

MARRIAGE, THE BILL OF DIVORCEMENT and THE EUNUCH ELDER

A two part scriptural consideration of Matthew 19:3-12

by Elder Bob Allgood

Part 1 – MARRIAGE and THE BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

The first marriage is recorded for our edification in Genesis 2:23-24. Adam said of the Woman, whom God had made from his rib and brought to him to be his help meet, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man". According to Jesus (Mat. 19:4-5) God the Creator then said "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh". I have come to think of these words which are recorded in Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31 as "God's Law of Marriage". I take notice that this was recorded "from the beginning" before God gave the Law to Moses, and before Moses began to suffer the Jews to put away their wives due to the hardness of their hearts (see Matthew 19:7-8).

History, and those who study it, reveals to us that during the earthly ministry of our Lord, there were two schools of thought among the Pharisee regarding the matter of Marriage and Divorce. The school of Hillel taught that a man could not put away his wife except it be for some "uncleanness" as Moses had taught in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The school of Shammai taught that a man could put away his wife for many trivial matters, even such things as spoiling her husbands food or if he found another more beautiful than her. So the Pharisee, desiring to tempt Christ, approached him and asked the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause" (Matt. 19:3).

To this question Jesus referred them to God's Law of Marriage which was recorded in "the beginning" as pointed out above. To this Law of Marriage

our Lord added and concluded, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder". After this these Pharisees asked, "Why did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and put her away?" It was then that Jesus explained to them that Moses suffered (allowed) them to put away their wives **DUE TO THE HARDNESS OF THEIR HEARTS - BUT FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO** (caps for emphasis). It seems to me that this is the key to our understanding the Bill of Divorcement that was allowed by Moses which **WAS NOT** part of God's Law of Marriage from the beginning. For as Jesus said, "But from the beginning **IT WAS NOT SO**".

Then what our Lord said in Matthew 19:9 harmonizes and reconciles perfectly with that which Moses allowed the Jews to do according to Deut. 24:1-4. Jesus said, "And I say unto you (unto you Pharisees and Jews), Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication (pre-marital sex or some uncleanness), and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery". It seems to me that it is no strange thing that this is exactly what Moses taught in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which reads, "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 uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the **LORD**: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the **LORD** thy God giveth thee for an inheritance".

Some today have inserted the word "Adultery" in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 the place of the word "Fornication" which Jesus used and which refers to the above passage in Deuteronomy. They do this without regards to the scripture which Mark wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit dealing with the same event, which reads, "And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But 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. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith 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 10:2-12). One cannot help but notice in the above scripture there is **NO** reference to pre-marital fornication or uncleanness as allowed by Moses in Deut. 24:1-4 as a basis for divorce.

By what authority men ignore this scripture, but feel they have the right to change the wording of another scripture and use it to “determine a doctrine” is beyond me. However it would be impossible under Jewish law for a wife who was guilty of "Adultery" to be put away and to remarry since the sin of "Adultery" was punishable by death. Leviticus 20:10 reads, "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." Jesus would have advocated the disregarding of the Law had he meant "Adultery" in Matthew 5:32 or 19:9 instead of "Fornication or some uncleanness" which refers to the "uncleanness" in Deut. 24:1-4, as Moses allowed.

There are several other reasons WHY the word "Adultery" can not be properly inserted in the place of "Fornication" in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. While the Webster's Dictionary described "Fornication" as any illicit sexual act, the Scriptures themselves (as Inspired by the Holy Ghost) make a clear distinction between the two words. In Galatians 5:19 we read "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ---". In Mark 7:21 we read, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, --". In I Cor. 6:9 we read, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, ---". It is obvious that according to Scripture the two words are NOT synonymous regardless of Webster's Dictionary definition.

Second, we must remember that Scriptural Context must be followed in order to properly interpret any passage. Since Matthew 19:9 was spoken to the Pharisees concerning the Jews and what Moses suffered them to do, if one inserts the word "Adultery" in the place of "Fornication", it would read like this and IMO, make no sense at all. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for ADULTRY, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." IF "Adultery" is the just cause of "divorce and the putting away of a wife" for the Jews under the Law - How did they escape the commandment that "the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death".

Third, Paul was a Pharisee who was perfect in his knowledge of The Law, and Paul wrote in Romans 7:2-3, “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man”. It seems to me that IF adultery is a legal basis for divorce and remarriage, Paul is silent on the matter.

Part 2 - MARRIAGE and THE EUNUCH ELDER

In my last article on Marriage and the Bill of Divorcement I tried to examine the passage in Matthew 19:3-9 where the Pharisees came to Jesus to tempt him concerning the matter of “divorce for any cause”. I pointed out at

that time during the ministry of our Lord there were two (2) schools of thought among the Pharisees. The school of Hillel taught that a man could not put away his wife except it be for some "uncleanness" as Moses had taught in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The school of Shammai taught that a man could put away his wife for many trivial matters, even such things as spoiling her husbands food or if he found another more beautiful than her. So the Pharisee, desiring to tempt Christ, approached him and asked the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause" (Matt. 19:3).

Jesus knew their purpose and referred them to God's Law of Marriage which was recorded in "the beginning". Jesus asked the Pharisees, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" This Law is recorded in Genesis 2:24 after Adam had vowed "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" in verse 23. It was then that God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh". This is God's Law of Marriage.

This is the law Paul refers to in Romans 7:1-3 when he wrote, "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Paul could not have been talking about the Mosaic Law because Christ fulfilled that law and the child of God is "not under law, but under grace". Paul could not have been talking about the "law of sin and death" – "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The only law concerning Marriage and Divorce that Paul could have referred to was that Law which the Creator, who made them male and female, said "in the beginning". This is God's Law of Marriage.

Paul also speaks of this Law concerning Christ and His Church. In Ephesians he wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Then Paul added, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

In reality, the Lord Jesus Christ has only ONE BRIDE and the Bride has only one husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many Churches here in this time world, and each one represents The Bride of Christ. But when Jesus Christ presents The Church of the Firstborn to himself in glory without spot or wrinkle as a Chaste Virgin there will be only one bride and one

bridegroom at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Therefore to the Law of Marriage Jesus added these words, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Then the Pharisees asked, "Why did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and put her away?" It was then that Jesus explained to them that Moses suffered (allowed) them to put away their wives **DUE TO THE HARDNESS OF THEIR HEARTS - BUT FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO** (caps for emphasis). It seems to me that this is the key to our understanding the Bill of Divorcement that was allowed by Moses according to Deut. 24:1-4. Divorcement was allowed for "some uncleanness" such as the discovery that the wife had been guilty of fornication prior to the marriage and was not a virgin as promised by Jewish custom. This is why Jesus uses "fornication" as the basis for what Moses allowed. Adultery could not have been the basis – because adultery was punishable by stoning to death **BOTH** the adultery and adulteress. It says in Leviticus 20:10 "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." How then could a Jew obey this law, yet put away his wife for "adultery" so that she could marry another? That does not make good nonsense. In addition, what Moses allowed **WAS NOT** part of God's Law of Marriage from the beginning, for as Jesus said, "But from the beginning **IT WAS NOT SO**".

Following this dialogue between Christ and the Pharisees, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry". On the surface it appears they are saying, "If a man cannot put away his wife for any cause, and they must remain married until death, then it is better not to marry". Such a view of celibacy goes contrary to what God saw in the garden, for God saw that "it is not good that the man should be alone." And such a view of celibacy surely runs contrary to man's nature, for Paul wrote "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." It is better to marry than to lust or commit fornication. Paul told the Corinthian saints, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

Jesus responded to the disciples with an answer that is, in my opinion, just as much a part of the Marriage and Divorce subject as anything, and especially so as far as Elders are concerned. What is recorded in Matthew 19:10-12 is a continuation of what was said Matthew 19:9, and must be considered if we are to keep the subject in context. However what is recorded in Matthew 19:10-12 is only for those who are "able to receive it".

One of the qualifications for an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ is that he be the "husband of **ONE** wife". Paul writes in I Timothy 3:1-2, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop (pastor, overseer, Elder) he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, --". Paul goes on to name other qualifications such as being, "vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” But these are all subjects for another article since I am dealing only with the ONE WIFE matter in this one.

The Greek word ONE in this passage, (and in Titus 1:6 where this qualification is repeated), is the word “mia”, pronounced “mee’-ah” and means one or first. The word does not mean one at a time. When reconciled with all the other Scriptures concerning the subject of Marriage and Divorce this qualification means that a Bishop or Overseer of the church of God, an Elder, like Christ himself, is to have **ONLY ONE BRIDE, or one living wife. This is why Jesus responded to his disciples with this hard saying concerning Eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven sake. Jesus said, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”**

As I understand this, IF an Elder must “put away” his wife for any Biblical cause, such an infidelity or unbelief, then he ought to remain unmarried until the death of his living wife. At that time he would be free to remarry. This is exactly what Paul taught in I Corinthians 7:10-11 “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.” I must assume the same applies for the husband if he departs from his wife, “let him remain unmarried”.

In other words, as Jesus said to his disciples, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” Let the Elder become a Eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven sake. “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”