it not be that such a quiet, private word may be of greater worth than our public orations? Besides, where is the brother who needs not to sit and listen, whilst others exhort? He who neglects to do this, especially if he thinks himself above it, however brilliant he may be, is the one who most needs instruction from others.

Irritating Partners

A man is not manly unless he can put up with trifles — unless he can show himself wise, and kind, and patient under little irritations. If a question arise with the wife over unimportant matters it is manly to give way. If our wives wish to wander through the fields and pick poppies and cornflowers, in preference to walking along the sea-shore searching for shells and pebbles, let us yield to their wishes. What does it matter, even if it is not quite to our taste? Surely it is wiser to sacrifice a little for the sake of peace than contend and contend. Some of us are so selfish, or so unreasonably obstinate, that we upset ourselves, our homes, our ecclesias, and all over nothing. “Ah! but I fight for principle. I’m the master”. Are you sure, my brother, that you fight for principle? May it not be for self, because to give way would mean interference with your enjoyment, or, worse still, cause you to give pleasure where you would rather give pain? Men who fight for principle (if the fight is to count in the divine reckoning) are, as the Scriptures enjoin them to be, large-hearted and large-minded. They do not grow angry over trifles. They are not quarrelsome. They are willing to overlook much. They also lay themselves out to please. Brethren, when the feeling of selfishness and obstinacy takes possession of us, let us see to it that we do not give way to it, but conquer it. And perhaps there is nothing more helpful in this direction than recalling our duty as set forth in the following precepts: “Live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11); “Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:13); “Follow after the things which make for peace” (Rom. 14:19). There is no selfishness and no wicked doggedness where these precepts are allowed to rule.

Respecting Experience

Let us not treat the aged with disrespect. To do so is reprehensible in the eyes of both God and man. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head," said Moses, "and honour the face of the old man" (Lev. 19:32). Israel's law-giver expressed the mind of God. Let us heed the teaching and show that we do so by our example. As a further step in this direction let us carefully train our young. Let us not only tell our children of the wishes of God, let us also explain to them the seemliness and reasonableness of them. Let us point out that old age is no crime, that we grow old because God has so decreed it, and that to speak contemptuously of the aged is to insult Him and mock His work. Irreverence towards the aged is, unfortunately, on the increase. Even pagan Rome made it a crime for juveniles not to rise up in the presence of the aged. Not a few professing christians in our day would rather make it criminal to encourage this. We can do something by way of checking the evil in the circle of the brotherhood, if not in the world. We can do so by refraining from unseemly behaviour towards those advanced in years — from poking fun and cracking jokes at their expense. We can also administer timely reproof where these failings are unworthily exhibited by those in whose company we happen to be. By way of emphasizing those thoughts the following might be quoted from a recent copy of *The Schoolmaster*: "We are lounging away our reverence, our courtesy" — "A hoary head is a dunce's cap today" — "The tired hands are the has-beens" — "Old books were written by old fools" — Oh! let us fight against this surrender — this wickedness. Remember and apply the words: "The beauty of old men is the grey head (Prov. 20:29); "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. 16:31).

The Position of Wives

“Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them”. Men who are unkind, churlish, and neglectful in their behaviour towards their wives will doubtless one day rue it. Predisposition in either of these directions should be manfully attacked and overcome. After Christ, a man’s wife should come first in his affections and considerations. The commandments are very definite upon the matter. The wife should not be treated as a useful chattel, but as a precious gift from God (Prov. 18:22). The wife is to be loved (even as a man would love himself), cherished, nourished, and held in honour (Eph. 5:28,29; Col. 3:19; 1 Pet. 3:7). A husband’s duties do not begin and end in providing temporal necessities. He has to bear in mind that his wife is a joint heir with himself of salvation. He has to dwell with her “according to knowledge”. He has to be circumspect: to study the manifold bearings that his conduct has on her race for eternal life. He has to look to her spiritual requirements; to help her to get to the meetings, and secure time for reading. He should also endeavour to arrange for profitable companionship for her. “The husband is the head of the wife,” and should therefore form a worthy example to her. Further, the fear of displeasing her should not influence him to forgo the obligations and calls of the Truth. Neither should that motive cause him to refrain from giving faithful counsel or timely reproof. The injunction to “live joyfully” precludes the exhibition of a domineering, austere attitude (Eccles. 9:9). Oh! what scope there is in the marital relationships for glorifying God by good works.

Parental Obligations

As fathers and mothers, do we realize our duty? Our children are, in a sense, a loan from God, and one for which we shall have to render account. Few obligations are of greater moment than the rearing and training of our offspring. God asks us to co-operate with Him in developing a "Godly seed" — a seed that He can immortalize, and in which He can take delight, now and hereafter. How to accomplish the task He tells us. In our dealings with our children, it is not a question of what the law allows, or custom approves, or our whims dictate, but what God requires. The world's magazines contain much on this subject, but for us to consult these, and neglect the Scriptures, is to commit a gigantic folly. We are to care for the physical needs of our children, and exert ourselves to this end. We are to realize that we have a personal responsibility in the matter — "farming out" does not come within the divine prescription. This phase of our duty checks selfishness, develops a variety of virtues, and is the initial step towards creating in our children that affection, respect, and confidence which are so precious and essential later on. When the age arrives for imparting knowledge, Bible revelation is to occupy a leading place. As parents, we are to regard ourselves as God's instructors to the little ones. He leaves us to expound and simplify, and to guide the young minds in all the vital aspects of the Truth, including those relating to the meaning of reconciliation and salvation. Let us show ourselves faithful in all this, and avoid the untrue and misleading sentimentality of the churches.

Whom To Marry

Are you, in searching for a partner for life, looking for one whom God would approve — one who would serve a nobler part than the mere providing of a comfortable home, or animal pleasures? Then turn your eyes in the way of those only who love the Bible, and who show their love for it by a regular and faithful reading of its pages. This is the counsel of the Oracles of God. What if this counsel is mocked by outsiders, and emphasized by far too few of those who name the name of Christ? Wisdom is wisdom, and is indestructible, and happy are they who heed her voice. Marriage with the alien is a sin, and marriage with those who are unfaithful to Bible teaching is akin to it. Satisfactory partners — wise and good people (judging wisdom and goodness by the divine standard) — are not to be found away from Bible influence, and this influence exists only where a constant and attentive place is given to Scripture study. In the matter of marriage, never be in a hurry. Avoid being led into an unwise arrangement by self-deception. A man or woman is not in the Truth (whatever his or her claims may be) who does not believe and obey it — who has no fondness for it, and fondness shows itself by a desire to read and talk about it. We are wise if we aim at securing partners more spiritually minded than ourselves, not less so. Marriage is a very serious matter — it means either help or hindrance in the fight for eternal life. God is concerned in the marriage of His children, for He is concerned in their salvation. Hear, therefore, His voice in the act of choosing. He has spoken plainly. Hesitate not to search and ponder His mind, and your marriage will be no failure.

A Wife's Just Claims

According to the Scriptures a wife has to come first (after God) in a man's affections. Her needs, physical and spiritual, claim the primary place in all its arrangements. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the ecclesia" (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). How did Christ love the ecclesia? His love was shown in his tender regard, his eagerness to comfort and enlighten, in his ever-readiness to make sacrifices for the advancement of its well-being. These are the qualities that should be exhibited by husbands in their treatment of their wives. It is not weak for a man thus to love his wife. Where a husband is faithful to God's will, the wife is not treated as a servant. She is not unnecessarily stinted in money or food. Her authority is not lowered in the presence of her children, nor her position in the eyes of strangers. A husband can be very wicked and very cruel in these matters, and yet pass as good in the eyes of onlookers! Man has no right to rob his wife of free will. He must show judgment in ruling, but his ruling must not trespass on territory which both Scripture and reason delegate to the wife. When God deputed the ruling of the house to man, it was for other reasons than his superior ability in the eating of a dinner, or in lifting a load, or in making a noise. Again, a properly-minded husband will not be found here and there on pleasure, whilst the wife is solitary and miserable at home. He will not be careful concerning his own salvation and indifferent concerning hers. God's mind respecting a husband's obligations is interestingly shown in Deut. 24:5; Lev. 18:18; Prov. 5:18,19; Eccles. 9:9; Mal. 2:14.

The Bride of Christ

Many beautiful figures are employed in the Scripture to describe the close and affectionate relationship between Christ and his people, but there is none more beautiful than that of marriage. What is marriage? For an answer we must turn, not to the many unhappy alliances which obtain on all hands, but to God's ideal of the institution. God made "male and female" that they twain should be "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4,5). Where this oneness — this divinely intended unity — exists, men nourish and cherish their wives, they love them as their own bodies (Eph. 5:28,29). Thus it is, says Paul, with Christ and the Ecclesia. He allowed himself to be cruelly slaughtered for her sake — he now yearns for her well-being, as the Scriptures teach. As we think upon the revealed mystery we feel that we miserably fail in our appreciation of Christ's love, of his deep-down fondness for us — and of the joy which little acts done in his name and for his sake must yield to him. But he doubtless bears with us. He knows well the deadening influences of sin which press so heavily upon all of us. Our deficiencies are not to last for ever. How often should we blush at our callous and unfeeling behaviour, if we did not think, as we should, on this matter! O Lord, "Increase our faith", and forgive our shortcomings. Exaltation to spirit nature will right matters. The Kingdom of God will see a perfect (multitudinous) woman as we now behold in Christ a perfect man. Then will come the time for a complete antitype of human marriage, only in the antitype the excellences will exceed the type as the light of the sun exceeds that of the moon.

Marriage: Summary And Its Spiritual Significance

"The Lord God said, It is not good for man to live alone; I will make an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

Ordained Of God

The implication of the words above is clear and unmistakeable. They prove beyond all doubt that marriage, the legal, physical union of male and female, is not a mere human invention, but is ordained by God, and that, behind every true marriage stands God.

In answering the hypercritical Pharisees' question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus took them back to the very beginning of creation — and rivetted their attention on the divine purpose from the beginning of the world: **"Have you not read that He which made them in the beginning, made them male and female, and for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be *one flesh*. Therefore what God hath joined together let no man put asunder"**.

These words emphasise the sanctity of the marriage union, and elevating it above other human relationships, establishes it as insoluble throughout life, dissolvable only in the advent of death, or the Lord's coming (Luke 20:35-36). Marriage is of God, and the laws given in relation to the marriage state by Him are designed to impart the maximum measure of happiness, joy and benefits to the human race.

Yet, when we look about us, when we examine the shocking marital state of the world, we find that men and women are not experiencing, in the marriage union, all the joy and happiness they should. Why is this? What has gone wrong with the marriage institution?

Man's Solution To Joyless Marriage

For many millions, marriage has yielded, not joy, but sorrow, misery and despair. Just how far marriage has fallen short of the divine ideal, is revealed by U.S. statistics, which show that in

that country divorce has torn asunder *one marriage in every three*. That means 33⅓% of all marriages contracted throughout the U.S. is doomed to end in failure.

Looking inside the home, investigators were appalled to find that the tiffs and spats between husband and wife, have given way to something far more sinister; even fist fights, knifings and shootings. They are dismayed to learn that millions of husbands and wives were living together — *but as total strangers* — deliberately uncommunicating; deliberately incompatible. Even worse was to come, in the shape of desertions, oftentimes by husbands, bringing untold misery and hardship on the wronged partner, and suffering and grief on the children; and this is becoming increasingly commonplace. The latest trend in man's efforts to break down and completely destroy the marriage institution is revealed in certain letters to editors of daily newspapers.

One writer advocates the creation of convenient loopholes in the law, to make divorce even easier than it is. Included in his letter are the words: **“Total community respect for marriage as an institution can never arise until marital exit (divorce) is made respectable”**.

This man wants sin clothed with a garment of respectability. Another, in requesting licence for trial marriages, wrote: “My contention is that there should be two possible alliances, both legal and equally blessed by the church and state, upon which a young couple in love may embark. Young people who are fairly certain that they will eventually stay together and raise a family should be legally entitled to take a licence, and, free from guilt or shame, or embarrassment, or even the need for bravado, live together in dignity and assurance”.

This writer actually suggests that the iniquitous, *defacto* union between two young people, should not only be permitted, but should also be regarded as respectable, and should receive the blessing of church and state, and be absolutely free of all taint of human shame and public censure. What he really wants, is for God to forsake His high and lofty standard of holiness, and approve and condone outright, blatant sin. If the trial marriage should fail, then we suppose, the partners would choose another soul-mate and begin the experiment all over — and again — and again.

Finally, one shocked observer was moved to remark: **“That the morals of this present generation, have changed so noticeably that continence, chastity, faithfulness to the marriage partner — are viewed today — as the ossified survivals of a prehistoric age”.**

Is Marriage Outmoded?

What he is saying, is that happy, contented marriages, based on fidelity, love and mutual respect, are merely fossil relics of the past, and about as rare.

The fact is, that the marriage institution is under constant attack; extreme pressure is continually brought to bear on it, mainly by commercialised sex, sewer novels, perverted advertising and entertainment media, which presents erotic acts as the norm. All this wears away at the marriage institution. The question is: “Can marriage survive all this? Can the marriage union be made to yield the abundant joy, happiness and satisfaction that God intended that it should?”

The answer is Yes! However, it requires that both partners go back to the Bible, to learn of and obey the divine infallible rules for happy marriage contained therein. If men and women would accept God’s wise counsel and advice, there would be no problems at all.

Before we examine the true meaning and spiritual significance of marriage, let us briefly consider two or three myths and misconceptions related to the marriage state. The first is propagated by the church of Rome, which teaches that abstention from marriage can be interpreted as a sign of faithfulness to Christ, so that celibacy should be the aim and practice of *all* Christ’s priests.

Fortunately, the Bible is quite outspoken on this particular point. Referring to points of faith the good doctrine Timothy should continue to preach, Paul writes in 1 Tim. 4:1-3: **“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry....”**

Paul shows quite clearly, that the doctrine that forbids the union of two people in marriage, is after all, not from God but

emanates from a church which possesses a lying spirit; therefore, it is a church utterly incapable of discerning and preaching truth. Proof of this, is seen in its teaching concerning the doctrines of devils — i.e. the supposed departed souls of human beings, which is quite foreign to the truth that is in Christ Jesus. Further, whose spiritual and moral conscience is seared, and made impotent and ineffectual by the hot iron of rank hypocrisy.

The Bible Advocates Marriage

As we have seen, the Bible clearly states that abstention from marriage is not after all a sign of adherence to the truth of Jesus Christ, but can indicate a *departure from the faith*.

How can Rome possibly forbid the institution of marriage to her priests, when we consider that the apostle Peter, the supposed first pope and rock upon which the church is said to be built, was himself a married man (Mark 1:29-30)?

Was the apostle Paul a widower? Had he ever been married? We do not know. But in his letter to the Corinthians, he made it quite clear that he, at least, upheld the principle of marriage (1 Cor. 9:1-5).

Paul's critics were saying that he was not an apostle. Their ground of accusation was *firstly*, unlike the other apostles, he refused to accept ecclesial aid or maintenance; *secondly*, he was refraining from marriage. This obviously proved that he knew, in his heart, that he had no legitimate claims to apostleship. Paul's denials are set out in the opening verses of chapter 9, and present unquestionable proof of the veracity of his claim. He was under no man's authority — he had seen Christ, and further, they themselves were living testimonials to his apostleship. In vv. 3-4 he states that he has liberty indeed to receive ecclesial aid in return for his spiritual ministrations on their behalf. The law stated that "the ox that treadeth out the corn should not be muzzled", and not only this, in v. 5 he reminds them that, if Peter and the other apostles had the right to be accompanied by their wives on their missionary journeys, he as an apostle, had as much right as they. He could marry if he chose, and, in that case, there was nothing to prevent his wife accompanying him as he went about preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. What prevented him doing this? It wasn't for

the reason they supposed. It was not because marriage for him was forbidden or unlawful. He had already given them the reason in 1 Cor. 7:32-33.

Paul had pointed out that the time is short; he had emphasised the brevity and uncertainty of life. If brethren, then, still sought marriage, they could find the responsibilities that accompanied the married state a barrier, hindering them from offering a full and dedicated service. On the other hand, a single, celibate man, such as himself, was free to attend to the things of God, without distraction. But to remain unmarried; to deliberately choose a life of celibacy for the kingdom of God's sake, Paul knew, was not for all men. Few could do this; nevertheless, it was after all, a sacrifice Jesus greatly admired (Matt. 19). In the early verses, Jesus had taught his disciples, contrary to the tradition of the Pharisees, that the marriage vow was binding and irrevocable, so divorce was definitely out of the question. Appalled, they remarked: "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (v. 10).

But they were wrong — for on the contrary, God said, "it is not good for man to be alone". The man complements the woman, and the woman, the man — together they are complete.

Yet, it is good (in some cases) for a man not to marry. The anomaly is explained by the Lord in vv. 11-12. Jesus is saying that some men are born in a physical state which demands celibacy, and some were made this way, by men. The Essenes, however, practised celibacy, simply because they regarded the marriage state as unholy. Others because they could not face up to the responsibility that accompanied the marriage state. But others made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of God's sake, i.e. they deliberately chose a life of celibacy — foregoing all the joys and pleasures that marriage brings that they might be free to render to God a fuller, more dedicated service. In this category was Jesus himself, as well as the apostle Paul. Now *this* is the celibacy that Jesus admires, that wins his unqualified approval.

It is *for his sake* — for the Kingdom of God's sake.

Essentials To Sound Marriage

Previously, we mentioned that God has intended that every marriage should be a happy and contented union between male and female, and that He has left on record, divine rules to ensure this desirable end. These are outlined in Eph. 5:22-25. The rules for a happy and contented and satisfying marriage, are simple:

1. Wives submit to husbands in meekness, as unto the Lord.
2. Husbands to love their wives as themselves, and as Christ loved the Ecclesia.

When this is done, a state of unity, of oneness, resulting in joy and happiness will develop. Submission, love, unity, happiness, is the divine order and formula for happy marriage. We notice, however, that marriage, spiritually, as well as physically, will be successful, only when the contracting parties are bound together, not only by law, but by love. A love that is long-suffering, kind; a love that is slow to anger; merciful; gentle; that thinks no evil; that is quick to forgive all trespass and sin (1 Cor. 13).

A Physical and Spiritual Union

Marriage — spiritually — physically — is not just a legal binding together — but a *union* which works by love. Paul now lifts our minds to a very high plane indeed. He makes the astounding statement that the marriage relationship between husband and wife is symbolic of the glorious mystical union between Christ and the ecclesia (vv. 30-33).

In expounding the relationship between natural and spiritual marriage, Paul quoted from the Genesis record, 2:20-24. Consider this and follow his reasoning. To provide a bride adequate in all respects for his need, God put Adam into a deep sleep, then while he slept, pierced his side and from his own body, his own bone and flesh, He made an helpmeet for him. It is very easy to see, in these events, a foreshadowing of greater and more glorious things to come. Even the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ; the piercing of his side, that in the sleep of death, the shedding of his blood on Calvary, brought into existence through faith and obedience, through baptism into him, his own glorious, multitudinous bride.

Through faith and obedience, these become *one flesh* with

Christ; one united body, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, sharing one hope, one common salvation. A unity which is eternal (John 17:11,21,23; Gal. 3:27-28).

A Witness To The Truth

From this we see, that the ordinance of marriage, the union between Adam and Eve in the very beginning of the world undoubtedly foreshadowed *God's ultimate purpose with creation* — even the *final unity*, and *oneness of all flesh*, with God — through Jesus Christ our Lord. The institution of marriage, therefore, with all its love, faithfulness, integrity, sacrifice, forgiveness, is given by God, to man, that he might keep constantly before him *the glorious hope*; the divine purpose with creation that all men will become *one flesh* with God. They will partake of the divine nature — which is their *eternal salvation*.

The sanctity of marriage is elevated when we remember that the husband is a figure of Christ, the wife, and his ecclesia. Their relationship, the practise of submission and love, the constant striving for unity, serve as necessary training and instruction in higher things; therefore, every act of infidelity, unfaithfulness, every argument, show of anger, all railing, complaining and bitterness; every desertion, every divorce, darkens and destroys the glorious hope that marriage is designed to keep before all mankind. We do well to remember that marriage is God's constant witness on earth — to His eternal purpose.

The Genesis record teaches us that God created woman for the man — this was by design, and was effective in removing her independence — henceforth, she was dependent on the man for guidance and counsel.

With this in mind, we ask the question:

“Would it be legal and right for women to seek equality with men? Is there any scriptural basis for so doing?” The answer is “No, certainly not!”

Disruption of Marriage

Every time a woman assumes authority over the man; every time she seeks her independence; she is striking hard at the divine ideal of marriage. By this act she is undermining and making vague and indiscernable the glorious witness and

purpose of the marriage institution. For instance, what would happen if the ecclesia assumed equality with Christ? Or sought to be independent of him? It is obvious that Sarah, the wife of Abraham, understood perfectly the true significance of these things — she revealed this when “*she called Abraham Lord*” (1 Pet. 3:6).

Yet, today, we find the spotlight focussed on the bride. In the past, it was on the groom, and rightly so — and the spiritual lesson remained intact. The world, however has no respect for spiritual truths, it is forever reversing the divine order of things. Only recently we noticed that the papers are full of the *Women's Liberation Movement* — an organisation aimed at establishing women's independence from man; that she should no longer be in submission to him, that she is his equal. This movement is energetically seeking to destroy the divine pattern of marriage and obliterate its meaning. This is no new thing; Rome, the so-called mother church, has done just that. For instance she claims to be equal to or better than Christ; she claims her independence from him; she is no longer in submission to him. But, in the book of Revelation, she is referred to by Christ, as the great harlot, the unfaithful, adulterous whore, whose end is to be utterly and finally destroyed at his coming and his Kingdom. As the ecclesia is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands, in everything.

The Figure of Marriage

Now the figure of marriage was used by the prophets of old to portray the unique relationship existing between Israel and God (Isa. 54:5-6). The basis of this unique relationship was love and loyalty. Every marriage in Israel should have served to remind the people of their divine obligations. Mixed marriages contracted outside the nation were therefore strictly forbidden. Israel was reminded of this by Moses as recorded in Deut. 7:1-5.

Moses knew this unequal yoking with unbelievers, this attempted communion of light with darkness, would result in a divided loyalty, in unfaithfulness in Israel. The idol-worshipping worldly partner of an illicit union contracted by an Israelite, would surely turn his heart from God. What God hath joined together, surely means equally joined together. Equally

means believer with believer. One of the great principles of marriage is unity, that the two should be *one flesh* is the divine wish.

How can there possibly be unity — oneness — in a marriage contracted between believer and unbeliever. There will be the inevitable clashes, fights, arguments, disparity of aims and ideals, divided interests, lack of harmony, and tension, as the unbeliever strives to lead the believing partner his or her way, which, of course, will be away from God and from the Lord who bought them. *Only in the Lord* is the only sure way to unity and peace in marriage. Any other way is sheer unadulterated madness and folly.

And what about the children of mixed marriages? What effect has an unequal yoking on them? Look what Nehemiah says about this in Neh. 13:23-28. Nehemiah was shocked to find that mixed marriages — Israelite with idolator — were so prevalent in Israel. Both priest and people were equally guilty of this great sin, the children, who should have been a holy seed, the Lord's heritage, could not even speak the language of Israel. Is there any difference in our own day? Can we expect the children of alien, mixed marriages to speak the language of their believing father or mother? To speak the language of Israel, i.e. to worship God in spirit and in truth, to converse intelligently on the glorious purpose of redemption, to speak of the wonders of Christ's coming kingdom? Or will the children halt between two opinions? *Only in the Lord* will provide the Holy Seed, the heritage of Yahweh.

Broken Marriage

Finally, the question of divorce. Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every or any cause? What does God think about the question? Does He permit divorce? Does He approve of separation? Has He made provision for divorce in His Holy Laws?

Let Malachi answer the question (Mal. 2:11). As all wives of Israel were considered to be Yahweh's daughters — so the women who worshipped idols, were considered to be the daughters of those idols. Marriage of an Israelite to an alien woman was, in effect, marriage to the idol she worshipped. It was to become *one body* with the abomination (v. 12). The

man who taught that divorce and remarriage was lawful, and the scholars who believed him, were both to be severely punished for that sin. Their guilt was inexcusable, for it was plainly indicated in the scripture, that in the beginning, it was not so (vv. 13-14). To enable them to marry the daughters of a strange god, the Jews first put away their legitimate wives, the wives of their youth, who had given them the best years of their life and their beauty; who had shared their joys and their sorrows, who endured the struggles of life together. And now the solemn binding vows of their marriage, to which Yahweh Himself had been witness, for He was present on their wedding day, were all cruelly, callously broken and ignored. The afflicted and forsaken women, and their children, flooded the altar with their tears of pain and grief and distress, springing from very bitterness of soul, as they cried in anguish to Yahweh. These were *their companions, their friends*, who enjoyed their trust and confidence — now they were cruelly cast off.

God hates putting away (vv. 15-16). God hates divorce. In the beginning it was not permitted; neither should it be so now. Marriage was ordained for the purpose of providing a holy seed — children who would glorify God and praise His Name continually; who would speak of His wondrous love and infinite mercy and compassion among men. Therefore God hates putting away.

Who among the espoused ecclesial bride will be ready to meet the bridegroom when he cometh? Those who are adequately prepared — who have donned the garment pure and white, which is the right sayings and right doings of the saints.

In the parable of the ten virgins, the master points out that the cry "the bridegroom cometh" will find some sleeping; some who have neglected to remain vigilant — watching — preparing for his coming. The Lord intimated that he will come *unexpectedly*, at a time when we *think not*. The work of preparation is spread from day to day over a life time.

The foolish virgins of the parable, on hearing of the bridegroom's return, awoke suddenly to their responsibilities, and went forth eager now and willing to do his will. But it was too late; a life-time of preparation cannot be compressed into a few moments. "*Watch, therefore*, for you know neither the day nor the hour".

Summing up — we find the rules for success and happiness in the marriage union, are:

1. Marry only in the Lord. Believer with believer (1 Cor. 7:39).

2. Know that it is a legal binding that worketh by love (1 Cor. 13). Submission of the bride — love of the husband — unity in all things — joy everlasting.

3. The marriage union typifies the relationship that exists between Christ and the ecclesia (Eph. 5:22-23). The husband represents Christ — the wife, the ecclesia.

4. Marriage is God's witness on earth to His eternal purpose of redemption — that ultimately, "All flesh" will be *one with God* — partakers of the Divine nature through Jesus Christ, our Lord (John 17:9-11,21,23).

— Amended.