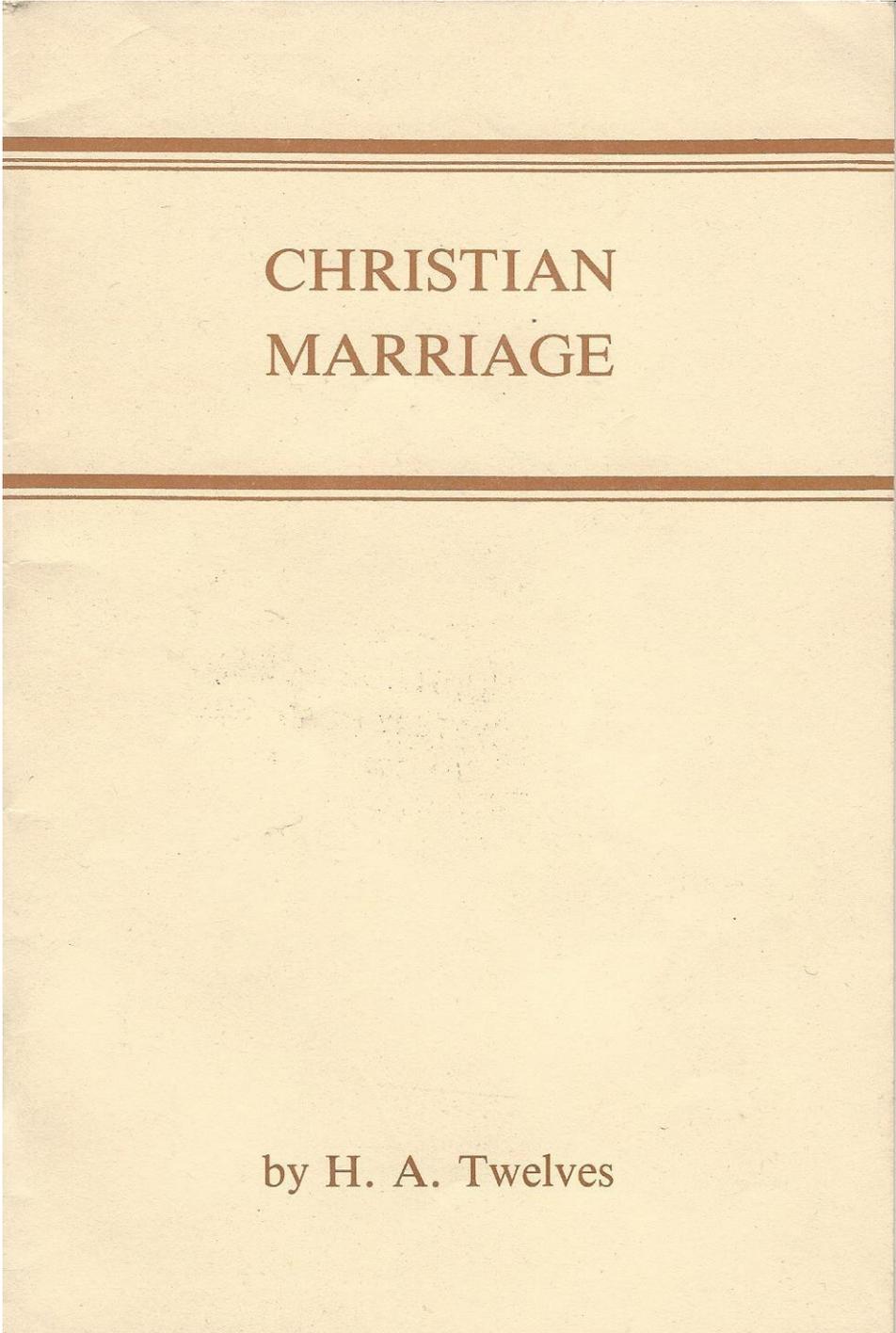


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CHRISTIAN
MARRIAGE

by H. A. Twelves

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth ...
And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity".

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8, 13.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

DISCIPLES OF THE LORD are called to a noble service: stronger than any human bond is the devotion their Master asks of them. Their pattern is his life of complete dedication to the Father's will and their hope to be made "like him" in glory when he shall appear. Their goal is perfect fellowship with God, transcending all human happiness in a life in which natural ties shall no longer have meaning: "for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven".¹ As they wait for God's Kingdom to "come",² they are to live as those whose "citizenship is in heaven, from whence also they "look for the Saviour".³

A few in all ages have sought to live this life alone, not only avoiding worldly sins but untrammelled also by domestic cares: they have given a rigorous sense to the Apostle's words about the Christiari soldier not entangling himself "with the affairs of this life".⁴ Most disciples, however, seek to follow Jesus in the ordinary paths of human life and find opportunities for faithful service, even for heroism, in the uneventful ways of marriage and parenthood. Indeed, Jesus intended that it should be so.

MARRIAGE AMONG THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

The same Timothy who was urged to "endure hardness" as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ"⁵ and to resist the defiling influences of the world upon his spirit, was also told in Paul's first letter to him that the *prohibition* of marriage⁶ would be a mark not of faithfulness to the purity of the gospel but of departure from the faith. The Lord himself had been far from making any such prohibition. He had acknowledged the spontaneous choice of celibacy by a few: "there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake"; but with kindly balance and human

¹ Matt. 22:30.

² Matt. 6:10.

³ Phil. 3:20.

⁴ 2 Tim. 2: 4.

⁵ 2 Tim. 2: 3.

⁶ 1Tim. 4: 1-3.

understanding he had realized that such a sacrifice could not be expected of all: "he that is able to receive it, let him receive it".¹

It would seem probable that a number of the Lord's followers were already married when his call came to them. Peter undoubtedly was, for the second miracle Mark records was the healing of his wife's mother, who was "sick of a fever".² Whether the Apostle Paul had been married and was a widower when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians³ is not clear, but he told them distinctly that he had the right to marry, if he wished⁴: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?"⁵ From the record of the apostolic preaching and from certain words in the epistles it would appear possible that there was already a predominance of women converts to Christianity⁶, yet in New Testament times there must have been not a few faithful couples like Aquila and Priscilla, both giving joy to their Lord (as together they preached the Word)⁷ ministering to his servants and devotedly working for him. A married life of like quality, or, at least, of exemplary holiness was required of those who should bear responsibility in the church⁸, whilst for all believers marriage was pronounced an "honourable" estate⁹ and parents were to find the source and model of all fatherhood in "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰

CHANGING NEEDS

The conditions in which these first century Christians had to live differed greatly from our own. Indeed, marriage laws and customs have varied widely from land to land and age to age and the moral climate of the times has often revealed itself in men's changing attitudes towards the relationship of the sexes. In all times and places true disciples have found an inspiration and a defence against the bad influence of environment in their Lord's moral counsel and the guidance of Holy Scripture. In our own days when laxity is rife, the Lord's counsel needs to be clearly delineated and earnestly commended to the hearts and minds of all who would be faithful disciples in the midst of "a crooked and perverse nation".¹¹

The following pages are written in the hope of helping chiefly those who are contemplating marriage or who wish to know in days of conflicting standards how a disciple of the Lord should behave. The lofty Christian ideal will first be emphasized, and whatever practical guidance is offered, this ideal will be its foundation, as also in the endeavour to define the Christian attitude towards the increasingly common practice of divorce. Further, it may be that disciples long married may find help and encouragement in this review of what they know from Scripture and from their own experience.

¹ Matt. 19: 12.

² Mark 1:30.

³ 1 Cor. 7:7.

⁴ 1 Cor. 9:5.

⁵ i.e. Peter.

⁶ Acts 16:13, 17: 4, 12; 1 Pet. 3:1.

⁷ Acts 18:2; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19.

⁸ e.g., 1 Tim. 3:2.

⁹ Heb. 13:4.

¹⁰ Eph. 3:14-15.

¹¹ Phil. 2:15.

AIMING HIGH

The Christian ideal is clearly stated by the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians: "Nevertheless let everyone of you so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband".¹ These words sound the high note which must be sustained throughout all our consideration of particular problems. They show the spirit in which every true disciple should prepare for marriage. Faithfully pursued, that counsel would help us to overcome all temptations and save any marriage from threatened wreck. Many problems would simply not arise if each partner tried sincerely, though imperfectly, to put it into practice from the wedding day onwards.

That marriage is "the legal, physical and moral union between man and woman, in complete community of life for the establishment of a family"² is true enough, but this apostolic counsel goes behind the legalistic approach. We are directed here to something more positive and constructive than the binding nature of vows or anxiety as to what friends may think. Here is guidance which goes beyond any "live and let live" compromise. It enjoins upon the husband active, unwearied effort to protect and support his wife, whilst her part will rarely prove difficult if he, ever so falteringly, seeks to love her "as himself".

"As himself": we cannot fail to be reminded by these words of the second half of the Master's summary of the Law of Moses: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".³ Like his Apostle, Jesus substitutes for negative restraint, positive, helpful concern for the other's welfare, and earlier in the same chapter this general teaching of the Master has been exemplified in what he says about a man and his wife.

GOD'S FIRST DESIGN

The Apostle's exhortation and Christ's exalted teaching about marriage rest alike upon the original divine intention in the institution of marriage. Both of them quote the first book of Scripture as an authoritative statement of God's wish: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh".⁴

It is evident, however, that this verse cannot be isolated from its context: the word "therefore" ties it closely to the account of woman's creation. Whatever difficulties our sophisticated age has found in that account, it must be acknowledged that the Bible story does explain certain aspects of human marriage which, without it, would be very difficult to account for. There is first the clear indication that more than animal mating is involved: "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him".⁵ "Good" raises moral issues; "alone" is a social term; a suitable "help" suggests psychology. Then, also, the manner of woman's creation, the record of her production out of man⁶ shows, quite apart from the question of its historical truth, that the author of Genesis realized the need to explain the closer affinity existing between the human pair than between earth-born beasts, and supplied an explanation adequate to the need. An early record which so well accounts for emotional, psychological, social and moral factors in marriage might well give pause to our modern scepticism.

¹ Eph. 5:33.

² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

³ Matt. 19:19.

⁴ Gen. 2:24.

⁵ Gen. 2:18.

⁶ Gen. 2:21-22.

But the Apostle Paul's use of this record suggests that we seriously limit its value if we stop short at the historical level. His Spirit-guided treatment of it in his letter to the Ephesians directs us to important truths which were thus early being woven into human experience and which have lost nothing of their value to-day. He quotes the passage from Genesis: "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". And then he adds: "This is a great MYSTERY: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church".¹

MARRIAGE A MYSTERY?

Before we examine in detail the Apostle's teaching about marriage, we must know what he means by the word "mystery". The word was early mistranslated by the Latin *sacramentum* and so the belief was encouraged that marriage was a sacrament in the orthodox sense of the word: a sign or means of communicating grace through the Church. This view cannot be justified, though Christians should certainly treat marriage as a sacred thing, approaching it with godly intentions and with high resolve.

But the word "mystery" here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, refers to the disclosing of a truth hitherto kept secret or only dimly perceived.² One such truth, partially revealed in Old Testament times but fully laid bare to the Apostles, concerned the gathering of the Gentiles into the Gospel fold.³ Jew and Gentile would be joined to make one temple for the Lord's indwelling, one body with him. This is a principal theme of the earlier part of the letter to the Ephesians and provides the setting for the passage about marriage which we are about to consider.⁴

What is perhaps the most spiritual of epistles is closely tied to practical living, and the profound exposition passes smoothly into concern for personal relationships. Nor in this present consideration of marriage will any pseudo-spiritual approach be affected: the physical realities of the condition are constantly in view and must never be ignored: the Apostle's high spiritual ideals are severely realistic.

"There is one body":⁵ thus he sums up the revelation of the mystery which he has expounded. To the unity and spiritual health of that body all the divine gifts are sent to minister. Similarly, mutual consideration and submission, as of members of one body, are required of believers in all their dealings with each other, but especially in three relationships: between husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant. The core of this counsel is found again in the letter to the Colossians and it is possible that words common to both letters represent a code of conduct well-known to early Christians, which they may very well have learned by heart. Whilst in Colossians it occupies only nine verses,⁶ in Ephesians it is interwoven at some length with comment about Christ and the Church. Indeed it is this spiritual commentary which Paul here wishes to emphasize: "I speak concerning Christ and the church".⁸ At the same time, of course, he does desire to commend high standards for the conduct of married life: "nevertheless let every man love his wife even as himself".⁷

¹ Eph. 5:31-32

² Rom. 11:25; Rev. 1:20, 17:5-18, 10:7; 1 Cor. 15:30-32.

³ Rom. 16:25-26.

⁴ Eph. 1:9-10, 22-23; 2:11-12, 19-21

⁵ Eph. 4:4.

⁶ Col. 3:18-4 : 1.

⁷ Eph. 5: 32.

⁸ Eph. 5:33

THREE ASPECTS OF THE MYSTERY

Husband and wife can find in the Apostle's words something for each and a common lesson for both. He speaks first of the wife's submission, then of the husband's love, and lastly, of the resulting unity. His teaching about the wife's *submission* does not in any sense conflict with his earlier exhortation to mutual submission or with the New Testament's insistence on the equality of the sexes before God.¹ As an individual in need of salvation and as members of the body that is being redeemed, man has no superior excellence. "There is neither ... male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Socially, each is incomplete without the other. In the family, however, responsibility in major matters must rest upon the husband and when he seeks to play his part in the spirit enjoined upon him by Paul's later words, the truly Christian wife will readily accept the Apostle's counsel. For it is no grovelling, grudging subservience that is required but a willing, ready devotion and that quite regardless of financial dependence or independence. She is helped to give what is required of her by the parallel Paul draws with the Church. Her guide is the complete submission of the community of true believers to their Lord. As they are led by his wisdom in doctrine and in morals and acknowledge his headship and authority, neither rebelling nor seeking to improve upon his counsel, each wife in that community seeks to behave so in her own home.

It is largely due to the influence of Christian teaching that there are fewer peoples now than formerly among whom women are regarded as mere chattels: they are more and more esteemed as individuals with their own characters and interests and points of view. That is right and proper and the meekness of spirit which Paul, as also Peter, asks that she should show towards her husband is not to be tyrannously demanded by him. Indeed such a spirit of submission can only be regarded as unreservedly suitable when he, for his part, is fully aware of the tremendous demands that the Apostle's teaching makes on him.

What a love is set before us here in Paul's second section, *the husband's love* for his wife! It is no mere regularization of lust, but a challenge to transform desire (*eros*) into self-giving love (*agape*) in the most intimate relationship of life. Physical attraction alone will not equip us to meet this challenge. More is needed than idealized romantic love or intellectual sympathy or identity of tastes, invaluable though these helps may be. The flame of passion flickers out: fidelity provides the lamp to guide our wedded feet; but only self-denying love, like that of Jesus, can help us to reach the exalted standard of conduct which the Apostle here implies.

For like that of Jesus the husband's love must be, says Paul; his love for the church is the pattern. He loved us when we were "without strength, ungodly, sinners"² and by his love our purification and sanctification have been made possible. He loves us still, many as our faults are, if daily we are lending ourselves to his cleansing work through the Word and prayer. The love by which Jesus laid down his life for sinners and by which still he pleads for erring saints is the perfect model for the believing husband to follow. He is called to a loving care not only for his partner's present health and happiness but also for her spiritual needs and her eternal welfare.

The supreme aspect of the mystery is the resultant unity. How "ought men to love their wives"? "So ... as their own bodies".³ Here especially the Apostle keeps close to the Genesis record and sees in the first institution of marriage a revelation of the precious truths of the Gospel.

¹ Gal 3: 28.

² Rom. 5:6-8.

³ Eph. 5 : 28.

According to the early account, woman was created out of man's side when he was fallen into a deep sleep. So the church owes its life to the pain Christ willingly endured, the piercing of his body, the shedding of his blood, his falling asleep in death as a perfect sacrifice.¹ He will, at the last, see in the redeemed believers "of the travail of his soul".² There are, of course, strict limits to the usefulness of the analogy and it would not be wise to elaborate doctrines from it. The deeper beauties must be the subject of meditation and growing perception, whilst some of its meaning will doubtless remain hidden from our finite minds. It is clear, however, that a large and central part of the Gospel of our salvation was already symbolized by the manner of Eve's creation and, much of God's heart of mercy was already here being revealed even before she sinned.³ Her creation and union with man pointed to the final unity of the whole regenerate creation under the headship of Christ.

Until that perfect unity is achieved the Apostle would have us aspire to it as those who are already members of the mystical body of Christ and he would have each marriage of believers increase our awareness of this high calling. For him that body was more than a figure of speech; it was a reality, even though the full meaning of the vigorous terms he uses escapes us.⁴ Our union with Christ must be no nominal one. Only they are truly members of his body who have been baptized into him, and abide in him, suffering with him and sharing in his life. This, with its implications for the marriage of believers, merits silent meditation.

Here then, is the lofty Christian ideal. The Apostle has taught us that by the creation of woman, God was not only providing for the continuation of the race and for man's physical, psychological and social wellbeing, but was directing our attention to His glorious purpose of achieving a perfect union between Himself and the faithful of all ages who would owe their redemption to the sacrifice of His Son. In the closest of human bonds, in the very focal point of mortal life, the believer is lifted beyond it to the contemplation of glorious spiritual truths. That which would most persuasively tie us down to earth, claiming all our interest and attention, is to be constantly penetrated by the example of Christ and to be lived as a parable of nobler things. How good it is that disciples should be taught these things before they marry and should be reminded of them on their wedding day.

Their contemplation must by no means end then. We need constantly to return to this vision of the ideal. All marriages are in fact marred by sin, inasmuch as all human beings are not as God intended them to be. Every seeking of one's own good or pleasure or satisfaction; every failure to forgive; all bitterness and rancour ; all boredom and weariness; all nagging and bad temper; all discord and impatience; every shirking of our union's high demands; every neglect of family responsibilities; every slipping into a merely animal existence-not to mention every disloyal thought and wandering desire-all are then seen as a falling from grace and from God's high wishes for us, and as obscuring the bright hope that marriage was designed to kindle and to keep alight. Each day of selfless devotion, each year of united service to the Master, each Scripture read together, each lesson taught the children, each step of progress in sympathy and forbearance these will fit us more and more to share the joy of the coming day.

For the Scriptures abound in counsel suited to our needs. The words we have considered from Ephesians are on the plane of lofty, spiritual idealism. More particular lessons are even more beautifully enshrined in 1 Corinthians 13. The love here described is the love Christians should show

¹ John 19:34; 1 John 5:6.

² Isa. 53:11.

³ With good reason Dr. J. Thomas devoted several early pages of *Elpis Israel* to this exalted theme, pages 47-55.

⁴ Eph. 5 : 30; "of his flesh and of his bones". It is not quite certain that these words appear in their proper place.

even to those to whom they are not naturally attracted: husbands and wives should find it easier to show it to each other. What more soothing balm could be found in the moments of strain that all married people know than these pure and holy words, read either alone or together. For a very few days of married life are enough to prove to most of us that human love unaided does not make us always "kind" and ready to suffer long; nor does glamour alone know how to bear all things. Nor can we be sure of success even if we "understand all mysteries". We need to pray for grace that we may grow in that love whose absence from our heart makes us as nothing.

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

Both before and after the wedding-day there are many problems on which young disciples feel the need for guidance of a kind which seeks to interpret Biblical ideals in the sphere of daily living. Some effort must be made to supply the need, even though in many matters counsel cannot be dogmatic. Even the inspired Apostle Paul refrained from unwarranted dogmatism when advising the Corinthians on various aspects of married life. Not that his inspiration was in doubt: he is simply indulging a gentle irony towards those who claimed superior enlightenment when he closes his treatment of the topic with the words: "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God".¹ Yet this inspired writer qualified certain parts of his advice by saying: "I speak this by permission and not of commandment",² meaning, of course, not that he was only permitted to speak it, but rather that he was permitting, not commanding, the disciples to do thus and so. Similarly, when he said: "To the rest speak I, not the Lord",³ he implied no disagreement with the Master but gave his own inspired advice where there was no recorded utterance from the Lord. In a case in which guidance from Jesus had been handed down he could say: "Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord".⁴ proceeding to quote what we now find recorded in Matt. 5:32. What concerns us here is the fact that even inspiration allowed for variations in practice and could make a distinction between a positive command and a permissive ruling. The Apostle esteemed celibacy "good" but not the sole good⁵: he could acknowledge, as Jesus did,⁶ that "every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that".⁷ How much more must human counsel be hedged about with reservations and qualifications.

WHY A PROBLEM?

Not that such a potentially rich experience as married life should be approached anxiously as a vexing problem. In its physical basis marriage is a simple but wonderful arrangement for the propagation of the race. Emotional impulses are set in motion by sexual attraction, part of whose secret seems to lie, as Wordsworth suggested⁸ in the fascination of "dissimilarity in similarity". The instinctive urge which all healthy people possess needs to be controlled but most of the problems arise from psychological, social, moral and religious factors.

¹ 1 Cor. 7:40 (R.V.).

² Verse 6.

³ Verses 12, 25, 26.

⁴ Verse 10.

⁵ Verse 1.

⁶ Cf. Matt. 19:11-12.

⁷ Verse 7.

⁸ Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

For man is not only an animal: he is a self-conscious being, and a social being too. Different societies have had taboos and local marriage laws, which cannot be even sketched here, but which must be taken into account in any attempt to outline right Christian behaviour in a given age and clime.

More important still, man is a sinful creature, fallen from innocence. A sense of shame has been associated with the "uncomely parts" and with the intercourse of the sexes; a sense which only the Fall satisfactorily explains. To those who are perplexed by the conflict between fleshly desires and spiritual aspirations the New Testament's teaching about our bodies offers both comfort and a challenge. It does not pretend that the conflict is not there: in several deeply moving passages it describes it.¹ But it denies that the body or any material thing is morally evil in itself and it challenges us to sanctify our bodies by the mind of the Spirit and to glorify God by them.² This consecration, which we cannot accomplish by ourselves, becomes possible, it assures us, by the victory which Jesus has already won, if only we have faith.³ Much of our anxiety is quietened by the Apostolic teaching that the marriage of true disciples is in accordance with God's will and can indeed, rightly used, resolve many of our conflicts.⁴ Wrongly used, it creates worse ones.

MARRIAGE WITH THE UNBELIEVER

It was not only in New Testament times that believers were taught the need to use marriage aright: for the worshipper of the true God marriage had always been seen as a moral act.⁵ In Old Testament times the people of God were strictly forbidden to contract marriages with the idolatrous peoples around them, lest they should be turned from their faithfulness:⁶ with tragic results they ignored the prohibition from the least to the greatest of them. Solomon's case, like that of many others, is recorded to warn believers of later ages, whose idols would be less obvious but equally effective obstacles to the worship of the true and living God.

It is sometimes argued that the strict Old Testament prohibition was replaced by a gentler law of liberty in New Testament times and that Christ himself has no categorical words about a Christian's duty in this regard. In fact, the claims of our Lord make greater, not less demands upon our personal loyalty than the teaching of the Law. Though we could not expect to hear from the lips of Jesus before his church was founded any specific allusion to marriage with unbelievers, yet we must surely grant that an honest reception of his searching moral doctrine rules it out. Our Lord asks his disciples to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to love him more than husband or wife⁷: these are tremendous demands even for those united in the faith and constantly they fail; but wilfully to receive into one's bosom one who does not share our godly aspirations is to court disaster and to bring to the Lord the maimed and the halt.⁸

As the body of believers grew against a pagan background this question became more urgent and required apostolic instruction. It comes from the Apostles with no less force than from their Lord who inspired them. The clearest is found in the command to widows, which cannot be limited to them, that if they married, it should be "only in the Lord"⁹: indeed the phrase is added very much as

¹ e.g. Rom. 7.

² Rom. 12:1.

³ Rom. 7:24-25.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7:25; Heb. 13:4.

⁵ *The Divine Imperative*, BRUNNER, page 357.

⁶ Exod. 34:14-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23; 11-16; Ezra 9; 10; 1 Kings 11:1-11; Neh. 13:23-27, 10:29-30.

⁷ Matt. 6:38; Matt. 10:37.

⁸ Mal. 1:8.

⁹ 1 Cor. 7:39

if it were an unnecessary statement of what should have been obvious. Other words of the Apostle Paul, which cannot be restricted to the married state, apply with greater force to marriage than to any other relationship: "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."¹ The Revised Version margin sends the reader from the first of these injunctions to the second. Usually the writers of the Epistles take it for granted that sincere believers will marry those "of like precious faith": the beautiful passage from the letter to the Ephesians expounding the Christian ideal could not have been written without that assumption.

The teaching of the Bible is clear and to this principle - that they should marry "only in the Lord" - all who would become members of the body of Christ must assent. That is not to say that it is easy for us all to obey it. Yet, however conscious we may be that only by God's grace we ourselves were enabled to do so, and however sensible we may be - as we should be - of the sore trial it imposes, especially when true believers are few, the principle must not be allowed to become blurred. We may readily acknowledge that even a believing mate can hinder one's faithful service to the Lord, particularly in a time of crisis,² and admit that on occasion a partner who was once baptized may very well prove more of an obstacle than a tolerant partner outside the fold; yet such exceptions by no means justify rejection of Scriptural teaching and the lessons of common sense. It is evident that a mixed marriage, with its divided loyalties, is likely to be less harmonious than one that is built upon identity of belief. Serious problems are likely to arise about the religious education of the children, who will lack the sense of security which agreement between their parents could give them. More important still, the believer's service and worship are bound to be impaired in their quality however neutral or tolerant or even co-operative the partner may be. Yet human nature is frail, and clear as our duty may be, disciples sometimes fail to do it. It is easy to assent to a principle at a time of cool detachment or through youthful inexperience: it may be very hard to choose the right way when torn between human affection and loyalty to the Lord. A disciple may have known from youth what he ought to do; he may have sought friends among those who loved God's ways (though in some places the number of such companions must be small) ; he may nevertheless fall in love with one outside the church. He may then have acted wisely and begun very early to discuss matters of faith in the hope of winning the loved one for the Lord. He may have received without resentment the counsel of those who were concerned for his present happiness and everlasting salvation and at the first signs of love prayed for its happy issue or for an early painless severing. Despite all counsel and against his better judgment he may find in fact, perhaps after a long struggle, that he has disobeyed, falling from the high ideal of Bible teaching which he had acknowledged. What then can he do?

He must expect his fellow-believers to be very sad. He must not be surprised if some of them are critical, believing that he has wilfully sinned against the Lord: after all, they may not know of his struggle or may themselves have suffered loneliness through resisting the temptation to which he seems so easily to have succumbed. He may be sure that most of them will be humbly interested in his spiritual welfare, acknowledging that marriage is not in itself a sinful act and that once it has been made, it cannot be unmade. He must expect that responsible members of the body will wish to talk to him to be sincerely assured that with his mind he still assents to the Scriptural teaching to which with his body he has been too weak to be constant. They will be concerned to make him realize, if it is not already clear, that the trespass is not against them - but against the Lord. They will behave humbly, conscious that they too frequently fail to do the Lord's will, being perhaps envious or proud, or angry without cause, or at times, of little faith; and that not all their failures are sudden unexpected lapses. They will seek from him no insincere or formal expression of sorrow, but an honest, serious acknowledgment that his marriage was not in accordance with Bible teaching. When that has been kindly sought and contritely given, he may take his place at the Lord's table, waiting

¹ 2 Cor. 6:14

² 1 Cor. 7:32-35, 26, 29, 30

upon the mercy of the Lord, to whose judgment he commits himself. He will know in his heart that the matter may not be simply ignored. He will understand that a spirit of contentious self-justification on his part would make peaceful, fruitful fellowship impossible. "In many things we offend all"¹ and repenting and confessing our sins, have communion with him who "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".²

If a disciple has the grace to show such a spirit, his task in life then becomes a challenging one and, except for the fact that he has started off on the wrong foot, he is in the position of the many disciples in the first as in the twentieth century who were already married when they answered the call of Jesus. By his conduct in the home he may win the one he loves to share his joyous faith. All who, for whatever reason, are faced with that task should be helped by their fellow pilgrims both positively and by kindly understanding. For their path cannot be expected to be easy. Violent opposition from the unbaptized partner is doubtless rarer than when Peter was called upon to give his counsel, but it does still sometimes occur and those who suffer - more often now as then, the wives - can still do no better than follow his advice: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they may without the word be won by the conversation (behaviour) of their wives, when they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear". They are to imitate Sarah, calling Abraham her lord, and her spiritual daughters truly they will be, if they "do right and permit nothing whatever to terrify" them.³ In other words, their wifely submission must be joined with a sober, quiet, firm resolve to be faithful to their Lord at all costs: a spirit of fearful, faithless expectation of trouble would invite it. They need constantly to pray for wisdom to discern when and where they may suitably yield to the other's will without compromising their position or creating worse problems for the future. Theirs is a delicate and often protracted test, calling for cheerfulness and patience and for quiet perseverance, but the joy of victory is great and not a few have found it. They have come at last to know the treasures of peace and consolation that are enshrined in Peter's phrase: "heirs together of the grace of life".⁴ No longer now must they endure tension and conflict, reservations about each other's interests and plans, an incomplete sharing of each other's fondest desires, awkward silences in company and in the presence of their children. Instead, they have received the unspeakable blessing of united prayer for strength to walk the road together.

That is part of the joy which the union of true believers brings: may its presence be so radiant from all believing households that fewer and fewer young people may be tempted to find their life-partners outside the church.

PRESENT PERPLEXITIES

The most serious of the problems affecting a believer's marriage is avoided when worship can be shared, but there are others which identity of belief does not, of itself, remove. We will try briefly to suggest ways to their solution.

THE NEARNESS OF THE LORD

Disciples contemplating marriage in these difficult "last days" have been known to entertain doubts whether they should proceed with their plans. None knows how near the Lord's return may be, nor how much more "perilous" the times⁵ will become before his advent: there may indeed be a dire

¹ Jas. 3:12.

² 1 John 1:9.

³ 1 Peter 3:1-6 (Weymouth).

⁴ 1 Peter 3:7.

⁵ 2 Tim. 3: 1.

testing ahead for the servants of the Lord. Certainly they all wish to heed Christ's warning, lest he should find them unprepared, through being caught up in the universal pursuit of material satisfaction.¹

Individual temperament and the peculiarities of our personal situation will influence our decision about marriage. Some, doubtful of their spiritual reserves, deny themselves marriage, believing that they should not add to their responsibilities or multiply their vulnerable points: if thereby they do not dash hopes which they had encouraged or waste another's youthful years, doubtless they do well.² Their decision is in line with some parts of the Apostle Paul's advice which aimed at easing the disciple's burden in a time of crisis: he wanted to "spare" them; he would have them "with- out carefulness". To remain unmarried was doubtless better "for the present distress". It is possible that to-day his advice to the unmarried and unattached would be the same as then. Those already in love will be taught what they should do by a prayerful assessment of their own needs and faith. The same apostle's reproof to those Thessalonians who gave up their work and became idle busybodies because they thought the Lord was near, will dissuade them from unbalanced action or panic counsel.³

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Young disciples have to decide not only whether they should marry but when, and the factors affecting that decision are complex. Children, because of their physical needs, depend for a long time upon their parents, and the effect of civilization and education is to prolong the period of dependence and delay the time of wage-earning. This general factor has combined at different times with varying conditions to produce different patterns of behaviour. After the Second World War, for instance, few seem to have allowed their courtship to be unduly prolonged by the housing shortage and the high price of furniture; full employment and the development of careers for women seem to have encouraged early marriages, the newly-married pair sharing the parents' home for some years and the wife continuing to go to business. The majority who choose this course are not necessarily impatient, passionate or wilful, nor are those always calmer and more idealistic who delay their marriage until they have found a house and can afford to furnish it as a home for a real family life: such would doubtless be a rash, unwarranted simplification. Those confronted with this dilemma will doubtless find wise, respected counsellors acquainted with their special needs: only the most general matters will be mentioned here.

PROTRACTED COURTSHIP

There are, of course, advantages in a long engagement, provided it is not too long. One gets to know one's partner really well and so the mutual adjustment during the early days of married life is based: many of the rough places have already been made smooth and the rugged corners have been rounded off. It is also a good thing - too rarely esteemed of late - to have to work hard for something one really desires, and the patience, discipline and restraint entailed can be quite heroic. Nor is it all loss if one's education or employment takes one far from one's beloved for a season: a love that will survive such a test is almost bound to be the real thing.

¹ Luke 21:34-6.

² 1 Cor. 7:28.

³ 2 Thess. 3:6-15.

On the other hand, it would be foolish to discount the disadvantages. By far the chief of these is the emotional strain which sometimes becomes unbearable. The two already feel that they are one: only lack of money has delayed their wedding: half-blinded by their passion, seeing only themselves and not their duty to society, sometimes quite sincere disciples fall.

These lines are written with a desire to help both devoted lovers who find the waiting long and also the many innocent young folk for whom this test of their discipleship may be hidden in the future. Clear thinking now may enable them to stand in the hour of temptation. Clear thought guided by prayer will show the nature of the choice: on the one hand, relief of physical tension; on the other, altogether weightier considerations: the blighted life of any child that might be born; the shame and sorrow and helpless disappointment of one's parents: a gnawing anxiety, a worse tension than the first, and even if no public consequences follow, the pretence of holiness, the loss of freshness and innocence in their love, the sense of guilt and perhaps of mutual reproof, which can wreck happiness and foul the springs of physical and spiritual health.

May such thoughts as these be burned into the consciousness of our young readers, so that they may be enabled to behave as true disciples in the hour of trial. To intend marriage is not to have a right already to enjoy the privileges of marriage: intentions sometimes fail; the acceptance of the responsibilities of marriage must come first.

LOVE HAS GONE DOWN IN THE WORLD

It has become more than ever necessary to write in this way because of the change that has taken place in the attitude of many people towards sexual behaviour: all young people are influenced by it, whether their engagement lasts long or not. The change cannot be denied: it is partly a change for the better and partly for the worse: two world wars and scientific developments have been its chief causes. Greater frankness has been widely accompanied by a loss of spiritual and moral ideals, whose result, especially in large cities, has been a casual, brazened, joyless promiscuity. Disciples who are usually safe from its worst effects, will do well to remember that "evil communications corrupt good manners":¹ whilst welcoming the greater freedom from prudery and shams, they must strive to resist the insidious lowering of the tone of their partnership and must seek not to lose grace and freshness, chivalry and idealism.

One part of their armour is the sound knowledge about the physical facts of marriage which they should receive in a wholesome manner. To enter upon marriage without it is to ask for troubles in the early days. Both these and many earlier strains and stresses, sources of acute distress to the adolescent mind, sound parental education could largely avoid. It should begin early: indeed, if it does not it can often not begin at all. The average child begins very early to ask questions which can be answered honestly and as completely as he is able to bear. Thus, gradually, a foundation of factual knowledge can be unemotionally laid, on which, at the age of puberty the building of moral standards can be settled and the coping-stone of individual responsibility fixed. In this, disciples of Christ, beyond all others, should be most concerned and best able to do their duty by their children. Where, for any reason, this is impossible, some respected, tactful friend should be asked to fill the breach. The duty is a moral one: it cannot be left to the biology teacher.

Certainly, knowledge of the facts is insufficient defence against the effects of this changed moral climate. The blatant crudeness and cynicism around can only be successfully withstood through the constant vision of the best and greatest. Supremely that means for all disciples the vision of the Lord

¹ 1 Cor. 15:33.

Jesus, lovely in strength and purity, and the need cannot be overstressed for young people seriously and reverently to study the Word of God in order to capture his spirit and imitate his way of thinking. But, in fact, they will read other books as well and the quality of their love will reflect the influences to which they submit their minds in newspapers, magazines, books, pictures and music. Even amongst believers there is some room for diversity of interests and tastes but those contacts should be cultivated which elevate the mind and feelings and those must be eschewed which degrade them. Paper-backed novelettes can hardly be expected to nourish high ideals, but there is much good prose and poetry that does. So too, the beauty of the natural world and of great art will offer more inspiring objects for the lovers' delight than the painted tawdriness of Hollywood divorcees, whilst music reminiscent of animal or savage convulsions will hardly give wings to the heart's desire. Disciples of all ages, whether married or engaged, need to be always alive to the effect their reading, listening and looking is having upon them.¹

LIVING WITH "IN-LAWS"

Some of the strains we have mentioned are avoided by those who marry young but in recent years there are often others which they incur. It may be said without fear of contradiction that they should avoid, if at all possible, living with parents, unless it is desirable for them to do so in order to support and care for them: there is important truth in the words: "for this cause shall a man *leave* his father and mother". Even when the old folk are sacrificing comfort and peace and enabling the young to save money, the strain on the tempers of all may be very great: the young are not always alert to the needs of older people and the parents are more easily reconciled to having to share their child's affection if the young couple are not in the parental home. Such difficulties can, of course, be welcomed as a challenge to Christian love and forbearance, and by exemplary self-discipline some have come through such tests with their characters enriched. Most of us do well to spare ourselves the strain.

BUSINESS WITHOUT CHILDREN?

Similarly one must state one's conviction that normally it is unwise to put off having children in the early years. Whilst procreation is not the sole intention of the marriage union and the sexual relation can be a means of expressing love for one's partner, yet to prefer comfort and luxury to parenthood is to divorce the marital relationship from its primary aim and to invite a considerable nervous tension. Normally - a most important saving word - it is better that children should be born from the first spontaneous love than that calculated self-interest should give them older parents. The wife's health, the child's physical heritage, the salutary effect of responsibility - all argue a case for having children early. Even more compelling is the fear that postponement of a family for reasons of selfish indulgence may become an indefinite postponement with the joys and sorrows of parenthood repeatedly being sacrificed to the gratification of ever-renewed whims and fancies. Then, when children are desired, it is too late: bitter regret cannot bring back the lost opportunity. Nervous disorders and spiritual ill-health often follow.

This is not to deny that parenthood should be approached with a sense of responsibility and with an intelligent concern for the welfare of our children and for the mother's fitness to care for them. Family limitation may have low or very high motives and may be achieved with healthy or unhealthy spiritual effects. To this, as to other aspects of married life, disciples must pray to bring a conscience not hardened by worldliness but attuned to the purity of their Lord.

¹ Matt. 5:29-30.

There are of course, many married couples¹ whose childlessness is due to no fault of their own: nothing in this life would have given them greater joy than to dandle their own child on their knees. A few find solace in adoption and where proper care is taken the results are often amazingly successful, but for many, the sound of children's laughter and the sparkle of their eyes must always be a source of mixed emotions, speaking to them of what might have been. Such sad ones deserve sincere and tactful sympathy almost as much as those who have lost through death the joy of their eyes and upon whose homes a strange stillness has fallen. Our Heavenly Father knows our needs. With love and wisdom He gives or denies, and what He has given He sometimes takes away. Though now we may not understand His ways, all will be made plain in the day when "God shall wipe away all tears".²

Those who have been blessed with children very rarely begrudge the sacrifices their upbringing often entails. They find ample compensation - if indeed they think it necessary - in the never failing interest of their development. They rejoice to answer their questions when they can. They support them in their failures and share the gladness of their successes. They seek to be worthy of their trust. They guide them towards the path of discipleship and their spiritual health is the constant burden of their prayers. Through the years of the children's dependence, the parents' love for each other is enriched and beautified against the time when, the children departing, they rejoice again in each other's sole companionship as at the first.

SNARES FOR THE UNTHOUGHTFUL

That, at least, is what ought to happen, especially in a believing household: it would be unrealistic to suggest that it always does. Such happy fruits cannot be reaped without patient effort, even by those who start well with the blessings of devoted love and a like faith. Identity of belief is not alone sufficient to ensure a happy married life, though it is an essential ingredient. Many trials and temptations come to test both love and faith, some that are common to all men, others that disciples only know.

So many of them are trivial and with a sense of humour can be seen in right proportion; but it is just a sense of humour which a man and a woman in love find so elusive, when offences, real or fancied, are exaggerated. Words spoken in haste are taken seriously and a battle of tongues is engaged in, in which each fears to retreat lest it should seem a confession of defeat. In certain moods, playful banter can lead to really painful disagreement.

There are more serious dangers. Criticism of the other's parents or relations; demands that all earlier friendships should cease; nostalgic longing by the husband for his mother's dainties; resentment of the attention claimed by the children; disagreement about their discipline; these are just a few of the mistakes young married people can make, which, unless checked early, can produce tragedies. From these, disciples of Christ are not completely immune.

Money matters also need sensible planning with mutual trust, if anxiety and its attendant ills are to be avoided. It is good that husband and wife should have been used to similar standards of comfort and important that they should agree as to how money should be spent. Regular, reasonable budgeting and accounting need not betoken avarice or a love of money, but a conscientious desire to do the right thing with the blessings God bestows. In such matters the believing wife can be a powerful influence for good by avoiding both fecklessness and excessive ambitions for her husband.

¹ According to some authorities one in ten.

² Rev. 21 : 4.

There are even more important ways in which a wife's spirit counts for much in the Christian family. Where her husband is a disciple active in his Master's service she is often called upon to make great sacrifices. She may be deprived of his company at weekends and often during the week, and even when he is at home she must often content herself with his silent presence, for study claims his full attention. Her cheerfulness under such trials is both a mark of genuine discipleship and also an inestimable help to her partner. His is a difficult task. He must do his Master's service and show Christian love at home. He must constantly consider what he is about, lest he find himself dealing with un-wearying patience with other people's problems and neglecting the spiritual welfare of his wife and family. He will do well to discuss with her how often he should be absent from home for long periods, remembering the variety that the Lord's work brings into his life by contrast with the monotony of her lonely, domestic duties. Yet even here he needs to beware: family devotion can prove merely an extension of self-centredness and preference for one's own comfort over the Lord's service can parade as dutiful regard for one's family obligations. There must always be a tension here for the true disciple; prayer and faith alone will teach how best to serve the Lord and love one's own.

Prayer and faith are indispensable additions to human love if the full, rich and happy married life which God intends, is to be our lot. Without them we can easily fall into drabness or, worse, into hypocrisy, and from them tragedy can result.

THE MODERN TRAGEDY

Tragedy is by no means too strong a word to describe the present situation in this country and one aim of this booklet is to strengthen its readers lest they should become involved in the tragedy or by familiarity begin to find it less tragic.

In 1947, one-fifth of the marriages contracted in Britain were likely to end in public breakdown: that was a peak figure but in subsequent years the rate continued at about 50,000 a year. The sordid tale that lies behind those figures will not be told here nor shall we labour their witness to a widespread collapse of self-control and a frequent neglect even of decency. No more cold statistics will be adduced, for the tragedy of each individual case defies mathematical computation, whilst the train of woe in physical and mental disease and in the blighted lives of children and children's children cannot be analysed and classified. Blame will not here be apportioned though a grave burden of responsibility could justly be laid on certain sections of the press which, under the guise of conducting righteous probes, spread low standards and create an unhealthy climate of opinion.

Our earlier pages have outlined the Christian ideal for married life and applied it to a wide variety of problems. It is that same constructive and idealistic attitude that we wish to encourage in this brief but unhappily necessary discussion of the disciple's attitude towards growing modern laxity.

ONE MAN WAS TO HAVE ONE WIFE

It cannot be too emphatically insisted on that both the Genesis record and the New Testament teaching built upon it envisage a lifelong binding union with one partner.¹ That was undoubtedly the divine intention of which the Lord reminded his questioners in Matthew 19: the lofty apostolic teaching we examined took it for granted. Experience has justified the wisdom of this arrangement: monogamy controls the sex impulse and relates it to personality and to a long-continued parental

¹ "It is now acknowledged that, contrary to an earlier theory of anthropologists, monogamy was not a development from polygamy but vice-versa." BRUNNER: *The Divine Imperative*, see page 342, 647-8.

responsibility: polygamy offers it variety of expression and debases it.

It is a matter of supreme importance that Christian disciples should be fully persuaded of this from the very start of their married life. Their wedding day should be an occasion of joy but also of firm and sober resolve, that, come what may, nothing but death shall part them. "A woman is bound to her husband so long as her husband liveth",¹ states an essential truth, even though its context is not concerned with marriage at all. Believers must not allow themselves to be infected with loose notions which would make marriage an experiment to be abandoned if unsuccessful, or when one's real "soulmate" comes along. They must intend fidelity to each other and realize that romantic love cannot, in the nature of things, persist unchanged, but that it can be enriched and deepened, or failing that, be replaced by undeviating loyalty to each other and to promises given.

Careful study of the Scriptures reveals that polygamy makes its first appearance there with Lamech in the wicked line of Cain. It became a widespread custom among the antediluvians and after the Flood it seems to have become a recognized practice among the people from whose society Abraham was called.

No sincere disciple will seek to justify a plurality or change of wives from Abraham's case, the second recorded in Scripture.² He will not fail to notice that the patriarch took Hagar at Sarah's suggestion and to her later sorrow and in doubt of God's promise. It will be seen too that in Jacob's case³ who, like his brother Esau, had more than one wife, Laban's deception was a contributory cause, and the intense rivalry of Rachel and Leah in childbearing complicated the issue.⁴ We should find no stumbling-block here, but rather a cause for gratitude that in spite of their fall from the original high ideal, God was willing to continue His gracious purpose of redemption through men who, in this respect, were like their contemporaries. Acknowledgment of God's power and faith in His Word were what God was seeking and was pleased to find, even in a social setting which did not answer to the original high ideal. So David, "a man after God's own heart", seems to have incurred divine displeasure for other reasons, but not for this, nor before him had Samuel's father. A plurality of wives undoubtedly entailed a departure from God's declared will, but its slight redeeming feature may very well have been that it avoided the harshness and cruelty to wife and children which must often have resulted from divorce.⁵

Similarly no faithful disciple will attempt to justify laxity by reference to the Mosaic ruling on divorce.⁶ In the Law of Moses, adultery, where the partners were caught in the act, was punished by death, the innocent partner being thus freed: a severe deterrent, this, required because of the people's unholy environment, and at the same time a stern lesson to teach the gravity in God's eyes of idolatry or spiritual adultery. For suspected adultery or for a whole series of faults, including the inadequate performance of domestic duties, wives were commonly at this time put away, husbands having come to regard it as their privilege to divorce them.⁷ It was against such a background that the Mosaic ruling was given, seeking not to encourage, still less to command divorce, but to put a restraint upon passion by making a man sit down and think first and then write a document. It was

¹ In Rom. 7:3 the Apostle is not concerned with divorce: he can certainly not be taken to deny the existence of an exceptive clause in Christ's teaching.

² Gen. 15:4.

³ Gen. 29 ; 26; 26 : 34.

⁴ Indeed, Augustine tried to justify patriarchal polygamy as the original norm, resulting from this supreme need for fruitfulness, and the woman's intense hope of bearing the promised destroyer of sin.

⁵ See Orr: *The Problem of the Old Testament*, pages 472-3.

⁶ Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-4.

⁷ Deut. 24: 1-4.

for "the hardness of their hearts", says Jesus, that this attempt was made to regulate and control irresponsibility. The same intention was underlined by the prophet Jeremiah:¹ he too refers to the fact that the guilty spouse was not allowed to return to the first partner and he gives the reason: lest by reckless changing of mind, irresponsible separation and return, the land should be corrupted. We can appreciate the wisdom of this restraint and the patient divine instruction of an erring people through law-giver and prophet, and yet feel instinctively that the right model for Christian conduct is the unchanging fidelity to a single spouse indicated at the beginning and reasserted by God through Malachi.² The best pattern for the "innocent" partner of an adulterer is God's own willingness to receive back again, as a forgiven wife, the erring people to whom, through both Jeremiah and Hosea, He yearningly appeals.³ This surely is a sufficient answer to the legalistic, unreal theory that the act of adultery irreparably breaks the original bond of union, making reconciliation and reunion impossible.⁴ Such a notion takes no account of the wider moral issues involved and is hardly less fallacious than the modern sophistry which says that when love ceases, the marriage should cease also.

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

The Lord himself gives us the same clear guidance as to the believers' moral duty. He does this by his general teaching on the treatment of offenders, and even of enemies, from which it is clear that the Christian part for the "innocent" partner is the way of forgiveness. He does it also when he takes his questioners back behind the Mosaic restraint which they had quoted, to the divine intention in woman's creation and thereby reasserts the divine will that marriage should be an indissoluble bond.⁵

It is by the spirit of this teaching that the earnest disciple, whose partner has grievously offended, will pray for grace to be guided in his unutterable confusion of emotions. The existence of an exceptive clause in Christ's teaching in Matthew 5 and 19 will not easily turn him from the Christian duty to forgive. He may know quite well that the clause cannot be shown to be an interpolation;⁶ he may similarly have found unconvincing the argument that Jesus was speaking only of premarital

¹ Jer. 3:1.

² Mal. 2:14.

³ Jer. 3:1 ; Hos. 2:19-20, etc.

⁴ Hermas, A.D. 140; Tertullian, A.D. 200.

⁵ In the time of Jesus, the Romans had deprived the Jews of the power to inflict capital punishment: adultery, therefore, was in fact no longer punished by death. It was allowed as a cause for divorce even by the strict school of Shamrnai, whilst the laxer school of Hillel allowed divorce for very trivial causes. Moreover, the wife also was now able to put away, as well as the husband, Herodias, for example, Herod's wife, having rejected her first husband (Mark 10:12). Further, "divorce without liberty of remarriage was unknown both to Jewish and Roman Law". (Inge: *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*).

The incident recorded in Mark 10 and Matt. 19 was an attempt to trap Jesus between these two rival schools. Partly to avoid the trap, and partly to show righteous scorn for the low level of their approach, he takes them back to the principle enunciated in the beginning.

⁶ It would be easier for the expositor if there were grave reasons to doubt its authenticity but on textual grounds the clause cannot be set aside. Opposition is subjective. Gore thought the clause genuine: Inge was against it: Brunner said it was interpolated by the early Church because they confused moral teaching with law-making and thought therefore, that the words of Jesus needed some correction. The fact is that it was omitted only by the Vatican Codex, whose authority on this point has been rejected by some of the best textual scholars. Theophilus quoted the clause in A.D. 180, as also did Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen.

fornication making later marriage null;¹ he may have very strong reasons inviting him to take his stand on the letter of this clause and to seek a divorce, knowing that the existence of the clause is an inconvenience for the church's strictest disciplinarians: yet with God's strength he can overcome such strong persuasions and win a victory that may well assure his own and his erring partner's salvation. If concern for physical or mental health or for the children's welfare makes reinstatement of the offender impossible or undesirable, forgiveness is not incompatible with separation, but it is clear that divorce and remarriage for ever preclude the possibility of reinstatement, even should sincere repentance ensue.²

A sincere attachment to the spirit of Christ's teaching will make easier the difficult path of disciples in what should be the very rare cases of grievous offence. A balanced acceptance of all Christ's words, informed by the same spirit of sympathy and understanding, will guide believers in their treatment of converts who have sinned or have been sinned against and been the subjects of a divorce before hearing the Gospel call: and the faithful preaching of the gospel in a society so sadly at fault may well increase the numbers of such converts. Above all it will be the prayer of writer and readers alike that so bright a light may shine from happy believers' homes, and such positive, realistic ideals be commended to the young by example and precept, that they themselves may never come near to falling in this matter and that the whole body may worthily work as salt in the world, preserving it from corruption.³

A GREAT ADVENTURE

Courtship and marriage can be a great adventure, especially for the disciple. In theory the bachelor and spinster should be able to live better lives and "attend upon the Lord without distraction".⁴ Doubtless, some do. In practice, however, "it is not good for a man to be alone". Most would admit that the dangers of their single state are great. Physical problems, nervous tensions, instability, selfishness, excessive caution, morbid attachment to set habits, all these may lie in wait for those who have no partner. Over all of these, saintly disciples have been known to triumph, winning heroic battles and devoting themselves with unflinching selflessness to the good of all whose needs they know. For some, such trials are bound to be in store: it ill becomes those whose lot is happier to mock, criticize or cruelly to pity. Rather we must commend them to the comfort of their God "who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able"⁵: may they find solace and strength in the thought that, even in this, it is theirs to follow the Master, who "was tempted in all points like as" they are.⁶

¹ The argument runs that if there has been premarital, illicit, sexual intercourse, marriage with another is no marriage at all, for the guilty party is already joined to another. Its chief ground is that had post-marital unchastity been intended, *moicheia* not *porneia* would have been used. But a careful examination of N.T. usage of *porneia* confirms Parkhurst's definition: "any commerce of the sexes out of lawful marriage" and the translation "unchastity" found in Weymouth, Moffatt, Wade and R.S.V.

There is a moral objection to the argument. Taken in conjunction with the absolute impossibility of divorce which it attempts to prove, it would preclude from the possibility of a happy marriage, any sinner converted from an impure way of life, baptized and later desirous of marrying a believer.

² It is just conceivable that in certain circumstances vindictiveness could prompt a refusal "to free an offending partner by divorce, but in Christian disciples the refusal is more likely to be made through the hope of eventual reconciliation.

³ For a fuller treatment of divorce, see J. Carter's *Marriage and Divorce* which the present author fully endorses.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7:35.

⁵ 1 Cor. 10:13.

⁶ Heb. 4:15.

The gift of a life partner and children provides those gentle persuasions to unselfishness which most of us so much need: by their means our Heavenly Father may begin to "chase this self-will through all our heart". Such kindly influences work mostly in ways that are seen, helping to produce a quiet, contented, godly atmosphere for our children to grow up in. But in the most private moments of our life and in our inmost thoughts marriage holds for the disciple a glorious challenge. It is no less than this: to overcome by the Christian love of giving our basic urge to get: to seek above all, as lover, husband, wife or parent another's happiness and good.

THE INSPIRING VISION

Whether we look forward with youthful hope or backward with grateful memories, our first inspiring vision must ever be before our eyes. One of the loveliest responses to our Saviour's redeeming love can be the union of two well-matched lives in physical, mental and spiritual harmony, unselfishly loving each other, prayerfully guiding their children, steadfastly serving their fellow-pilgrims, joyfully working and waiting for the Lord: here can be the gladdest fore-taste of the Kingdom's bliss.

Our Lord himself shall come as the Bridegroom. He who with his presence graced the wedding at Cana in Galilee¹ and found in the figure of the marriage feast a joyful image of his glad return, shall seek his bride in the end of the days. May those who through devotion to their Lord deny themselves the joy and satisfaction of the closest of human ties find reward in his service and comfort in his never-failing friendship. May they have grace to make themselves ready and have it granted unto them "to be clothed in fine linen, clean and white". May all who make their pilgrimage within the bonds of wedlock, live together with gratitude and in holiness of life, that finally, by God's mercy, they may be "called to the marriage supper of the Lamb".²

Because of the nature of this subject the writer feels constrained, publicly though perforce anonymously, to thank all those whose example has helped him in a task which awareness of his own faults would have made him unwilling, without such help, to undertake.

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¹ John 2:2.

² Rev. 19:7-9.