

MATTHEW 19:3-12

CAN A CHRISTIAN DIVORCE?

“Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’”

“The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But he said to them, ‘Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.’”¹

Divorce touches almost every family in our nation. Studies show that first marriages have a 50% chance of ending in divorce. Second marriages have a failure rate of about 72%; and third marriages end in divorce 85% of the time.² However, divorce statistics do not tell the entire story. The statistics generated do not count the incidents of desertion, divorce granted in other countries or judicial separations.³ Also, the normal pattern for young adults today is to live together for a period in kind of an informal trial marriage. Many of these experiments in self-gratification end in separation, which masks the real extent of divorce.

Here are some disturbing facts about divorce. Almost 75% of divorces are initiated by women. One year after divorce or separation, more than 50% of children will never see their fathers again.⁴ The statistics for the United States are slightly better than those for Canada.

There are some other disturbing tidbits of information that point to the serious threats to matrimony in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, the rate of cohabitation without marriage doubled between 1980 and 2000. However, cohabiting creates a less stable environment for couples than does marriage, and over 60% of couples choosing cohabitation as their first conjugal relationship, regardless of whether they marry later or not, will separate.⁵

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Statistics found at <http://divorcerate.ca/>, accessed 13 April 2010

³ The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Marriage and Divorce” (article), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0005119>, accessed 13 April 2010

⁴ <http://divorcerate.ca/>, op. cit.

⁵ The Canadian Encyclopedia, op. cit.

Make no mistake, divorce is never God's ideal. In fact, God has gone on record as saying, "I hate divorce" [**MALACHI 2:16**].⁶ Surely it requires no effort to convince you that divorce is a serious issue; the impact on men and women who experience the breakdown of their marriage injures them severely. The emotional toll taints relationships for years—even relationships that are not moving toward marriage. Severe as the toll is for husbands and wives who experience divorce, the toll on children is more severe yet. Tragically, some of those children carry the scars that arise from the bickering between their parents into their own marriage relationships, thus demonstrating that marriage breakdown contaminates relationships for generations.

Though Christians need to learn God's high view of marriage and honour that view, it is equally vital that they recognise the danger of accommodating a casual view of divorce. However, we need to recognise that the issue of divorce is not the primary problem in the mind of most Christians; remarriage is the issue that truly disturbs believers. We are social creatures, created to long for companionship. Thus, it is not surprising that we continue to seek out companionship, even after marriage breakdown. Just as God has addressed the matter of divorce, He has also spoken on the issue of remarriage. We do well to have a solid theology of marriage and divorce before being forced by the world to respond to the trials that plague so many of our children and friends.

THE PHARISEES' QUESTION — "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Establish in your mind that it was the Pharisees who asked this question. Their purpose was to trap the Master. They might endlessly debate this issue among themselves, but they were united in their hatred of this brash Galilean who seemed to be attracting such a massive following of people that had previously held them in esteem. In their mind, their stature, their standing before the people, was at stake. So, they sought to discredit him before the masses that attended his words.

The method these religious leaders used in attempting to discredit Jesus was the same one they repeatedly used. It had always ended in failure, but it was really all they had. If they threw enough mud, surely some would stick! If they could only get Him to make a pronouncement on some controversial topic, surely He would offend some of the rabble that seemed always to hang around Him. However, the Master made it a practise to appeal to the Word of God so that they were placed in the position of opposing that Word. It is a good practise for us to make our appeal to the Word of God, rather than popular opinion, to the latest poll or the "fad du jour."

First of all, the Pharisees must have known the Master's position concerning divorce. They knew He has said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" [**MATTHEW 5:31, 32**]. Clearly, the Master took a strong view opposing divorce. He did employ what some have called "the exception clause," in placing strict limits against divorce. Now, in the text, he was being challenged to defend His position.

⁶ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

To understand the question it is necessary to know what Moses wrote. Moses wrote, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance” [DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4].

Undoubtedly, you have heard a preacher at some point or another explain that there were two schools of thought among the rabbim. Rabbi Shammai and his followers were of a strict school, interpreting Moses’ words to mean that divorce was permitted only if a wife was found to be unchaste or adulterous. Set in opposition to this school of thought was Rabbi Hillel and his followers who adopted a much more liberal view that had become extremely popular. Hillel and his followers had seized upon the words “if then she finds no favour in his eyes” to allow divorce for the flimsiest of reasons. Therefore, in their estimate a husband could divorce his wife if she accidentally burned his meal, or if at home she talked so loud that the neighbours could hear her.

You need to understand that the latter view had grown in popularity until at the time of Jesus it was the majority view. In fact, it would appear that even the disciples were disposed to accept this view as revealed through their expression of astonishment recorded in verse ten: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” The position advocated was something like “no fault divorce” in this present day. The Pharisees thought that they could trap Jesus by asking this question in front of his followers. If He endorsed the liberal view of Hillel, He would displease the followers of Shammai, who though in the minority were nevertheless respected. However, if He approved of the position of Shammai, He would insult the majority opinion. Moreover, the Pharisees could accuse Him, though not justly, of being inconsistent since He kept the company of sinners and even ate with them [see MATTHEW 9:11; LUKE 7:34; 15:2].

The Pharisees’ question is more pertinent than you might imagine. Divorce touches almost everyone today. “Till death do us part” has no real permanency in the minds of most Canadians. Rather than sacred vows before a holy God, we apply a form of judicial terpsichore to get what we imagine we want. “I found someone I love more,” is used as justification for divorce. “I just want to find myself,” has become code signifying grave danger for a marriage.

No-fault divorce became the law of the land during the late 60s, necessitated, claimed advocates, by “inefficient marriages.”⁷ Though changes in work-force patterns of women during the 40s and 50s contributed to increased stress on marriages, the evidence suggests that no-fault divorce has become a major contributor to the increased incidence of divorce in the western world. The adoption of no-fault divorce would, claimed proponents, make the divorce process more open and honest.

⁷ Douglas W. Allen, “No-fault divorce in Canada: Its cause and effect,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, Vol. 37, 1998, pp. 129-149 (<http://www.sfu.ca/~allen/nofaultCan.pdf>) accessed 21 May 2010

However, the transformation of divorce laws didn't simply make it easier for men and women to get out of troubled marriages, it transformed the social compact, changing our ideas about the permanence of marriage and the responsibility parents have to their children. It had a number of unintended consequences, the effects of which are prominent today. For one thing, the number of divorces has increased as result of no-fault divorce.⁸ "Studies showed that after divorce laws were changed, spouses tended to invest less in their marriages. Economists found that spouses in states that had passed no-fault divorce laws were 10 percent less likely to put the other spouse through college or graduate school and 6 percent less likely to have a child together.

"Marriage rates fell and cohabitation rates increased as men and women lost confidence in the institution. Some 20 percent of children are now born to cohabiting couples, the majority of whom will see their parents split up by the time they reach adolescence.

"Legal changes have consequences"⁹

Really, the Pharisees might have been asking their question today! The legality of divorce is not in question, but the morality of divorce should be very much in question for Christians. To be certain, in an earlier day some marriages continued that should have been terminated. However, today far more marriages are terminated that should have continued. With our contemporary emphasis on the self, we are no longer concerned for God's view of our sacred vows or for the impact of our choice on others. Focused on our "happiness," we act or react, and the consequences are often heavier than we could have imagined.

It is a small response to our modern situation, but I want to publicly establish my personal policy guiding my participation in the marriage ceremony. I am neither licenced nor gazetted to perform marriages, nor do I intend to be gazetted. I advise couples that seek my participation to go to a licenced marriage commissioner to satisfy the legal requirements of the province; if they wish a church service, such can be arranged following the legal ceremony. I stress that as a minister of the Gospel, I will preach the Gospel complete with a call to faith to all in attendance. Since it will be a service of the church, the government has no role in what I say or do. While I recognise the government has an interest in marriage, I have no desire to be an agent of the government. Therefore, I choose not to be licenced to perform marriages.

Because marriage in the congregation of the Lord is a service of worship, and because of Scriptural proscription, there are some marriages over which I will not officiate. I will not marry two unbelievers; how can they ever hope to keep a vow made to the True and Living God, a God whom they neither believe nor worship? Moreover, I will not marry a believer to a non-believer. The basis for this position is my understanding of the apostolic command: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God" [2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-16a].

⁸ Allen, op. cit.

⁹ See Mollie Ziegler Hemingway, "Same Sex, Different Marriage," **Christianity Today**, May 2010 (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/11.52.html>) accessed 21 May 2010

I know many of my friends in ministry among the churches disagree with my position. On numerous occasions some of them have attempted to dissuade me from my stated position. A common argument is that someone might join the church because I did a wedding ceremony. A group of ministers once argued that point. I responded to their protests by noting that corporately they represented over 200 years in service among the churches. “Name one couple that is a member of your church because you did their wedding,” I challenged. The ministers were silent and left one after another. I have issued that challenge on numerous occasions since.

I am willing to speak with a couple that seeks to be married and who wish my participation, but I insist that I am making no commitment. If they are not both Christians there can be no involvement on my part. I make it clear up front that I am prepared to present the salvation that is offered in Christ the Lord, but that we will not go beyond that until I am assured that they have been born from above. I can name the names of several couples that did come to faith in Christ the Lord and united with the church I pastored as result of my strict policy.

Over the years of my service before the Lord, I have examined the marriage registers of a number of churches. As I examine those documents, I observe that it is common that those who were married were of differing faiths and of no faith. What they shared in common was a desire to have “a church wedding.” I seldom see evidence that those married ever attended the services of the church in which they were wed, much less lived of life of consecration to the Son of God. When I have challenged brother pastors for the reason they have performed these weddings, they have frequently stated that it provided a good income supplement. I do not charge a fee for performing a wedding ceremony; I see my participation as my service to the people I pastor.

This raises a final issue that reflects my policy for officiating weddings within the congregation over which Christ has appointed me. Generally, I refuse to perform a wedding for someone who is not a member of my congregation. If they belong to another congregation, they should arrange with the pastor of that congregation to perform the ceremony. If there is a valid reason their pastor is unable to conduct the service, as courtesy to a sister congregation and to a brother pastor, I will participate upon request from the pastor to do so. However, if their pastor is not notified of their actions, then I am unwilling to be involved.

This policy is based upon and guided by my confidence that a wedding is a service of worship. It grows out of my conviction that the One worshipped and before whom the couple will make vows is the True and Living God. As result of these beliefs I am convinced that those who are to be wed must live a life of commitment to Him. This policy also reflects my belief that Christ established local churches, and that these churches are to respect one another, refusing to do anything that would hinder the advance of the Gospel.

THE MASTER’S RESPONSE — “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” All churches pay lip service to the truth Jesus stated, though it is difficult to implement in the modern context.

Jesus confronts our supposed independence by showing that we are not really independent of God. We are answerable to “He who created” man and woman. This is a theme throughout the Word of God. Long years before the Master spoke, Solomon warned, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” [ECCLESIASTES 12:1]. We imagine that we are free individuals who are accountable only to ourselves, but the Word of God is quite clear that “In [God] we live and move and have our being” [ACTS 17:28a].

An overview of the creation of man and woman is given in GENESIS 1:26-30. “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’”

There is a more detailed account of the creation of our first parents given shortly after this generalised account. “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“‘This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.’

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” [GENESIS 2:18-25].

Let’s deconstruct this account. First, God says the woman was created for the man. However, she was created to be his complement; she was not inferior to the man, nor was she superior to him. Together, husband and wife are created to make one another complete. Therefore, God says “they shall become one flesh,” a position ratified by the Master.

Growing from this divine assessment is the knowledge that a husband is to esteem his wife, as we are taught elsewhere in Scripture. “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” [1 PETER 3:7]. Notice, men, that failure to show honour to your wife is associated with failure to live with her in an understanding way, and it is a cause for unanswered prayers. Husbands, if your prayer life is dull and lifeless, it may be because you are not treating your wife with respect.

Wives are instructed how to live with their husbands in this same passage. “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” [1 PETER 3:1-6a].

Wives, you are under no mandate to be submissive or deferential to men in general. As a wife, you are responsible to have an attitude of submission to your own husband. Tragically, because of our fallen condition, it is always necessary to offer the caveat that a wife’s submission to her husband is not unqualified. No woman should ever consider doing anything that is immoral or unethical, nor may she deny her Faith because her husband demands her to do so. However, having said that, a wife is enjoined to adopt an attitude that seeks to honour the Master, Jesus Christ. I have said on multiple occasions, and I am convinced on the authority of God’s Word, that it is a wife’s privilege to offer her submission to her own husband; no man has the right to demand such submission of his wife. Moreover, husbands are always responsible to be considerate of their wives, seeking always to demonstrate esteem for them as partners in the work of the Faith and in living godly and holy lives before the eyes of a watching world.

What Peter teaches is amplified in Paul’s Letter to the Churches of the Cayster and Meander Valleys, the letter we have received as the Book of Ephesians. Listen to a portion of that instruction that we neglect to our own detriment, even to this present day. “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” [EPHESIANS 5:22-33].

While marriage cannot be said to be a “sacrament,” it is nevertheless true that husband and wife are joined in a union that bears a divine imprimatur upon their relationship. Jesus struck at the very heart of the contemporary view of marriage with His emphasis upon the divine ideal of permanence. If God unites husband and wife—man and woman—then it is not the place of man to separate the two. Though as a Christian I am compelled to advocate that believers in the Risen Son of God obey the laws of the nation, I am adamant that the state has no compelling interest in addressing any moral issue associated with marriage breakdown beyond ensuring the safety of the separate parties and in ensuring that the parties treat one another equitably in distribution of assets, and to ensure that the children are provided for. However, the question asked by the Pharisees could have been rephrased in this day, “Don’t you agree that no-fault divorce is biblical?” And the answer of t was, “No! Emphatically no!”

THE UNSPOKEN QUESTION — “They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’”

“The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But he said to them, ‘Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.’”

“And marries another” is the crux of the issue, though few Christians seem aware of it. Underlying the question these religious leaders asked was the thought that when one divorced, they were free to remarry. Therefore, when the Master burst their bubble, they were astonished, and their answer betrays their incredulity: “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

Jesus pointed out that Moses gave no command concerning divorce; rather, he allowed divorce. There is a big difference between the two views. Divorce is permitted, not commanded. Therefore, remarriage is the stickler. Keep the point in mind!

On one occasion, a church that had experienced serious decline assigned a group of deacons to interview me. Their first question betrayed their lack of theological grounding as they appealed to what had become for them a shibboleth. “Would you ever marry a divorced woman,” the chairman asked. As each eye was turned to me, I could see the astonishment writ large on each face when I responded, “No, thank you, I already have a wife.”

There was an awkward silence that was finally broken when I said, “You are asking the wrong question. The Master has already stated that divorce is permitted. It is the “why” that is important, and His teaching means that some of your children cannot be married in this church.”

I continued by pointing out that I find at least three instances in the Word of God that permit remarriage. One case follows from an application of sanctified logic. In the Second Corinthian letter, the Apostle has written, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, 18].¹⁰ If all things are new, then what has gone before is counted as belonging to an era marked by spiritual death. The past is not held against the drug addict who comes to faith, though we are cautious in placing them in a position where they would be tempted. Likewise, the drunk that is born from above is made new in Christ; and though we would not encourage her to spend time in a bar trying to convert the patrons, we accept her as one of God’s twice born children. However, some would say that the formerly married are somehow marred and thus cannot be made fully new. Nevertheless, I insist that either “all things” includes the former status or it includes nothing.

Again, the Apostle to the Gentiles has given us a clear statement concerning a believer who is deserted by an unbeliever when he writes, “To the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—a wife should not divorce a husband (but if she does, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband), and a husband should not divorce his wife.

“To the rest I say—I, not the Lord—if a brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is happy to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is happy to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified because of the wife, and the unbelieving wife because of her husband. Otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever wants a divorce, let it take place. In these circumstances the brother or sister is not bound. God has called you in peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-15].¹¹

When the believer is deserted by an unbeliever, she, or he, is not bound. The terminology used was judicial language that implies that the believer is no longer bound in the marriage relationship. That is, the believer is free to remain single or to remarry. This understanding must be read in parallel with verses 39 and 40, where a wife is said to be “bound to her husband as long as he lives.” It is a different word in the Greek, but the same concept. However, if the husband dies, she is “free” to remarry as she wishes, only in the Lord. If the parallel holds, as seems evident to me, then “bound” in verse 15 also means “free to marry another.”

¹⁰ **The New King James Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 1979, 1980, 1982)

¹¹ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

Therefore, it is evident that the Bible permits remarriage in the case of a believer who is deserted by an unbeliever and in the instance where an unbeliever is divorced but then becomes a believer. Then, in our text the Son of God outlines one final divine exception when He stated, “Whoever divorces his wife, *except for sexual immorality*, and marries another, commits adultery.” The word that is translated “sexual immorality” is the Greek word *porneia*. We get our English words “pornography” and “pornographic” from this Greek term. It was a broad term referring to any sexual deviation. In this instance it points to any sexual proclivity or deviation that has violated the sacred trust demanded by the marriage relationship. What seems apparent is that what is in view is persistent, unrepentant violation of the trust inherent in the marriage relationship. The exception is not merely adultery, but sexual immorality. I have sometimes said to couples that adultery is grounds for forgiveness.

As an example of the faithfulness expected of the child of God is the example of a godly elder, who is to be “the husband of one wife” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2]. Literally, he is to be a one-woman man. He must not have a roving eye, constantly looking with longing at other women. Similarly, an individual may be technically faithful to the marriage relationship and yet be given to viewing or reading pornographic material. Such an individual is repeatedly violating the marriage relationship, just as the Master pointed out during the Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into hell” [MATTHEW 5:27-30].

The disciples were astonished at the strictness enjoined by the Master’s words. “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry!” Perhaps you feel that way also. Candidly, the power to live a holy life, living with your own spouse in a knowledgeable manner, comes from the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. You cannot know that power, and you are susceptible to falling into sin against your spouse, if you do not know the life offered only in Christ the Lord. He died because of your sin, and was raised to life again in order that He might declare you right with the Father.

For this reason, the Word of God calls you to life in the beloved Son, saying, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation.” The promise concludes by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

I pray you are born from above—and you are if you believe this message of life in Christ the Lord. I pray that you are a godly woman or a godly man, and you can be if you permit the Spirit of Christ to reign over your life. Turn from trusting in your own wisdom and from embracing the attitudes of this dying world, even as you believe the promise of the Saviour. Amen.