

Jesus now left Capernaum in Galilee having found there little interest remaining in His message or even His healing hand. He traveled the far side of Jordan, the part outside the promised land given to them by Moses. He avoided Samaria this trip although earlier He had purposely walked through that country so despised by the Jews; John 4. Along the way people found out He was coming and crossed Jordan to hear Him. (John the Baptist had preached over there at the first.) No mention of healings here? But soon the opposition arrived. Questions, questions, always carefully crafted seeking to entrap Him in His words. This time it was questions about divorce. External contemporary records indicate there was a huge running dispute among the Jews regarding this question. Jesus did not take sides. His answers showed that none of the popular, opposing opinions were right, much less representing God's mind. Divorce and remarriage is still a hot button issue among many Christians and even remains a concern in the world, although nowhere near what it was fifty years ago.

Jesus' response is a landmark pronouncement. He goes back to the beginning, bypassing the stack of commandments and traditions that had accumulated since. Jesus' words are simple. They show that marriage is the God-instituted permanent union of one male with one female. It is not to be terminated or adulterated for life. Nothing but a one male/one female union is acceptable. Period! Anything else is simply a perversion of God's design and intent and is condemned in the Law of Moses and elsewhere throughout scripture.

God originally created most living creatures, including humans, male and female. (Later, Noah's ark was to carry two of each "kind" of most creatures except five extras of "clean" animals were needed for sacrificial purposes.) Together the two humans were to start a new family apart from that of their parents. See Genesis 3. In so doing they two became one flesh. Physically, this one flesh union generates new human beings. Each of these offspring are a marvelous one-flesh embodiment of the parenting couple. God never made any provision for a righteous, permanent separation between a married pair except for death, 1 Corinthians 7. For either of them to leave the other and marry another is adultery. For either to be with a third person is adultery. Such acts adulterated their pure union in marriage. *Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* Jesus states "what God has joined together let not man put asunder" There is no such thing in scripture as a righteous, "no-fault divorce." Jesus is very intolerant of such divorces calling them adultery.

Why did God tell Moses to require a legal bill of divorcement if a man put away his wife? This does not mean He excuses divorce, much less condones it. God, in His mercy, simply provided much needed legal status for a woman who was arbitrarily put away by her husband.

Otherwise she was a nonentity, adrift and subject to erroneous assumptions and false accusations regarding her moral character. Such legal protection wasn't needed if she had indeed committed adultery. Why? Because under Moses' Law any married person who committed an act of adultery (any sexual encounter outside of marriage) was to be put to death, Leviticus 20:10. In John 8:4,5, Jesus refused to condemn the woman "taken in the very act" because the man involved when she was caught was not presented to Him for judgement. A deeper reason was that He was sent to be Saviour not Judge. But Jesus doesn't hesitate to expose the common practice of men putting away their wives for some fault or whim, for what it was. **HARDNESS OF HEART!** Easy divorce and no-fault divorce was not in God's thinking from the beginning at all. Still isn't!

God is a God of compassion and mercy and is infuriated when a man treats his wife as a slave, or worse. Mark was inspired by the Spirit to exclude the Lord's exception for adultery given in Matthew. In Mark the focus is solely upon the basic principle of Marriage. Marriage is sacred, permanent, blessed and honored by God. It was created by God for the mutual joy and companionship of two adult humans, one of each gender. Any other sexual interaction outside of this fundamental of Creation is sin, whether adulterous, fornication, or perversion. Contrary to claims of homosexual groups today, inborn tendencies (if they even really exist) don't excuse aberrant, perverted, deviant, depraved behaviors. Why? Because every human being born, except Jesus, has an inborn sin nature. Men cannot rightly, before God, claim inborn physical or emotional tendencies as an excuse for sinful acts. Having an inborn weakness for alcohol doesn't excuse the sin of drunkenness or other sinful behaviors that accompany drunkenness. Inborn homosexual tendencies do not excuse homosexual acts, for these God has declared both drunkenness and homosexual **acts** sinful. These, along with other sins, are to be removed from the assembly, either through confession and repentance or excision. However an inborn tendency toward a sin does not exclude a believer from the Lord's table. We are to judge ourselves and eat. In the world homosexuals are attempting to claim discrimination. Don't be fooled. Being homosexual is not the same as being born black. It is not a sin before God to be black, but it is sin to endorse and practice homosexual activity.

Similarly animal behaviors are subtly touted today as models for acceptable human behaviors. Again, don't be fooled. God is not mocked. Paul, in Romans 1, laid out the folly and end of man's sophisticated thinking.

The pure and simple, beautiful fundamental truth of permanent marriage between two (not more) adult individuals of opposite gender stands as a shining pillar of God's love, no matter how man corrupts it. Marriage is precious to God. Jehovah views His relationship with His

chosen Nation Israel as a marriage. Christ's relationship with the Church is one of Bridegroom and Bride, culminating with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb soon to be. Today we may add a superlative factor to our marriages, or marriages-to-be, by considering this unparalleled human experience as prefiguring the future joyous marriage of Christ and His Bride. Honor, cherish and enjoy your marriage or your engagement in this light.

Parents brought little children to Jesus. The disciples again missed the heart of their Lord. Let the little children come to me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of God. Simple trusting hearts easily come to Him. The older and more sophisticated we become the less we are likely to come. He is so gentle toward them. They are not afraid of Him. They let Him take them up in his arms, put His hands upon them, and bless them. Do we take up little ones and bless them? Are we gentle enough so they will let us? Do we care? But unless one accepts the kingdom of God with the simple faith of a little child he will not get in.

The rich young man who just then approached Jesus desiring eternal life turned out to be such a person. He asked "What must I do?" This is the normal human approach to any question of life. But there is nothing you or I or this young man could do. His money could not buy eternal life. His knowledge and obedience of the commandments of the Law was exemplary. One thing he lacked. What was it? Note, he failed to mention one of the commandments, the last one, "Thou shalt not covet." The Lord looked upon him and "loved" [agapao] him. He gave him an opportunity. Go sell all and give to the poor, take up the cross and follow me. It was a two step process. Lay down what he had so he could have something far better. There was no saving merit in making himself poor, no saving merit in giving to the poor. But giving up all held precious, to leave a life of ease and comfort to **take up the cross to follow the Lord Jesus, that** was the key to eternal life. This choice parallels the Lord's leaving His home in glory to go to the cross for sinners like us.

2Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

But the young man was held fast by his wealth. He lost out on far greater riches. He had run to Him at first. He had kneeled at first. He was "good". He was loved by Jesus. He remained lost. Why? Jesus tells it like it is. A (real) camel can pass through the eye of a (real) needle easier than a rich man enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were amazed beyond measure. Who then can be saved? With God all things are possible!

Jeremiah 9:23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: 24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth:

for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Man is fully dependant upon God for salvation. There is no other way.

The disciples, as all godly Jews, had been raised to equate wealth and well-being to godliness, or as the reward of godliness. This was consistent with Old Testament teaching. It was God's way with His earthly people to bless godliness with earthly wealth. (In His providence men still reap what they sow. Those who honor Him He will honor here on earth.) But Jesus turned a new page while here. Earth is not our sphere of reward or expectation. We are now a heavenly people with a heavenly hope, part of a heavenly kingdom. Christ is in heaven! Yet some Christians today are being taught earthly prosperity is God's intent for all, the goal of humans to attain. This false gospel is Satanic, actually diverting the attention of lost souls from the need of eternal life and heaven. Many such preachers are mere con-artists enriching themselves at the price of their eternal destiny, and worse, that of their victims.

Peter spoke up, "we have left all and followed You." They had indeed. Jesus commended it *Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, 30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

They would receive then in that time a hundredfold reward for all they left, family, home and lands (but not a hundred more wives), and in the world to come, eternal life. What does this mean? Their family would become broader than mere human relatives, including all believers as brothers and sisters in Christ. Their house would be the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Assembly soon to be founded. Their lands would include the whole earth, their fields for sowing the good seed and harvesting souls. Instead of 100 additional wives they collectively would become the Bride of Christ. Think Big for God is Bigger than anything we can imagine.

1Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath

not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. Those who humbly place themselves last to further the gospel and honor the Lord's name will find themselves to be given first place in the kingdom to come. But this was also another faithful admonishment regarding their contention a few days before about who would be greatest.

Ron Canner, March 14, 2007