

Matthew - Commentaries by Arthur Copeland Brown

The Marriage Union: Can It Be Broken?, Marriage Union: Can It Be Broken?, The

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Marriage is not only the basic relationship of human civilization, but-especially to the Christian-should be respected in accordance with God's thoughts.

"Let marriage be held every way in honor and the bed be undefiled." (Heb. 13:4 JND Trans.)

"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor." (1 Thess. 4:4.)

Together with many another, we deplore the fleshly mind indulging in defiling thoughts about the misuse of that which God would have held in sanctity. We further abhor the generally prevailing and growing looseness of divorcing and remarrying which is revolting to all holy sense of decency.

This disturbing subject confronts believers with more and more frequency in our day of increasing spiritual weakness and the enemy has successfully used uninstructed ones to mislead unestablished souls into error. Beloved brethren are frequently ensnared by this false teaching and sometimes found denying the "exception" pronounced by the Lord in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. In this they disagree with the ablest teachers and embrace a view contrary to assembly decisions which have been uniformly accepted for well over a century.

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ plainly teach that in the case referred to in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 the innocent party is not forbidden to remarry. Rome's "no- divorce" standard is therefore not God's conclusion and those who adopt such teaching (whether of Rome or not) find themselves in opposition to very plain expressions from God's Word. In fact, the persistent evasion of the "exception"-if followed to its conclusion-would charge those assemblies of Christians who are gathered to the precious name of Him who is holy and true, with fellowship with adulterers-a serious inference indeed!

The false claim that marriage is indissoluble and that it is sin for the innocent party to remarry, licenses transgression by saying, "Nothing can break the tie"!

The consciences of all who are exercised about this subject and who seek the light of all of God's Word concerning it, are sincerely respected. But the persistent evasion of some to the plain statements of Scripture-although perhaps accompanied with sincerity, zeal and holy motives -tends not to fellowship and oneness of spirit, but to disruption and "division.... contrary to the doctrine which (we) have learned." (Rom. 16:17.) Some are thereby carried away with moralizings and half-truths until the will has become inflexible, beyond recovery, carrying other ill-instructed souls with them.

Without controversy, one who has been freed from the marriage bond should carefully seek divine wisdom and guidance before remarrying. The Word of God is: "Only in the Lord;" "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient;" "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak." (See 1 Cor. 6:12-7:39-8:9 etc.)

It is recognized that these comments pertain to the believer who is found in a case such as referred to above. Scripture recognizes a difference with those who lived in sinful wedlock prior to conversion. "Such were some of you, but ye are washed." (1 Cor. 6:9-11.)

There is no doubt as to God's original design for a single pair to be coupled for life; also that He had in view and purpose the inseparableness of "Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:27,32; Rom. 8:35,38,39). It is also true that the epistles do not mention divorce. "Bound as long as her husband liveth" (Rom. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:39) is normal Christian behavior.

Some, seeing only this side of the truth as to the bond "what therefore God hath joined together, " conclude that it cannot be sundered. But what saith the rest of the verse? "Let not man put asunder." Surely if it is impossible to be done, there would be no object in forbidding it. It does show possibility and also responsibility. Therefore man's evasion of responsibility must be unequivocally faced and exposed. Since sin has come in man fails in his responsibility. He disregards God's holy purpose in order to indulge his ungodly lusts. To ignore this enormous sin is not holiness, as it furthers unholy practice. Scriptures abound on this very important subject, emphasizing prohibition and self-control, with many warnings against abuses; besides giving case after case of shameful failure. See polygamy in Gen. 4:19 and even tolerated in the Old Testament times until it reached its height in King Solomon.

What a relief from all this is found in the chastity inculcated by holy writ. "That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor"; "Holy women"; "Virtuous woman"; "a woman of worth." (Ruth 3:11; Prov. 12:4;31:10 JND Transl.) "a woman that feareth the Lord"; such honor the Lord. Joseph, in Gen. 39:7-12 is an example of chastity. Devotedness of heart for Christ alone can keep us. 1 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:4,5 and 1 Peter 3:2-5 tell us of "what becometh women professing godliness" which is modesty and discretion. This will preserve from many a snare; it will honor the Lord and set an example for others.

"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. "

Matthew's gospel is primarily Messianic and Jewish. In chapter 19 the Lord answers the tempting Pharisees in keeping with the principles of the kingdom which he taught in chapter 5:32. "The principles of His kingdom are true for Jew, Gentile, or the Church of God. " (A. Fleck, 1930.) Here the Lord honors God's creation of man and woman (vv 4-6), states the cause for Moses' provision of divorce—hardness of heart (v. 8), sets aside Moses—"But I say unto you" and disallows all their customary looseness, including putting away and remarrying at will, or for any cause save illicit intercourse (v. 9).

Some have been so misled as to call Matthew 19:9 "a loophole for the flesh!" They evade and circumvent the "exception" so clearly stated in this verse, which signifies nothing less than that man wickedly "puts asunder" what "God hath joined together." "He which is joined to an harlot is one body, for two, sayeth He, shall be one flesh." (1 Cor. 6:16.) This does violence to the former bond.

If we leave out the word "except" we have exactly what the anti remarriage devotees teach, but this would be to void what the Lord Himself so plainly stated.

Cavilers have sought to confine this term to pre-nuptial sin in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 and then claim that "some unseemly thing" in Deut. 24:1 (JND Trans.) is the same thing. This last reference uses the same word as that in the previous chapter, verse 14, which shows that it is a general term for uncleanness. Now-a-days "fornication" is commonly regarded as prenuptial sin and "adultery" as unlawful intercourse between those who are married. Webster says "Fornication is sometimes, especially in the Bible, used to include all sexual intercourse except between husband and wife." That this is so will be seen by carefully weighing the following passages. The term in Ezek. 16:26 shows that it was really adultery because of verse 20. In 1 Tim. 1:10 which should read, "fornicators," 1 Cor. 5:1;6:18; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3 and Acts 15:20,29, it is evident that the term must include "adultery." The same would be true in Gal. 5:19 where the term "adultery" is not approved by all the Greek editors. Both terms are used in Rev. 2:21,22 of Jezebel and her victims. Who could think that the 23,000 who fell in one day because of "fornication" were all single persons? (1 Cor. 10:8.)

Could it be God's mind to permit divorce for the sin committed before marriage but not permit divorce for committing sin after marriage?

Mr. Darby, Kelly, Grant, Alford and many of the ablest teachers speak of fornication as that which severs the marriage bond, which could not be before the bond existed. Alford says "Fornication must be taken to mean sin, not only before marriage but after it also, as including adultery. "

"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives." It was a mercy for the wife. "If thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go." (Deut. 21:14). "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes,

because he hath found some unseemly thing (JND & RV) in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement...and when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. " (Deut. 24:1,2.) Previous sinning is not mentioned or inferred as it is in 22:13, 14, 20, 21; such was to be "stoned." Unbetrothed guilty ones had to marry and never divorce. (22:29). "The man only that lay with her shall die: but unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing, there is in the damsel no sin." (Deut. 22:25,26.) This shows how God makes a difference between the guilty and the innocent.

Therefore the supposed guilt of pre-nuptial sin in Deut. 24:1 could not be, and this is further proved by the fact that she could marry again in verse 2.

The correct translation reads: "she shall be called an adulterous if she be to another man. " It has nothing to do with divorce and remarriage.

If either one willfully put away the other and then remarried another they committed adultery. The innocent party is not here considered, nor could it annul Matt. 19:9. "In the house" (Mark 10:10) was where he explained how man "puts asunder. "

Since here the "exception" is not given we are only safe in interpreting it in keeping with all other scriptures that pertain to this truth. The first part refers to willfully putting away without scriptural cause. The last must refer to marrying a guilty one who has been put away, as Scripture never penalizes the innocent party to perpetual celibacy.

This chapter does show that the normal endurance of the wedding bond continues until death breaks it. Here fornication or divorce is not the subject. It takes up separation of believers (vv 10, 11) and desertion by unbelievers (vv 12-16). A pagan might not tolerate his wife's Christianity and willfully abandon her. It amounts to about the same sin as willfully thrusting away as found in Mark 10:11,12. In such cases it is difficult to draw the line between the possibility of repentance and the certainty of none; so it is said: "For what knowest thou O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" Strong affection and earnest prayer might result in his salvation and complete repentance of his willfully despising the marriage bond. (Some countries have made provision for deserted ones to obtain legal freedom from the bond.) Such a one might marry again since the deserter had previously forfeited his claims.

"According to 1 Cor. 7:15, I cannot doubt that the Christian, deliberately deserted by the unchristian partner, was in every way free, free that is, to marry; but it assumes deliberate forsaking by the one who went away. The Christian was never to do it, and if obliged to leave, to remain unmarried." Letters J. N. D. 1871 Vol. 2, p. 154.

"I do not think a deserted woman would be held to perpetual celibacy where the law recognized her as free. " Letters J.N.D. 1872.

Remarriage is Scriptural whenever divorce is. The innocent person may remarry, yet in this it is most important to have the Lord's guidance. Saints gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus have ever received such, but refused all those who have remarried after breaking their former bond. The old writers taught the same, except brother A. F., who kept his views to himself for over fifty years (according to his own statement). In Jan 31, 1930 he wrote: "If we separate or such a subject we become two sects, Divorce or Non-divorce.... It becomes the Shibboleth of a party. "

Let us briefly retrace the history of this question.

In 1863 Mr. Darby wrote: "I look upon the man's act as a breach of the tie before God, namely-the tie is broken (Matt. 19:9)." Also in 1871: "God never allowed the Christian to break the tie; but when adultery was committed, the one doing so had broken the tie, and the Lord allowed the other party to hold it to be broken and act on it by formal divorce. " Letters J.N.D. Vol. 2, P. 154.

In the Synopsis Mr. Darby further states: "The guilty person had already broken the bond. It was no longer one flesh. " In the Collected Writings, Vol. 30, P. 397 we read: "Sin may break the bond, but divorce is totally forbidden under any condition but that of the fact by which the bond is thus already broken. -

In 1923 Mr. W. F. Harlow of San Diego, California, published his 32-page booklet, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage?" Three times in this article he says, "to keep his salvation!" He harps on "fornication" in Matt. 19:9 as being "the prenuptial sin" of Deut. 24:1, and countenances no remarriage until the offending party is dead.

This was followed by a cleverly written booklet written by an "open brother, " Edward D. Barry, of Palmerston North, New Zealand, entitled "An Open Letter to all Christians Regarding Divorce." Being more convincing, it trapped many. This emboldened Andrew Dawkins of Bremerton, Washington, to publish a 63-page booklet full of errors circumventing the "exception," and forbidding all divorced persons to remarry. Other propagators are still at it.

A brother having buried his wife, married again, (in 1925) one who had divorced her husband before she was saved; as it was proven that he was going with another woman whom he subsequently married. The Renton meeting having inquired diligently into her case decided (Oct. 7, 1926) that she had become free to remarry according to Matt. 19:9. E. B. was a signer of this decision and a staunch upholder of it until Sept. 19, 1929, when he suddenly reversed in favor of brother A. F.'s view, and tried hard to force it on the meeting.

He then left the meeting on Oct. 13th and was followed by a handful of sisters and one young brother.

His book of Proverbs has been called "The Young Man's Book. " Would that, our young men might take it to heart more seriously. Likewise the young women. Nor are we to limit its need to the younger generation only, since there is in all the strongest fleshly lust, constantly liable to respond to appeal unless the heart is guarded. "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded; for out of it are the issues of life. " (Prov. 4:23 JND Trans.) Unguarded "eyes full of adultery," intimacies and like mischief "war against the soul," dishonor the Lord, and end with an un-erasable blot.

Disregarding this subject would fail in faithfulness to warn souls how to by-pass the dangerous road.

"For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter...Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house...and thou mourn at the end... and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. " Prov. 5.

Verse 14 calls for special consideration: "I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly!" So that we are not immune where Satan especially aims to work wilily. "God is light," and "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness. "

"Why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?" (v. 20.) Then in Chapter 6, vv 24, 25, 27, 32 and 33: "Keep thee from the evil woman, and from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids...can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?... Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. "

Again in Chapter 7: "Among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: and behold there met him a woman. with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart... So she caught him and kissed him... and said unto him...I have perfumed my bed with myrrh... Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning... With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattery of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare. "

In closing we are persuaded that we can not overemphasize the importance of constant devotedness of heart for Christ so as to exercise divine discretion as a guard for oneself as well as for the good of another.

May the reader bear with this branching off from the original subject, aware that it is the lack of self- control and dependence on the Lord that works havoc and sorrow to both the guilty and the innocent. May God's Word ever be our guide and preserver from a lifetime regret.

A.C.B.

Helps on Difficult Subjects, The Kingdom

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Many Christians confess that they are not clear as to the various aspects of the Kingdom when they are reading their Bibles.

The three principle phases are 1. "The Kingdom of Heaven;" 2. "The Kingdom of Christ;" 3. "The Kingdom of God."

As to the past kingdom of Israel, in the days of Samuel, Israel rejected Jehovah that He "should not reign over them" 1 Sam. 8:7, and as a result Saul was anointed king. Upon his failure Jehovah provided Himself a king (David) after His own heart 1 Sam. 13:14; 16:1, 13, to whom He promised that of his seed He would establish One to sit on the throne of his kingdom forever 2 Sam. 7:12, 13. Then in the days of Solomon the kingdom was divided and the two lines of kings are recorded in Kings and Chronicles until all was dissolved by the captivities. Nevertheless the prophets prophesied repeatedly of the future Son of David that would come to reign over Israel and all the earth in His kingdom Dan. 2:44; 7:14, and all the prophets.

Announcements and offers of the Kingdom were made by John the Baptist Matt. 3:1, 2, and the King Himself Matt. 4:17, and then the twelve apostles Matt. 10:7, as "at hand." But instead of receiving the King they rejected Him. While the Son of God was here the Kingdom of God was here Matt. 12:28 (but not "the Kingdom of Heaven") then taken from them by their refusing Him Matt. 21:43, and slaying Him verse 39. "We will not have this man to reign over us" Luke 19:14. He was cut off by their crucifying their King, and Israel set aside Dan. 9:26; Rom. 11:15.

This expression is found in Matthew's gospel only and has special significance in the ten parables of the Kingdom as to the new and present opportunity towards Gentiles. It is the sphere of profession of Christ on earth where all who are received by baptism into it includes both real and unreal. It is what is called Christendom.

1. Wheat and tares (Matt. 13:30)
2. Unclean birds roost in the mustard tree (Matt. 13:32)
3. Evil doctrine leavens the meal (Matt. 13:33)
4. The preciousness of the true Church in His estimation (Matt. 13:44)
5. The beauty and unity of the true Church (Matt. 13:46)
6. The catch of the gospel net includes good and bad fish (Matt. 13:48)
7. The unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:32)
8. Laborers in the vineyard—some evil murmurers (Matt. 20:11)
9. One lacking wedding garment cast into outer darkness (Matt. 22:13)
10. Wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:2)

To the apostle Peter was given the keys (Matt. 16:19) of administering an opening into the sphere of the Kingdom of heaven on earth, to Jews Acts 2:38 and to Gentiles Acts 10:47, 48 by baptism.

Those who are real have been "translated into the kingdom of His dear Son" Col. 1:13 and now suffer "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" Rev. 1:9, knowing that "If we suffer we shall also reign with Him" 2 Tim. 2:12, "in the kingdom of their Father" Matt. 13:43—the heavenly part of the millennial scene.

After the "wheat" is gathered into His garner (Matt. 3:12; 13:30; John 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 2 Thess. 2:1) the seventieth week (heptad of years) of Dan. 9:27 "the hour of temptation shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth" Rev. 3:10; Phil. 3:19. God will send mere professing Christians ("tares") strong delusion to believe Satan's lie so that they will worship the Beast and his image, demons (Rev. 9:20) antichrist and Satan (Rev. 13) and finally be cut off and "damned" (2 Thess. 2:11) eternally Rev. 14:9-11.

The transfiguration depicted the glory of the Kingdom of Christ. Matt. 17; Mark 9; Luke 9; 2 Peter 1.

This is the thousand years of the day of the Lord. He will have gathered out of His kingdom all things that offend (Matt. 13:41) and He will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords Rev. 19:16, in righteousness, peace and blessing to all creation. It will commence when He comes in power and great glory, but wrath upon His enemies including the Roman beast and his armies, the antichrist, the Assyrian with his armies and Gog and Magog with their vast armies. Satan will be bound securely in the pit. The Psalms anticipate this glorious day when the godly of Israel will be delivered from all their enemies and be full of continual praise to Jehovah their covenant-keeping God. The glory of God will be fully displayed as Christ reigns with His bride, the church, over the vast millennial scene Eph. 1:10; Rev. 5:13; Psa. 72; 145-150 Isa. 11, 35, 60; Zech. 14:9-21.

"Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father... that God may be all" 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28 and "the day of God" 2 Peter 3:12, and the eternal rest of God be blissfully enjoyed with all His redeemed Heb. 4:9; Rev. 21:1-7.

This is the general term emphasizing the character of moral suitability to God. "The Kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" Rom. 14:17. Heart reality alone answers, but where this is lacking the sham will be exposed. Compare passages in Matthew as to "the Kingdom of heaven" with like passages in Mark and Luke where "Kingdom of God" is the expression used.

We now "see" and "enter" by new birth John 3:3, 5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9, 14; 5:1.

This term "the kingdom of God" is used many times in Mark, Luke, Acts and occasionally in Paul's epistles where we have God's view, and only occasionally used with dispensational limitations.