Marriage, Divorce And Remarriage

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

The Bible is the foundation of morality and marriage. Marriage is the support and stay of morality. Undermining marriage sabotages Bible teaching and thwarts righteousness. The Christian pattern for marriage is indissoluble unity. Marriage is to be had in honor among all—saint and sinner—and the bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4).

"Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did he not make one, although he had the residue of the Spirit? And wherefore one? He sought a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For I hate putting away, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, and him that covereth his garment with violence, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" (Mal. 2:14-16).

Malachi points out that God is witness between a man and his wife. He says God made one man for one woman. Though he had a residue of the Spirit from which to make other humans, God did not do so because he sought a godly seed. The prophet then declares that God is against divorce. He hates it! The teaching of this Old Testament prophet is like the teaching of Jesus on the subject of marriage and divorce. He warns against putting away because it undermines the home and destroys morality. It is strange that any teacher of religion would make allowance for what God clearly disallows. The emphatic and indisputable statement of divine revelation is that marriage is permanent and not temporary and fleeting. This

point must be featured and we must guard against saying, especially in public pronouncements, anything that would cloud what God made clear.

It is not uncommon for church leaders to make statements that confuse people about what the Bible teaches on the home and its importance. There has been a flurry of classes, lectures, seminars and workshops discussing marriage recently. Much of this creates doubt about the sanctity of the home and is designed to console those who have violated God's marriage law. Some seem to be hung up on trying to make people feel good about transgression of divine precepts. The result is clutter in an area that should be plain.

In discussing the important matter of the home we must talk about what makes a marriage according to the teaching of God's word.

What Is Marriage?

Marriage is sacred. It is the appointment of the living God. It is the coming together of two lives in the deepest possible unity. It is the surrender of separate individuality and the mingling of each in a common stream.

The following passages give us just about all the Bible says on the subject of marriage and divorce:

"And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). "and the rib, which Jehovah God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:22-24).

"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit

adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27- 28).

"It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:31-32).

"And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him, and saying, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:3- 9).

"And there came unto him Pharisees, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? trying 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. But Jesus said unto them, For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of the creation, Male and female made he them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh: so that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house the

disciples asked him again of this matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her: and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:2-12).

"Every one that putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth one that is put away from a husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18).

"For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man" (Rom. 7:2-3).

"But unto the married I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

"A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39).

The Bible is emphatic in telling us that marriage is a man and woman who have committed themselves to live together as husband and wife and who therefore have been joined together by Jehovah so as to be considered by their creator as a unit—as one. They, of course, continue to have their separate identities. The man has his physical body and the woman has hers. They are two, but the two are one. Each is responsible for his or her conduct and each of them will stand individually before God in the last judgment. The woman is not guilty of the sins her husband may commit, and the man cannot

be credited for his wife's good character. They are one in the sense that Jehovah has honored their decision to be united in marriage. He sees and hears their pledge and they are joined together in his mind. Jesus said, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." It is God who joins the man and woman together. Man cannot undo what God has done.

The civil law is also a factor in marriage, but it is not the determining factor. For the good of society God commands us to obey civil rulers. God appoints that there shall be governments among men, but he does not define the government or give the nature of the public establishment. It does not matter what it is—republic, monarchy, democracy, dictatorship—we must honor it because society cannot endure in the absence of authority and rule keeping and punishment of evil doers and praise of those who do well (Rom. 13:1-7). The Bible tells the Christian to be a good citizen and pay his taxes.

Some governments exercise their God given right and legislate rules for marriage and the home. Other governments may have scant or no rules to control the home. Tribes in uncivilized countries may have only their tribal customs to govern marriage, and those customs may be vague.

The marriage custom of Jesus' day was not as structured as American civil law governing the home is today. In the first century in Judea there was no marriage license, country clerk, recording process, or family law center. If a man and woman consented to be married, they merely announced it to family and friends. Usually there was a celebration in the form of a feast and flowers. The groom's men and the bride's attendants sometimes brought the couple together as a sort of unofficial beginning place for the marriage. It was mostly a family and community arrangement. In the case of Boaz and Ruth the ceremony consisted of one man handing his shoe to another man in the presence of witnesses.

Regardless of what the civil rule for marriage is, the critical thing is God joining the man and woman together. Marriage is a four cornered contract. It involves (1) the man and (2) the woman and (3) the Lord God and (4) the social custom or law of the land. Civil law is to be obeyed to the extent it does not contradict divine law. Where there is a conflict in two laws, the lower law is set aside at the point of disagreement. “Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

No matter what the civil rule is God joins the couple together. In every culture, clime, language and nation God is involved in the marriage. Malachi reminded his brothers that “Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth” (Mal. 2:14).

If God does not join the two together when they conform to the rules of their community, then it is no marriage and the children that may be born are illegitimate. Paul makes the argument that if God does not sanction the marriage the children are unclean, but when God does approve the marriages, the children are holy (1 Cor. 7:14).

God is involved in every marriage, joining the man and woman together, or the marriage is unsanctioned and the children are bastards. This consideration should forever settle the question of whether the unsaved person who is not in a covenant relationship with God is bound by the marriage laws of God. Even in a situation where the people do not recognize the God of the Bible, but follow Hinduism, Islam, tribal religion, or some other unbiblical system, God is involved in the marriage and joins the couple together. If not, their children are unclean. Those who say the marriage law of God is not universal and does not apply to folks who are not in a covenant relationship with God are stuck with the conclusion that children born to such marriages are illegitimate. This disagrees with Paul who says that such children are not

unclean but holy. If God joins together all who enter into a marriage– whether or not they are in a covenant relationship with God–then it still follows "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).

What Is Divorce?

The Greek word translated "divorced" in our English Bibles is also translated dismiss, let depart, let go, loose, put away, release, send away, set at liberty, and depart. The Hebrew word translated "divorce" in our English Bibles is also translated drive out, put away, be cast out, drive away, expel, and thrust out. Vine says the Greek word means, "to let loose from, to let go free." Thayer says it means, "to dismiss from the house, to repudiate" and, in Mark 10:12 is used of a wife deserting her husband. In the Bible divorce is a departure, a going away, or being driven out, or sent away, a repudiation, or abandonment. It has nothing to do with family law court, or a judge on the bench, or county records, or the official declaration "divorce granted." In our Western civilization we think of divorce as the action of a court of law in pronouncing the end of a marriage under civil usage. The truth is that a divorce happens when the man or the woman forsakes his or her partner with the intention of ending the marriage.

A husband may go away from his wife for a period of time to engage in business and it would not be a divorce in the Bible sense of that word. A wife may go away from her husband to visit her family, and it not be a Bible divorce. If either the husband or the wife intends to abandon the marriage and departs, that is divorce from a Bible viewpoint. This is made plain in Paul's statement, "That the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried…" (1 Cor. 7:10-11). If the wife departs she is unmarried. The departure is the un-marriage–the divorce.

Our understanding of divorce is when a judge on the bench grants a cancellation of the marriage contract under modern day civil law. This procedure was unknown in New Testament times. In the days of Christ and of Paul there were no county clerks, county courthouses, family courts of law, marriage licenses or certificates, divorce lawyers, or divorce petitions. If a man threw his wife out, or if the wife departed from her husband without intent of returning, that was the divorce.

In our modern world, people may no longer live together as husband and wife because of the abandonment of the marriage bed of either one or the other, and a divorce is requested and awaited. We foolishly ask, Can we stop the divorce. Not from a Bible perspective. The divorce occurred when the husband or wife left without intending to return. It is a divorce when one or the other partner to the marriage contract is repudiated.

Paul says if the wife departs she is to remain unmarried. Her only marriage option is to be reconciled to her husband (1 Cor. 7:10-11). She is unmarried but she has a husband, an unmarried woman with a husband. The reason she has a husband is that while the civil, social, and community aspects of the marriage have ended, the act of God in regarding the pair as a unit is not canceled. In the mind of God they are still husband and wife. They are still one. They may not be living together. Society may have declared them divorced. Still, the divine tie continues and he is her husband and she is his wife. If a Christian man is married to an unbeliever, it is a marriage. If the unbelieving husband has a wife—she is his wife—he is her husband—"and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her" (1 Cor. 7:12). If a Christian woman is married to an unbelieving man, they are nevertheless married. They are husband and wife. His unbelief does not violate the marriage. If he is content to dwell with her, "let her not leave her husband" (1 Cor. 7:13). He is her husband and she is

his wife even though he is an unbeliever. The religious condition of either partner does not render the marriage invalid. If it did, the children would be unclean – illegitimate – unholy. Paul says this is not the case and he argues therefore that the marriage is intact.

"Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace" (1 Cor. 7:15). If the unbeliever departs without intending to return—divorces the believer—the Christian is not under bondage. Is the saint, therefore, free to marry another person under the rules for marriage given in the Bible? The text gives no express information on whether Paul allows the Christian partner in such a marriage to marry again. The stringent rule Jesus gave for putting away one's marriage partner and marrying another would make it mandatory for Paul to express plainly and bluntly that abandonment on the part of an unbeliever permits the saint to marry someone else without sinning against God's marriage law. When Jesus gave the rule for marriage, divorce, and remarriage his disciples were shocked and concluded it is better not to marry than to be in an inescapable contract (Matt. 19:3-12). If Paul now gives an exception other than fornication it would seem necessary for him to clearly state it. We must not make Paul contradict Christ. We know the marriage rule is for a wife not to leave her husband and for a husband not to leave his wife. If the weaker vessel in a marriage covenant is under insupportable duress—abused verbally, physically, mentally and spiritually—she may depart, but may not marry another man. Her only option to living celibate is to be reconciled to her mate (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

We know, therefore, that under circumstances Paul would require a person to live without sexual intercourse. This puts to silence all those "it is better to marry than to burn" arguments designed to set one divine precept against another hallowed principle. If a husband is called away to the service

of his country and must be separated from his wife for a long period of time it is required that both the man and the woman abstain from sexual activity. Sickness and disability may make it impossible for one partner to a marriage to perform sexually, but that circumstance does not permit the healthy and able partner to misbehave. We have put such a premium on sex in our society that we discount the possibility and necessity of self-control. It may not be easy but we can be eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

Paul says that if two heathens are married and one of them is converted to Christ and the other is not a believer, and the unbeliever decides to quit the marriage, the child of God is not "under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace" (1 Cor. 7:15). The heathen is obviously attempting to put pressure on the believer to forsake the church and the hope of heaven. The unbeliever is trying to enslave the believer and force the saint to abandon the right way. The unbeliever is creating strife, confusion, and disharmony. Paul simply says the child of God does not have to put up with such tactics: God has called us in peace. Let the unbeliever depart (divorce). You can't do anything about it. You are not in bondage to the evil temper of the unbeliever in such a case. Still, the apostle says nothing about the believer's right to marry someone else.

It is interesting to note that the two heathens were married while they were both heathens. God had joined them together and they were one flesh. They were under the marriage rule of God, which has been in effect since creation (Matt. 19:8). Jesus restored it and it will continue while the earth lasts. One of the two is converted, and the unconverted partner makes a problem for the believer. Paul says, You don't have to put up with that. If the unbeliever leaves, let it happen. You are not under bondage. You have no obligation to attempt to live with someone who does not want to live with you because of your faith.

There may be many reasons for putting away, but only one reason for divorce and remarriage. If a brutal husband endangers the lives of the children and threatens the mental stability of his wife, she may depart (divorce), but she may not marry some other man. She can be reconciled to her husband, but is not to have another husband of a different kind. An unbeliever may make life so miserable for the Christian mate that separation happens, but the believer is not free to marry some other person. That permission is not given and that license is not granted. You do not have to be enslaved to someone who is trying to force you to give up your hope of glory, but your alternative is to be single.

The marriage law of God is very strict. The rule is one man for one woman for life, with fornication as the single exception. We must stridently uphold the sanctity of marriage. We must ardently obey the God-given rules for the home. The future of the church and of the nation depends upon maintaining good, solid family relationship. There may be exceptions, but let us focus on the rule. Our children need to be taught by both example and word the sacredness of the family. Let us cease trying to find excuses for failing to walk by the rule to which we have attained. “Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt- offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

God’s Ideal in Marriage

By Roger Jackson
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Genesis 2:18-25 is a record of the first marriage and the

creation of the first home. In the beginning it was just as God planned it-perfect in every way. It was not long before marriage lost its pristine beauty.

Genesis 4:19 records the first case of bigamy. There followed a shameful degradation of the marriage bond and the abuse of a divine gift. By the time of Moses, men were divorcing their wives for any reason. In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 this abuse was because of the hardness of their hearts. God made it plain before the close of the Old Testament that he hated divorcing (Mal. 2:16).

In answer to the question, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Jesus answered an implicit, “No.” There is only one scriptural cause for putting away, and that is fornication (Matt. 19:3, Matt. 19:9). Divorce is not God’s ideal in marriage.

Modem enemies of the home are wrecking God’s ideal marriage. Divorce destroys marriages and is available for almost any frivolous excuse. It has not helped society to make divorce readily available, as its advocates have insisted it would. It has left us with more homeless and one-parent children than ever before in the history of this nation. We have over 47,000 in Alabama alone. The social consumption of alcoholic beverages contributes to over half the fatal accidents on our highways each year. It is the culprit in nearly as many divorces. The use of alcohol socially contributes to immorality, which in turn breaks up homes and marriages. Humanism teaches atheism and Godless agnosticism, which denies a moral standard higher than human wisdom. The result is the contamination of the home that leads to its destruction.

We need to ask what is God’s ideal regarding marriage and then get back to it. No philosopher or marriage counselor is going to help us if we leave God, who created marriage and the home, out of its restoration.

What do we find when we examine what the Bible says is God's ideal in marriage?

Marriage is for the comfort, pleasure, and happiness of the Creator's people. In Proverbs 13:22 the inspired record states that the man who finds a wife finds a good thing. She is good for him because she was created that way.

Marriage is for the comfort, training, and security of children. In the home children are to be trained "in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Marriage is to fulfill the sexual desires of men and women. It is honored around the world in every civilized society as an undefiled institution (Heb. 13:4).

Marriage is to perpetuate the human race. The idea of surrogate mothers would destroy the home if carried to its logical implications.

God's ideal home and marriage involve one man and one woman. The creation of only one of each sex implies this. This teaches against the marriage of two women, two men, one woman to two or more men, one man to two or more women, group marriages, and communal marriages. When God made Adam a "helpmeet" as one preacher put it, "He made Eve, not Steve." Homosexuality and lesbianism are abominations to God (Lev. 18:22). This is a nauseating sin. For it God severely reprimanded the Gentiles (Rom. 1:27). It is among the sins of which the unredeemed are guilty, but of which they must repent to inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9).

God's ideal for marriage is one "helpmeet" for life. This word *helpmeet* means "an exact design for the needs of man." God designed woman for man. This also means he is designed for her. Together they fit the needs of each other. Other considerations regarding marriage matches involve personalities and personal traits. Two people go through a dating period to discover the presence or absence of matching

characteristics. When we find the one who best fills those needs and more nearly matches (is compatible with) our own personality, we marry. In that union we become “one flesh.” It is the “coolest” union of a physical nature that humans know. Although it has nothing to do with marriage, Ruth 1:16-17 describes the kind of union involved in scriptural marriages. It has to do with staying close to the one with whom we are united until he or she dies (Rom. 7:1-2). Death is the only honorable means of ending a marriage. This will be the case in every marriage if we follow God’s ideal.

When God created woman, he did not take her from man’s head that she should rule over him; or from his foot that he should walk over her; but he took her from man’s side, to be a companion, from under his arm, to be protected, and from near his heart to be loved.

God’s ideal for marriage is one head. I Corinthians 11:1-3 explains the man is the head of the woman. No matter how many women’s liberation movements we have, that is God’s law. Women who acknowledge it are happy and well-adjusted.

It is much easier for the wife to be dutifully obedient and submissive when the husband follows the instructions of Ephesians 5:23-24 to love his wife as himself.

Paul says in I Timothy 2:12-14 that the woman may not usurp authority over a man and that this is not simply a church ordinance but is so because from the first God made it so.

In the marriage bond there must be a unity of values and goals. This is God’s ideal. Marriages will suffer if the significant goals and values are different. Of these goals, none is more important than going to heaven. Although there will be no marriage in heaven, it is a valid idea for couples to seek to go to heaven together where the relationships will be superior to marriage.

When we get back to God’s ideal in marriage, we will restore

the home as God would have it, and the world’s problem of broken homes and lost souls because of them will disappear. May God hasten the day.