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Divorce and the Faithful Christian - Part 2

by Neville McKenzie

The Origin and Purpose of Marriage

Christ directed his audience back to creation. It is on the origin and purpose of marriage that an adequate theology must be built. It must then develop, drawing on the whole biblical record to discover the way the marriage union was adapted to make the best of the situation as it existed in other times and cultures. It must be remembered that God was still with his people even though marriage practices were very different to now. God still led his people towards his ultimate purpose, which is, as Paul writes: "...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." (Ephesians 1:10).

In Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:18-25 man was given a wife to be his companion. Together they were to be fruitful and multiply:

"Marriage was intended to be an enduring relationship of one man and one woman for life.... However, even in this early institution of a basic relationship in life, the biblical narrative does not set forth a marriage law...The account reflects the natural union of man and woman for their mutual enjoyment and fulfilment."¹

Such was the divine purpose for the relationship between marriage partners.

The Effects of Sin

"But after sin entered the world a whole new set of complex conditions and circumstances arose.... It was inevitable that trouble would befall the most intimate and demanding of life's personal relationships - marriage."²

The fall not only affected the relationship between man and wife, but also the relationship between man and God, and man and the environment.

With the breakdown of man's basic relationships, marriage was unable to develop as God intended. While for most people it is still better to be married, such is not the case for all. In many instances, marriage has become the antithesis of what was intended, bringing no pleasure to man or woman and no honour to God. It was in response to this type of extremity that divorce became an accepted practice in the Hebrew community.

Deuteronomy 24:1-3 is not so much a law establishing divorce as one regulating a custom already in practice.

Notwithstanding the Old Testament record of surrogate wives, concubinage, polygamy, and divorce³ Christ turned his questioners back to creation where God's prime intention for the marriage relationship is found.

(The legalists in Christ's day sought to build their theology on the Mosaic laws.) Thus, he avoided the political snare of the Pharisees and pointed to the true basis of God's intention for marriage.

Christ allowed none of the Old Testament marriage aberrations to be taken as normative. Yet he acknowledged that the inroads of sin at times suggest a compromise. This makes sense when law is seen as an aid to relational development and not as an end in itself. The apostle Paul followed the same logic when he counselled divorce for the sake of peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15).

In 1975, Australian legislators recognised that personal dignity should not be made subservient to marriage laws. Perhaps, this legislation sought to reduce human misery in the same way as the legislation of Moses in Deuteronomy 24. The hardness of human hearts is not limited by time or culture. It also recognises what Christ taught and history confirms, that moral growth never comes from external constraints, but from within.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

There is no easy solution to the problem of marriage failure, or for that matter the problem of sin generally. It will not be solved by religious or secular laws. The only hope for a troubled society or a troubled home is a radical change of heart.

Christ knew this. He never made laws to abolish slavery; a far greater curse than divorce. He never spoke on taxation or oppression by occupying forces. He knew that the solution to these problems must come from within. To use biblical terminology, a man must be born again if he desires to enjoy a life of satisfying relationships.

To achieve this transformation of nature is beyond the means of man. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is work which God can achieve for all, but it is conditional. We must put aside our pride. We must confess our need. We must be willing to be changed and be ready to forgive those who have wronged us and retribute our wrongs. Then, with the passage of time, God will heal the pain of divorce and bestow joy that will compensate for all the hurt, anger and disappointment caused by marriage failure. ■

1. G Edwin Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church*, (Santa Ana, California, 1977)

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18

3. Genesis 16:1-4, 2 Samuel 19:5, Judges 19:1-4, Ezra 10:1-44.

Kid Brother

by Flora Mia

Sure he was their kid brother but he was no baby. With seven older brothers he trekked up and down the mountains and grew to be a real tough lad. Competing with them he could shoot a sling shot within a hair's breadth. Because he was the youngest son, it was his lot to care for the sheep. It wasn't an easy task grazing the sheep on the steep mountainside. Day and night he was with them, all alone. It was then he realised that he was kid brother to God's own Son and this encouraged him to tackle bears and lions, which threatened the lives of his flock. On one occasion it even enabled him to slay the enemy's champ.

Because of that brave act, he became kid brother to Prince Jono, who was much, much older than he was. Jono knew that his kid brother would be king one day so he gave him his own sword and bow. That made kid brother feel like a real hero. The only other sword in the whole country belonged to the king!

The king became very jealous of kid brother and set out to kill him. Jono helped kid brother escape and flee for his life. For twelve long years he and his mates lived in the mountains, in the wilderness, in caves and even in enemy country. Once he had a chance to kill the king but didn't because he honoured the king, and he had a sense of his older heavenly brother's presence. He wrote many poems on this subject. The men in his group were all great champions, each in his own right, and though they knew him to be a great hero they loved him as a kid brother. On one occasion three of them broke through the enemy's lines to fetch him a cup of cold water from his favourite well.

Not only was he brave and strong and a great warrior, he was a just judge, a good military leader and a great musician. He not only wrote the words but he composed the music for many songs. In his day he was the most popular 'pop' singer, singing and playing on his harp.

At last the day came when he was crowned king. Even his enemies loved him and he was at rest. No more a fugitive. But like all kid brothers he had been spoiled to some extent and liked to have his own way, even if it was not right. One

day when he was all alone, he stole another man's wife and then had the man killed. God saw it all and sent his servant to face the king. Kid brother tried to wiggle out of the situation but the prophet said, "Don't kid yourself. You are the man." Now kid brother was in deep trouble with God. He really loved God and realised then when he sinned he was really hurting God. It is not often that a grown man cries, but the king did. Confessing, he said, "I have sinned."

Immediately the prophet replied, "And God has forgiven you." All of a sudden, kid brother felt a great burden fall from his shoulder and he was as free as a bird soaring in high heavens.

Years went by and now kid brother was an old man. Sometimes bad habits that we cultivate as kids take a real hold when we are old. So it was with kid brother. He pouted like a petulant child and shouted, "I'm the king of this castle and I want to know how many subjects I have in my great kingdom." His friend told him that such a thing was definitely out of the question. God was really king and had already commanded that a census was never to be taken. But David insisted and the census had no sooner begun when a destroying angel came to slay David's subjects. In great distress David pleaded with God to stop the angel and God did. David knew he had sinned and offered a great sacrifice. To show that David was really forgiven, God sent fire from heaven to burn the sacrifice. Once again David felt the joy of forgiveness.

Years later, when the servants of God were writing kid brother's biography, they called him "a Friend of God" and "a man after God's own heart." Then God himself added that kid brother had "kept all his commandments and his laws." How could God say such a thing about David when we have a record of his sins right here in black and white! Simply because David was kid brother to the Son of God and when Jesus died on the cross he took all his kid brother's sins and made them his own. Besides that, he gave his obedience to David as a gift and so it was quite proper for God to record that Jesus' kid brother was a perfectly obedient person. It's great to be kid brother to the Son of God, isn't it?



Epitaphs *by Paul Porter*



One morning in 1888, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite and weapons manufacturer, awoke to read his own obituary. The obituary was printed as a result of a simple journalistic error. It was Alfred's brother who died, and a French journalist carelessly reported the death of the wrong brother.

A man would be disturbed under such circumstances. But to Alfred Nobel, the shock was overwhelming. He saw himself as the world saw him: "the Dynamite King," the great industrialist who had made an immense fortune from explosives. As far as the general public was concerned, this was the entire purpose of his life. None of his nobler intentions were recognised or given serious consideration. He was, quite simply, a merchant of death, and for this alone he would be remembered!

As he read his obituary with horror, Nobel resolved to make clear to the world the true meaning and purpose of his life. This could be done, he concluded, through the final disposition of his fortune. His last will and testament would be the expression of his life's ideals. (Nicholas Halasz)

What lines are you writing on your life? I think it was George Bernard Shaw who once said that every couple of years, everybody should be required to give a reason for his or her existence; and if no answer were forthcoming, that person should be lined up and shot. What answer would you give?

This is what haunts me when I visit a graveyard. It's not the thought of ghosts. Nor is it the trees, glistening in the moonlight, or the wind rustling the leaves. Rather, it's the question marks that in my imagination I see engraved on so many of the tombstones. And the question is this: "What was it all about when I was still alive?"

From merry England comes this fine inscription:

*Here in death lies Harry Jones
Who in life weighed twenty stones;
Open wide the gates of heaven.*

For Harry Jones, presumably, life was all about meat pies.

For many of us alcoholics caught in the Rat Race, life stretches ahead like a hundred-metre sprint - into a brick wall. Listen to this:

*And WOW! he died
As WOW! he lived,
Going WHOP! to the office,
And BLOOIE! home to sleep,
And BIFF! got married,
And BAM! had children,
And OOF! got fired.
ZOWIE! did he live,
And ZOWIE! did he die.*

Sounds like Dagwood, doesn't he?

One smart character left these lines on his grave:

*Here lies an atheist-
All dressed up with nowhere to go.*

To which a dyed-in-the-wool Christian responded:

"I'll bet he wished it were true!"

For some people, life is like waiting in a queue. Somebody once compared the true Englishman to a man in a queue. Just as a man in a bull ring is the image of a true Spaniard, or a man with a two-foot cigar is an American, the Englishman is a man in a queue. Perhaps we are all men in a queue. Just waiting.

So what is life all about? Do we have an answer for Mr Shaw? Did the corpulent Harry Jones stumble upon the truth of the matter when he ate his first meat pie? Should we, Dagwood-like, heed the starter's pistol and sprint towards the brick wall? Or do we belong in the queue?

I doubt if I could answer the question to everyone's satisfaction, and it would be arrogant to pretend otherwise. But I take my cues from yet another inscription. The words are the apostle Paul's, and are intended, I suspect, for his own tombstone:

*I have fought a good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.
Henceforth, there is laid up for me
A crown of righteousness
Which the Lord, the righteous judge,
Will give me at that day;
And not to me only,
But to all them also who love his appearing.*

Now, when this old rabbi looks ahead to his own rendezvous with the Grim Reaper, he pictures himself in his mind's eye as a geriatric Olympian, wrestling and sprinting his way to the victory dais. "I have fought a good fight," he says. "I have finished the race." "I have kept the faith." "Soon, I will receive the victor's wreath."

And now imagine, if you can, the raw, animal excitement of the barracking spectators, as the old man finally leaps across the finishing line! Can you hear the shouting?

But for Paul, all this marvellous noise at the end is hardly surprising. "Sure," he grins, "there is a fight to be fought. Certainly there is a race to be finished, and a faith to be kept. But there is also a crown to be won. Of course."

A strange race, nonetheless, because all who enter may win. Listen again: the prize is promised, "not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing." That means all of us. Everyone is a gold medallist.

So when we finally approach our last years, (as one day we surely will!), I hope we can say something like this:

*Better is the end of life
Than the beginning
Better the end of labour
Than the starting,
And when I shall die,
"Receive me," I'll cry,
"For Jesus has loved me,
I cannot tell why."*

DOWN CAPERS No. 3

The Green family were neighbours of Neil and Peg Down. Leif Green and his timid little wife, Myrtle, were relatively new to farming at Green Gables, having fled the city, he explained, to be self-supporting and dodge the need to have an identity card. Their daughter, Olive, was the reason why the Down boys manufactured any excuse to drop by for a visit.

One morning Bob and Ben Down, together with Mark, spent their time spraying thistle-down on their own farm to try and eradicate the weed.

"Let's go over and see if old Four-Leaf wants his farm sprayed too," suggested Mark. (They called him Four-Leaf because he was as odd as the proverbial clover). They found Leif at work on a wall.

"What's the wall for, Leif?" they quizzed.

"To stop the Catholics," he snapped.

"The Catholics!"

"Yes, it won't be long before they try to overrun the whole country and kill us. They've done it before, you know. They're going to sweep in from the north so I'm putting up a barricade to stop them. It won't be long, I'm telling you. Soon there will be the last rain, and the death penalty if you work on Sundays. And you won't be allowed to buy or sell anything unless you have an identity card. And then it's Armageddon."

Olive Green heard the talking and came out of the house. The Down's eyes were anything but downcast. Mark was the first to find his tongue.

"Say...er...has your Dad always been so tense about the Catholics?" he asked.

"Sure has," she sparkled. "Did you notice one of his eyes is smaller than the other?"

"Well,...yes."

"It's because he always sleeps with one eye open in case the Catholics attack at night," she chuckled.

Mark stifled a guffaw in his hand and turned to Leif again. "We just called to see if you wanted any thistledown patches sprayed," he offered.

"No thanks," said Leif. "Besides, it's too dangerous for you to go driving your tractor in my paddocks. I'm the only one who knows where I planted the mines."

The Down brothers gaped in disbelief.

"How about the fences? Are they hot?" stammered Ben.

"Sure," said Leif, "and the gates also...All except the south gate where you came through."

"I suppose you've dug tunnels under the house too," sniggered Bob.

"You're right," said Leif. "If the Catholics manage to get past the electric fence, the mines, and then the stockade, we will hide in the tunnels. I've got three months supply of food hidden down there," he boasted.

"We'll get on home now," Mark suggested to Olive and Leif. "We can come by again later."

"You're welcome any time," said Leif. "Just remember not to take any short-cuts through the inner fence and only enter through the south gate."

"Glad you told us," they shouted back over their shoulders.

* * * * *

Two years later, when the Mohammedans took control of the country, they swooped in from the south and made a thorough search of Green Gables. Olive warned them about the minefield and live fence. They confiscated detonators and other equipment for making mines, as well as boxes of anti-Catholic books and leaflets.

Leif was arrested and imprisoned, sharing a cell with a Rabbi and a Catholic priest. The trial judge said Leif was so paranoid and intolerant he would undermine confidence in their government and be a danger to his neighbours. He worked five days a week in the prison laundry but was allowed his Sabbath off and a few visitors on those days.

Coming home from a prison visit one day Olive Green said to Mark Down, "I had a hunch trouble would come from another quarter. It certainly has in many other parts of the world. I mean...no group has a monopoly on totalitarianism, have they?"

"That's right," replied Mark, "the Bible scenario for Domsday is couched in very cryptic language. The final outcome may be quite different to what is forecast on all the prophetic charts. Prophecies eventually turn into history, but history should never be used as a hot-house for more prophecies."

Editors

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