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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Editor: Rev. Andrew Lanning
From the Ramparts Editor: Dewey Engelsma

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MEDITATION

Thou shalt also take one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar. And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put them unto his pieces, and unto his head. And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

—Exodus 29:15–18

Cut

The fifth ceremony that God appointed for the consecration of the priests was the sacrifice of the first ram. This first ram was a whole burnt offering, its entire body being burned upon the altar of burnt offering.

What stood out in the offering of this first ram was the fact that the ram was cut in pieces after it was slain. The ram's head was cut off, its legs were cut off and washed with water, its organs were cut out and washed with water, and its body was cut into pieces. All the pieces would be placed upon the altar together, and thus the whole ram would be a whole burnt offering. But the whole was the sum of its parts, for the ram must be cut and cut and cut again. "Thou shalt cut the ram in pieces" (Ex. 29:17).

What could this mean? Ah, it is very wonderful, for it is the gospel of our salvation. For the cutting of the ram of whole burnt offering harked back to another cutting long before. When God established his covenant with Abraham, he did so through a cutting. Along with a heifer and a goat and a turtledove and a pigeon, Abraham "divided" a ram by cutting it in pieces and setting the pieces opposite each other to make a bloody path (Gen. 15:10). God alone passed between those pieces along that bloody path and by that "made a covenant with Abram" (v. 18). Literally, God "cut" a covenant with Abram. By the cut animals God testified that whoever broke his covenant would be cut in pieces by the everlasting wrath of the holy God. But by passing between those pieces alone, God testified

that his people would not be cut but that he alone would keep the covenant by cutting a victim in his people's place. And now in the fifth consecration ceremony, the same meaning was proclaimed as a ram was cut in pieces. What a blessed gospel! God cuts his covenant with his sinful people in the blood of the ram and by it establishes an everlasting covenant of grace with them.

The fulfillment of the cut ram is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the cross God cut his covenant with his sinful people. The Holy Ghost testified of the perfect righteousness of Jesus by the ram that was "without blemish" (Ex. 29:1). The ram was strong and healthy and sound, without wounds, sores, diseases, or brokenness of any kind. For the righteous Jesus is without sin and "offered himself without spot to God" (Heb. 9:14).

By the ram the Holy Ghost testified that the sins of the priests and people were imputed to Christ. Aaron and his sons put their hands upon the ram's head, a symbol that God transferred the sins of his people to Christ. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28).

By the ram the Holy Ghost testified that God's people could come to him through the blood of Christ. For the blood of the ram was sprinkled round about upon the altar, a type of "the blood of Christ" (Heb. 9:14).

Glorious gospel, indeed! The cutting in pieces of the ram meant that God had established his everlasting covenant of grace with his sinful

people in the blood of Jesus Christ. And because God has established his covenant with us sinners in Christ's blood, that covenant is sure and firm and everlasting. Though we are sinners, we are the covenant friends of God! And nothing—not even our sins—can overthrow that covenant. For in the blood of the everlasting covenant, we sinful people of God are righteous.

It is the gospel of “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). That is, it is the covenant gospel of him whom God has cut in our place as the fulfillment of the types. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (v. 12).

—AL

THE SCRIVENER

Marriage Is Honorable in All

Introduction

The title of the lecture this morning is “Marriage Is Honorable in All.”¹ That title comes from Hebrews 13:4, which reads, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Hebrews 13:4 makes a startling statement about the institution of marriage. That is, it makes a startling statement about the relationship and structure that God has instituted among men that is the ordinance of marriage. Hebrews 13 says about that institution of marriage that it is “honourable.” It is valuable in all respects. That is so striking because there are many, many people who enter into marriage. Believers enter into marriage, but unbelievers also enter into marriage. And yet God says about the institution of marriage that it is honorable in all respects.

The only way that the word of God could say that “marriage is honourable in all” is if marriage belongs to God. God is the one who instituted marriage. God is the one who gave marriage among men. God is the one who has given the ordinance of marriage. In fact, perhaps the most important thing that we could say about marriage is that marriage begins with God and ends with God. When we say that marriage begins with God, we mean that marriage is from God. Marriage is not an institution of men. Men did not invent marriage. God gave marriage, so that marriage begins with

God. And when we say that marriage ends with God, we mean that marriage is *about* God. That is, the reason God instituted marriage among men is to say something about himself, so that marriage from beginning to end is entirely about God. That means also, then, that marriage does not begin or end with man. That is always the folly and the pride of man. Man thinks that all things begin and end with man, marriage included. But marriage does not begin or end with man. Marriage begins and ends with God. It is from him, and it is about him.

That doctrine of marriage—that marriage is God’s—has never been popular. In fact, that doctrine of marriage has always been unpopular. In the Old Testament it was unpopular; in the New Testament it was unpopular; and it remains unpopular today. The popular doctrine of marriage is that marriage belongs to man, that marriage begins and ends with man. But the truth about marriage is that marriage begins and ends with God and belongs to him. That is why marriage, the institution of marriage, is “honourable in all”: because marriage belongs to God.

And so this morning, let us consider for a little while this concept that “marriage is honourable in all.” First, we will consider God’s institution of marriage. Second, we will consider man’s attack on marriage. And third, we will consider God’s defense of marriage.

¹ This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given December 27, 2025, in Singapore. The speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXMA6QBVH1Y>.

God's Institution of Marriage

Let us begin with the idea that marriage is an institution of God. Marriage is from God. Marriage begins with God, not with man. God is the one who ordained marriage as an institution among humans. We read of that in Genesis 2:18–25. This passage records what happened the sixth day of creation, as God's concluding act of that last day of creation. God had already made the animals. God had already made Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God had already told Adam to keep the garden of Eden, in which God had set him. And now, as his crowning act of creation, God creates the woman and brings her to the man in marriage.

And the **LORD** God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the **LORD** God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the **LORD** God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the **LORD** God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam 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. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Gen. 2:18–25)

Here in Genesis 2 we have God's institution, or ordinance, of marriage. What we find in this institution of marriage is that when God brought Adam and Eve together—and therefore when he brings every husband and wife together—he joined those

who were two into one in a real joining. There is a union between the man and his wife, so that they who were two are now one. That is emphasized in this passage when Adam says about Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." There is a real unity, a real union and joining of Eve to Adam. Adam also says, "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man," so that in the very name for woman is reflected the fact that she was taken from man. Then, after Adam speaks, God says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). When a man and a woman are married, there is a cleaving together; and that cleaving together is so close that those who were two now become one flesh. In this institution of marriage, there is a joining together of that which was apart.

In the New Testament, when Jesus and then Paul refer to this truth of marriage, they refer to Genesis 2. In Matthew 19, as the Lord teaches the truth of marriage, he speaks about the beginning: "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). In verse 5 Jesus quotes from Genesis 2; then he adds, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh" (v. 6). Jesus refers back to Genesis 2 to show that in marriage two are joined together into one. That is also the apostle Paul's approach to his instruction on marriage in Ephesians 5. In that chapter Paul quotes Genesis 2. "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" (Eph. 5:31).

This joining of two into one is mysterious. It is something that exists beyond the full comprehension of mankind. And it is mysterious because in marriage there are still two persons. There is the husband, and there is the wife. They do not become one mixed personality, but they remain a husband and a wife. And yet those two are so really joined together as one that the apostle says they are no more twain, but they are one flesh. They belong together. The union of husband and wife is physical. It involves the outer man and the life of the body. But that union of the husband and wife also involves the inner man. It involves the life of the soul, so that the two of them together

are joined in purpose. The two of them together are joined in thought and in mind. They know one another thoroughly. In marriage a husband and wife are joined together as one. And it is mysterious. Paul, when describing this union of husband and wife, says, "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32). Though this mystery of the union of husband and wife is beyond our full comprehension, it is nevertheless a very real joining. We must not imagine that when God brings two people together in marriage, he pretends to unite them together, but they really remain at all times separate one from another. Rather, when God joins husband and wife together, he really, truly makes them one flesh.

The illustration of this reality is found in Adam and Eve, for Eve was formed of the very bone of Adam. She was his rib that God took from Adam and formed into a woman, so that as Adam had been formed by God out of the dust of the ground, Eve was formed by God out of the rib of Adam. She was very literally bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. But strikingly, Adam calls Eve bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh *after* they were married, *after* God had brought them together. Then Adam says about this woman who had been his rib, "This is now bone of my bones" (Gen. 2:23). Now she is bone of my bones. Now she is flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. Adam, after the marriage was completed, says about her, "She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," using that strong language to describe their union and joining and the unity between them.

This real union of a husband and a wife in marriage is performed by the almighty power of Jehovah God. God is the almighty creator. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). "God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). By God's sovereign, omnipotent power, he created all things. So also in marriage God, as the all-powerful creator, takes a man and a woman and unites them together as one flesh, so that God performs what no man can perform. The union of marriage is a wonder. The union of marriage is a divine work. It is not the work of human beings, but it is the work of the

sovereign God. God took Eve and brought her to Adam and gave her unto him as his wife. So also today, God takes every man and woman who will be married and brings them together as husband and wife and unites them.

Because this union between a husband and a wife is made by the sovereign, omnipotent power of God, that union between them is unbreakable and indissoluble by man. Man is not able to take apart a marriage any more than man is able to put together a marriage. Man is not able to make of one two any more than he is able to make of two one. When God brings together in marriage, *he* unites in that indissoluble union. And therefore God alone is able also to take apart, which he does by death, according to his good pleasure and in his good time.

All of this so far is what we mean when we say that marriage begins with God. Marriage is from God as the institution of God, not as the institution of man. Marriage is from God as the ordinance that he has made in society. Marriage is from God as the one who unites together husband and wife.

We have seen, then, what it means that marriage begins with God. What about the fact that marriage ends with God? Here we see why God instituted marriage among men: marriage is about God. Marriage is not about man; marriage is about God. Marriage is a message about God, a testimony from God to man about God. The reason that God instituted marriage as a joining together, so that husband and wife are one, is that God and his church in their relationship are one. God takes his church to himself as his bride and so unites her to himself that they together are one. They are very really—mysteriously but very really—one. That is the whole purpose of marriage, the whole end, or goal, of marriage: it is a testimony about God in his life with his church.

That is taught in the Old Testament, as well as in the New. In the Old Testament we find this in Ezekiel 16. We will read a few excerpts from that chapter, beginning with verses 8–14. God here is describing the church as a young woman, and he is the one who is passing by this young woman and then marrying her.

Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 16:8–14)

Here is marriage. Here is the marriage of God and his church. And here is the joy and comfort of the church: that her comeliness and beauty as the bride of God is not due to her own works or to her own goodness but is due to the comeliness that God has given to her. It is the comeliness of Jehovah God himself.

And what does the church do in that marriage? Immediately she commits adultery. That is what the rest of the chapter is about. In verses 15–34 we read of the church's looking to other gods, looking to other saviors, looking to everybody but Jehovah, which God describes as adultery.

What would God do because of the adultery of his church? He would chasten her and chasten her sore, as he describes in the chapter. And yet in all of this, God does not cast away his church but takes her to himself and remembers his covenant.

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 16:60–63)

The point of this passage is that God loves his bride, always loves his bride and maintains his marriage with his bride. He united her to himself, and he keeps her to himself in his everlasting covenant of grace.

Then the question may be asked, how is it that Jehovah God can enter into that kind of marriage with his church? God is God, and the church is composed of people. How can it be that God could enter into that kind of marriage with his church and make her one with himself? The answer is through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God marries his church. In Ephesians 5 we have the truth of the marriage of God with his church in Jesus Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth

himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 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. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Eph. 5:22–33)

God is married to his church in Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ is God, and he is man. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, who dwelled among us. In Jesus Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily, so that he is Emmanuel, God with us.

And now the church—being united to Jesus Christ and one with him by faith, sharing the same Spirit with him, which he gives unto her—is married to Christ and joined to him, so that they two are one flesh and are not separate but together. The Bible uses many pictures to describe the unity of Christ and his church. It uses the picture of the head and the body. Just as head and body are joined as one organism, so are Christ and his church. The Bible uses the picture of the vine and the branches, which are joined as one organism; so Christ and the church. But now we see the picture of marriage: that God has married his church in Jesus Christ, so that the church is one flesh with Christ. And just as real as the joining of a husband and wife is in marriage, so real is the union of Jesus Christ and his church. They very really and truly are one flesh.

This is the gospel. This is the good news for God's people, that we are one with Christ. The good news for the church of Jesus Christ is that what is hers is Christ's because they are one, and what is Christ's is hers because they are one. What do you and I have, as members of the church? What you and I have is sin. What you and I have is all our guilt. What you and I have is all of our departure from God and from his word. That is what we have. And that is Christ's because we are one with him, so that he takes that guilt on himself

really, as his own, though he did not commit any sin. And he takes upon himself all the curse that was due to us for our sins. What is ours is Christ's because we are one with him.

And what is his is ours. What belongs to Christ is righteousness. What belongs to him is perfect holiness. What belongs to him is the whole kingdom of God. And all of that is ours for Jesus' sake—not because we are worthy of it, not because we have done anything to be righteous or to be heirs of the kingdom, but because it belongs to Christ, and what is his is ours. That is the gospel. That is the good news of our salvation. Being married to Christ as one, what is ours is his, and what is his is ours.

That union between Christ and his church is inseparable, unbreakable, indissoluble. No man can put apart that bond between Christ and his church, just as no man could make that bond, but it is made by the sovereign power of God in his mercy and grace to his elect people. It is the covenant of God, the covenant of grace with his people in Jesus Christ, which covenant of grace is unconditional and unbreakable.

This is the wonder and glory of marriage: that it is about God, that it ends with God and testifies of him. Marriage begins with God: it is from him, his institution. And marriage ends with God: it is about him and his marriage with the church in Christ.

Because marriage begins with God and ends with God, that means marriage belongs to God as his institution. It means that God's will and not the will of man is sovereign in marriage. God joins together. Man does not join together. God maintains the union. Man does not even maintain the union. And God separates that earthly union in death. Man does not separate that earthly union by all of his inventions. Marriage begins and ends with God, which means that God alone is entirely sovereign over marriage.

God's sovereign will with regard to marriage, because it is his institution, is that the marriage of the people he has joined be for life. This means that God forbids divorce, and he forbids remarriage after divorce. The only exception God gives

for divorce is if there is adultery in the marriage; then the spouse who was sinned against may divorce. Divorce is not required in this case, but it is permitted. But even if there is a lawful divorce, that does not break the bond of marriage. God has not broken the bond of marriage by that divorce. The husband and wife remain married. Only in death does God sovereignly end that bond of marriage, so that after the death of one of the spouses, there may be a remarriage of the spouse who remains. This is because God is sovereign in marriage and because of the testimony that God would make by marriage.

Because this is so controversial today, let us take our time and work through the biblical instruction regarding God's will for marriage and his sovereignty over marriage in prohibiting divorce and remarriage as long as both spouses are alive.

Let us begin in the Old Testament, in Malachi 2:11–16. In this passage we have a deplorable circumstance unfolding in Israel: the men in Israel were divorcing their wives left and right. These men had been married to these women when they were young. But as the men grew older, they grew tired of their wives; so they left them and cast them aside in order to please themselves by other wives. The result was that there were women coming to the altar of God and covering his altar with tears. God speaks his mind about the behavior of those men in this passage.

Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath

been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. (Mal. 2:11–16)

God calls the divorce of their wives by these men treachery against their wives, treachery against the wives of their youth. These men were not practicing what would be considered lawful divorces and putting their wives away for committing adultery, but they were putting their wives away so that they could please themselves by marrying others. God says about these divorces that they were treachery against the wives of the men's youth. And notice what God says about his view of their marriages: God says that the wife is still "thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (Mal. 2:14). You put her away; you divorced her; but she is still your companion. She is still "the wife of thy covenant." What you have done in your divorce has not changed the union that I formed when I brought you together. Then God commands the men, "Do not deal this way with your wives. Do not deal treacherously with the wives of your youth. For I hate divorce. I hate putting away." In fact, God compares that putting away, that treacherous putting away, to a man's beating his wife up with his fists. That is what God means when he says, "For one covereth violence with his garment." It is as if a wicked man perpetrated violence against his wife and then covered over the bruises and the welts with a garment so that no one would see what he had done. God describes in the strongest possible language what these men were doing to their wives by divorcing them. It was treachery against them, which the Lord hates.

This was happening in the church. God is not rebuking Moab. God is not rebuking Ammon. He is not rebuking Philistia. He is rebuking Israel. In Israel divorce and remarriage were rampant. In the Old Testament church, they were rampant.

What God taught in Malachi in the Old Testament, he taught in the New Testament as well. In fact, our Lord Jesus Christ gave extensive instruction on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Let's turn next to Matthew 5:31–32. In Matthew 5 we have Jesus' sermon on the mount. In verses 31–32 Jesus is correcting and reforming the church's understanding of what it meant to be the church of God. There was a church in Jesus' day. It was the church of the Jews. It was the church that was ruled by the Sanhedrin, which would be something like the council of the church. It was the church that included the Pharisees, who were the premier members of that church; the greatest examples in that church of piety, so they thought; and the greatest examples, so they thought, of what it meant to be members of the church. This was the church in Jesus' day. But the church in Jesus' day had many wrong conceptions about what God had said in the past. One of those wrong conceptions was about adultery. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Matt. 5:27). The church interpreted that to mean, "As long as I don't commit the physical act of adultery, I have kept the seventh commandment." So Jesus teaches, he instructs and reforms, by saying, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (v. 28). Then Jesus, as he is still reforming the church regarding adultery, comes to marriage in verses 31–32.

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Jesus is referring in verse 31 to a law that Moses had given in Deuteronomy 24. In Deuteronomy 24 Moses had laid out the procedure for a man to divorce his wife. Moses had done that because what was happening in the church in his day was rampant divorce and remarriage—such divorce that as soon as a man put away his wife, she was left defenseless to the whims of evil men who were around her. She had no means to care for herself. So Moses, because of the hardness of the hearts of the men of Israel, had made provision for those divorced wives to be cared for. The provision was this: the divorced wife may be married to another. Moses had made provision for a legal channel by which to divorce and remarry, which involved a writing of divorcement. That writing of divorcement would force a man to stop and think and consider before he went through with his divorce and so easily took another.

The church in Jesus' day, claiming to stand with Moses in Deuteronomy 24, said, "Moses allows us to put our wives away. And if a man is going to put away his wife, there is a method for it: he can give her a writing of divorcement." Jesus says, "That is not how it is in the church. Divorce and remarriage is not permitted. I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife causeth her to commit adultery." When you divorce your wife, you make her an adulteress; and you make her an adulteress because she is going to go be married to another, and that remarriage is adultery. Jesus gave one exception for divorce: except "for the cause of fornication." If a wife, for example, finds that her husband has committed adultery, then the wife may divorce her husband. And when she does so, she is not sinning against Jesus' instruction regarding marriage. But "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." Divorce is adultery (with one exception), and remarriage is adultery (while the spouse lives). Divorce *causes* adultery, and remarriage *is* adultery. This is Jesus' instruction.

Well, you can be sure that the Pharisees who heard that sermon on the mount pricked up their ears at Jesus' instruction about divorce and remarriage because Jesus had just said something

different than Moses. So in Matthew 19 the Pharisees come to Jesus to ask him further about this matter of divorce and remarriage. They thought that they had Jesus cornered. They were going to entrap him by setting Jesus' doctrine over against Moses' doctrine. If Jesus' doctrine was different than Moses' doctrine, then the Pharisees would prove that Jesus was not from God. So they come with this trap to ensnare him.

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (Matt. 19:1–3)

Now, the Pharisees phrased their question very, very carefully. It was a perfect question to trap Jesus, so they thought. "Is it lawful?" Is it lawful according to the law of Moses? Is it lawful according to the law of God for a man to divorce, to put away his wife, and "for every cause"? "We heard you in that sermon on the mount, Jesus. We heard you say that there is one reason a man might put away his wife: fornication. That is not what Moses said. Moses did not give one reason. Moses gave more causes." "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered by appealing to Genesis, to what God had done at the beginning.

And he answered and said unto them, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Matt. 19:4–6)

Here is Jesus' doctrine of marriage: God joined the husband and wife together. He joined man and wife together in such a way that they are no

more two, but they are one. They are very truly, really united by the operation of God. And now "what...God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." You Pharisees say that man may put asunder this union; I say unto you, let man not do that. This was God's word and God's will from the beginning.

The Pharisees had Jesus cornered, they had him trapped, so they thought—because they had a law too. They had a word of God too. Their word of God was Deuteronomy 24, which made provision for divorce and remarriage. "They say unto him, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (Matt. 19:7).

"He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). Jesus' answer is masterful. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You are appealing to Deuteronomy 24 as proof that you may divorce and remarry? Do you remember why God gave Deuteronomy 24? It was because your hearts were so hard as you divorced your wives left and right and married others. For the hardness of your hearts, Moses gave Deuteronomy 24. And Moses, when he gave Deuteronomy 24, 'suffered' divorce. He did not approve it. He did not rejoice in it. He 'suffered' it. He tolerated it. And he suffered it because your hearts were so hard." It's almost as if Jesus is saying this: What you were doing was so bad. Your hearts were so hard. You were worse than the heathen. So, for the hardness of your hearts, Moses suffered you to put away your wives. But that was temporary. What Moses said in Deuteronomy 24 was not for all time. I say unto you, "From the beginning it was not so." From the beginning God had joined man and woman together in marriage for life.

And now Jesus gives the instruction for the New Testament church to follow, which is not divorce and remarriage according to the hardness of man's heart but this: "I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication"—there is the one exception again: divorce for fornication is permissible—"and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9). While

the spouse is alive, any remarriage is adultery. “And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (v. 9).

The disciples had a question because they recognized that this was a very difficult saying.

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, 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. (Matt. 19:10–12)

The disciples recognized that this teaching was hard. This was too hard. It would be better never to get married, rather than to get oneself in a position where he gets married and for whatever reason has to divorce and then must remain unmarried for the rest of his life. That was too hard. Jesus acknowledged that it was hard and said that all men are not able to receive this. No one by nature believes this. Throughout the Old Testament the church fought against this truth. Throughout the New Testament the church fights against this truth. Not all men can receive it, for it is only known by faith. And God is able to make a man or a woman a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. God gives grace to his people who have been married but who, being lawfully divorced, refrain from remarrying for the rest of their lives.

The disciples were not finished asking questions. They followed up with Jesus again the same day, after they went into the house. That is recorded in Mark 10:10–12. The Pharisees had come first to trap Jesus. They failed to trap him. Jesus taught his doctrine of marriage. The disciples there publicly followed up. Jesus answered them. And then they asked him about the same matter privately. They wanted more clarification.

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 10:10–12)

There Jesus, in the house with his disciples, stated his doctrine of marriage as clearly as one could wish. Divorce and remarriage is adultery. The words that Jesus used do not mean a one-time adultery, so that in the wedding ceremony, let’s say, adultery was committed; or in the marriage night adultery was committed. But Jesus says, “They commit.” They continue to commit. It is a present tense verb. Present tense verbs in the Greek language mean ongoing activity. Those who are divorced and remarried commit adultery and continue to commit adultery in that remarriage.

In Luke 16 Jesus again taught as clearly as one could hope regarding divorce and remarriage. In this passage Jesus addressed both parties, the guilty party and the innocent party. If in a marriage one of the spouses commits adultery, then there is a guilty party and an innocent party. But Jesus addresses them both. “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18). Remember that the one exception for divorce is adultery, so that if a man puts away his wife who has committed adultery, he is the innocent party. When he marries another, he commits adultery. But the one who marries the guilty party also commits adultery. In all cases it is adultery. Why? Because the husband and wife are one. In God’s eyes the man and woman are still married.

What Jesus taught at length, the apostles also taught. Paul, in Romans 7:1–3, teaches what it is that ends a marriage. What ends a marriage is not divorce. What ends a marriage is death. In verse 1 Paul introduces instruction about the law. Then we read,

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. (Rom. 7:2–3)

What ends a marriage so that a wife is free to remarry? The death of the husband and only the death of the husband.

The same instruction is given in I Corinthians 7. In this chapter the apostle is answering questions that had been posed to him by the church in Corinth. The questions had to do with single life—which is good, Paul declares—and married life. Paul writes,

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 Cor. 7:10–11)

Someone who has been divorced has two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled to the first spouse.

Again, I Corinthians 7:15: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” We bring that up here only because that is often misinterpreted to be a second ground for divorce. The apostle is not giving willful desertion as a ground for divorce but is saying that a believing spouse is not required to chase an unbelieving spouse to the ends of the earth to try to prevent a divorce if that unbelieving spouse insists on leaving. The believing spouse may let that unbelieving spouse go. That does not mean that the believing spouse sues for a divorce, nor does it mean that the believing spouse may remarry another. But it simply means that if the unbelieving spouse is determined to leave, then there is no guilt that falls on the believing spouse for it.

Then verse 39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

Man's Attack on Marriage

This is the clear truth of marriage, which is “honourable in all.” And this is the truth that man always, always attacks. Man makes an open, relentless attack on the truth of marriage. What does man do? He usurps God’s authority for himself. Marriage does not begin with man. It begins with God. It is from him. It is his institution. His will determines it. But man usurps God’s authority for himself and says, “We will make our own laws about marriage. We will permit divorce where God does not. We will sanction remarriage where God does not.” Man usurps God’s will.

Man also usurps God’s purpose. God’s purpose in marriage is a testimony about himself: that God is faithful to his bride. He does not leave her. He does not forsake her, though she commits adultery against him. He remains faithful to her in his everlasting covenant of grace and never takes another. But man usurps God’s purpose and says, “Marriage is for my happiness, and I must be happy at all costs. I must be pleased at all costs. And if I am not pleased in marriage, then I will cast aside my marriage and find another to be pleased with.” We can summarize man’s sin against marriage as adultery. That is the language of the text from which our title comes: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4.) Man attempts to turn God’s honorable institution of marriage into the playground of man’s will. By doing so, man dishonors marriage as an adulterer.

And the church is always the worst offender, not the world. Oh, the world offends in marriage too. The world does whatever she wants with marriage. She invents all her own laws for marriage and for what constitutes a lawful divorce and what constitutes a lawful remarriage. The world has been corrupting marriage from the beginning. Wicked Lamech, who was the seventh from Adam in the line of Cain, married two wives, Adah and Zillah, contrary to the ordinance of God, which is one man and one woman in marriage. From that day to this, the world has corrupted marriage. But the worst offender is the church. It always has been. In the Old Testament

the worst offender was the church, as men in Moses' day already, and then again in Malachi's day, divorced and remarried at will. And that was the case in Jesus' day. The church in Jesus' day was full of divorce and remarriage. The Pharisees' doctrine of marriage was that one may divorce. It is lawful to divorce for every cause and to remarry after that divorce. Jesus' doctrine has never been popular, even in the church. And the church is the worst offender because, whereas the world does everything that it wants with marriage and corrupts it in unspeakable ways, the church has the word of God in front of her. The church has the instruction of Jesus, who said to her, "This is my will for marriage. It has been said to you wrongly that all divorce and remarriage is lawful. But I say unto you, Whosoever shall divorce his wife and marry another commits adultery." The church has that instruction of Jesus, as clear and plain as day.

And the church, being the worst offender, becomes cruel—terribly, terribly cruel—to men and women because it will not teach them this truth. And why not? Well, things would get uncomfortable for the church very quickly if she taught this truth. She would invite upon herself the wrath of men and women who want to divorce and remarry. And the church would be incredibly small if she ever taught this truth. Who is going to want to join a church that teaches the life-long bond of marriage? The church can't do her evangelism work. She can't grow her numbers to great, swelling ranks because men and women in society are divorced and remarried. The truth of marriage is a hard saying. It is a hard teaching, as the disciples and Jesus himself recognized. And so the church—cruelly—receives members who are living in ongoing adultery and never tells them of their sin and, in fact, approves it in them, so that these men and women know not the danger that they are in according to the word of God. And then the church, in order to cover her cruelty, takes this clear word of God, which is as clear as anyone could hope, and twists it and twists it and twists it some more in order to make allowance for all the things that the world wants to make allowance for.

The church, then, is the greatest culprit among men in the corruption of the doctrine of marriage.

God's Defense of Marriage

But God defends marriage. God's defense of marriage, first, is the lovely gospel truth that God has mercy for ungodly adulterers. God has mercy for those who through ignorance or willfulness have fallen into the sin of divorce and remarriage. The mercy of God is not for those who are doing a good job. It is not for those who say, "I am sinless, and I am righteous in all things." The mercy of God is for sinners because the mercy of God is Jesus Christ the righteous and Christ's atonement, so that one who has fallen into the sin of divorce and remarriage or who for a time has supported that evil has the atoning blood of Christ covering his or her sin. There is mercy for ungodly adulterers.

How wonderful that God saves adulterers from their adultery, for we are all adulterers in principle. As Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). There is mercy in Christ for ungodly adulterers such as us, in fact, the chief of sinners. This is no time for the church that maintains the truth of marriage and that forbids divorce and remarriage to become proud, as if she has distinguished herself from others. We haven't. We are nothing. We are empty. We are sinful. We go astray. All that there is for us is the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

God's mercy in Christ is the defense of marriage. Otherwise sinners would be hopeless. Otherwise why worry about what marriage is? Why worry about what is lawful or unlawful if there is no mercy for sinners? God comes and defends his truth of marriage with mercy for ungodly adulterers. And he defends his truth of marriage with that mercy by pointing our eyes to himself and his perfect faithfulness in Jesus Christ. "Look here," says God. "Look here for the truth of marriage. Look to me for the truth of marriage. Look to your savior, Jesus Christ. Do you see him—your bridegroom, your head? Do you see what I have done with you with regard to him? I gave you to him, and I made you one with him, so that what is his is yours, and what is yours is

his. That is what I have done for you.” That is the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and his unbreakable covenant faithfulness to ungodly adulterers.

And God comes and defends the truth of marriage by giving the fruit of that gospel of mercy. The fruit of the gospel of grace is that those who have fallen into unlawful divorce and remarriage put away that unlawful remarriage; that they stop living in that unlawful remarriage; that, in gratitude for what God has done, they seek to live according to the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Here too, the church becomes very cruel by telling a man and a woman, “You may stay in that adulterous marriage. Just repent. Just say you’re sorry, and then you may stay in that marriage and live in it,” not telling them it is ongoing adultery. But God comes and defends the truth of marriage by giving his Spirit, by giving the fruit of an obedient life, the fruit of gratitude, so that the adulterer and the adultery—which is all of us who have been saved by grace—have our hearts welling up and overflowing with love for God, so that we seek to live to his glory.

Then, third, God defends marriage by giving to his church, to his true church, the abiding truth of marriage—the truth of marriage that does not change with the whims of men, the truth of

marriage that our Lord established for all of his New Testament church—and for giving that truth so clearly and so plainly. One who sits down with those passages says at the end of reading them, “It is as clear as could be. The Lord left nothing out. There is nothing lacking from his instruction, so that I see clearly in the words of the Lord, repeated by his apostles, exactly what his doctrine of marriage is.” That is the mercy of God to his church. The alternative is that we be cast upon our own wisdom. How awful. How awful that you be cast upon my wisdom—I don’t have wisdom—or I be cast on yours. How awful that we be cast on the majority opinion of the world or the majority opinion of the church, when the majority opinion has never found Christ’s teaching popular but has always found it popular to usurp marriage for man. But God defends marriage by giving us the abiding truth of marriage that is clear on the pages of scripture for the church’s instruction.

Ah, do you see the lovely institution of marriage? Do you see how honorable it is as a testimony of God’s faithfulness to his church? This is the truth of marriage that our Lord taught. And this is the truth of marriage that he delivers to us yet today.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S BANNER ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article CXLVIII: The New King and His Kingdom: Prophecy and Israel’s Restoration

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”—Rom. 10:12

The scope of our subject does not allow us to enter into a detailed discussion of the contents and meaning of Old Testament prophecy with regard to the future of the Kingdom. This would be a subject sufficiently rich and broad in scope

to require and justify separate treatment. We only want to call attention to general lines and principles. And then it must have become plain from our former discussions that we surely cannot agree with those interpreters that really take their stand on Jewish ground when viewing Old Testament prophecy, and from that point of view attempt to explain prophecy in a literalistic manner. And

we cannot refrain from emphasizing once more what we have stated repeatedly, that such a literalistic interpretation of Old Testament prophecy suffers from the fundamental error of denying the organic development of God's Kingdom and covenant in history. Because of this fundamental error they cannot admit that one dispensation is typical of another, that history itself, the history of the Kingdom of God in the world, is impregnated with prophecy and that for this reason the forms of one dispensation may entirely disappear to be replaced by those of another, of a higher and brighter economy. For the same reason they cannot see that the prophets of the old dispensation necessarily depicted the future of the Kingdom of God in terms derived from their own time and from the forms, customs and laws of their own dispensation, but that nevertheless these prophetic terms must be explained as the dispensation from which they are derived, namely, in the typical sense of the word. And lastly, they refuse to allow the brighter light of the New Testament to elucidate the dimmer revelations of the Old, and this because of the same fundamental error—their failure to recognize the organic development of God's Kingdom in the world.

Still more. Their failure to understand the organic development of the Kingdom and covenant of God in the world not only leads them to depreciate the brighter light of the New Testament, but they actually present the matter as if the Lord would retrace his steps in history and ultimately return to the old dispensation. Instead of progress they have retrogression. In the future God will retrace his steps and, directing his attention once more to the Jewish nation, will restore the old covenant people in their former habitation and with their former institutions. After all, the Jewish nation constitutes the Kingdom of God. The Jewish nation is to be reassembled from all the countries whither the people have been dispersed. As a nation they are to be restored to their former glory. They are to be brought back to their own country, and there they shall enjoy all their former pleasures and privileges, each enjoying the peace of Zion under his own vine and fig tree. The throne of David is to

be raised again to its former power and glory, the temple is to be rebuilt and constitute once more the central place of worship for the nation and those around them. And all the old institutions shall flourish once more in the literal sense of the word. Essentially the Kingdom of God is a Jewish kingdom. For a time it was brought to ruin because the Jews rejected their King. But in the future the people shall acknowledge their King they once rejected and enter into their former heritage with new glory and everlasting security.

Now, it is very lucid that if we deny the organic development of God's Kingdom and covenant and refuse to see in the new dispensation nothing but a higher fulfillment of the old, interpretation of Old Testament prophecy must actually lead to such a Jewish conception. True, even then literal interpretation, if strictly maintained, would lead to most flagrant contradictions in prophecy itself, but there are many passages that, when considered all by themselves, will yield no other conception than that of a literal restoration of Israel. But it is also true that this conception of Old Testament prophecy is quite foreign to the New Testament, and that Jesus and his apostles seem to know nothing of such a Jewish future. With regard to Jesus, the Prophet, whose Spirit was in all the prophets also of the old dispensation, it strikes us first of all that he never encourages the literal expectation of a restoration of the Jewish kingdom. From the point of view of literal interpreters this may be considered a most strange phenomenon indeed. It is asserted by them that the Jews rejected their King, and that for this reason they are now dispersed among the nations of the world for a time, but that in the future they will repent of their sin, acknowledge Christ as their King, and then be restored to their former glory as a nation. But we should never forget that the Jews did not reject their King as they conceived of him, but as he actually appeared. It is exactly the expectation of a literal kingdom of David that lived in their hearts and minds. The Messiah was to deliver them from their enemies, and he was to raise the people of Israel to national and political glory heretofore

unknown. Such a Messiah they expected. Had Jesus come in a manner and form that was in harmony with this literal expectation, they would have been prepared to hail him as their King. A clear proof of this statement is furnished by what took place in Capernaum the day after the wonderful multiplication of the bread. On that previous day they had been filled with zeal, and carried away with enthusiasm they want to take Jesus by force and crown him king. But Jesus had simply avoided them and refused the crown they were so willing to offer him. But the next day in Capernaum he gradually reveals himself to them in the real purpose and manner of his coming. He had come to give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. He must suffer and die, and only through this path of deep humiliation will he establish his Kingdom and can they have part with him. But this is a speech too hard for them. They leave him. They reject him, not in the glory of an earthly kingdom, but in the shame of his humiliation. And this same conflict is apparent more than once. It is exactly this conflict between their expectation of a literal king that will restore the nation literally to their former glory as a national kingdom of God on the one hand, and the actual appearance of the Messiah as the suffering Servant without form or comeliness on the other, that constitutes one of the main factors in their rejecting the Messiah. Surely, they rejected the Messiah, but not the Messiah of their expectation and not the Messiah as, according to literal interpreters of prophecy, he is to return to restore the throne of David. Had Jesus revealed himself at once as a King that was come to restore the Jewish nation literally, never would they have crucified him. But how can it be maintained, then, that the same erroneous expectation that constituted one of the chief reasons in the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews shall be fulfilled, nevertheless, in the future?

Besides, Jesus not only fails to encourage the literal expectation of a Jewish kingdom, for the

establishment of which he should have come, but frequently he announces the very contrary. He never presents the matter as if his Kingdom were primarily or only a Jewish kingdom. On the contrary, the field of the Kingdom is the world. In his parables Jesus discusses and presents practically every aspect of the Kingdom he is to establish, but never a word of the glorious future of the restored kingdom of Israel. He does, indeed, tell the Jews that the kingdom shall be taken away from them and given to others, and he assures them that there are children of the kingdom that shall be cast out into outer darkness. He also does speak of the future of the nation as such, as well as of the future of his own Kingdom. But that the nation of Israel as such shall be restored, that the throne of David shall be reestablished and the temple be rebuilt, we surely do not find in the revelations of the Great Prophet. Now, surely, if it is true that the prophecies of the old dispensation all point to a literal restoration of the kingdom of Israel; if it is true, moreover, that this restoration was to be accomplished by the Messiah that was expected, and if it is true that the Old Testament prophecies find their culmination, their fulfillment, in the Christ of Bethlehem, it is certainly strange that this Messiah does not speak of that kingdom of the Jews, to establish which was the purpose of his coming! No, we cannot understand this view of prophecy. That the Jews hold to this literal interpretation stands to reason. But they are, at least, consistent on their standpoint and expect not the same Messiah that was called Jesus of Nazareth, but another. But that the Old Testament prophecies must be understood in the literal sense and, nevertheless, we must believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the culmination of all Old Testament prophecy seems to us a contradiction which it is impossible to remove or explain.

And what is true of the testimony of Jesus is also true of the current testimony of the apostles. But about this next week.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

