

# One Flesh One Covenant

## Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

(Part 1)

by Dean Taylor

“...Yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.  
And did not he make one?” (Mal. 2:14-15).

**D**ivorce...the very word brings such pain, such heartache, such contention. It not only divides families, it splits churches, separates friends, polarizes denominations; it isolates victims, champions assailants, destroys faith, and disparages numberless children caught in the middle, asking—*“Why? Where is God?”*

The truth is—God *is* there, and He cares about these little ones; He cares about the families, He hears the prayers of the bereaved, He hears the cry of the widow and the fatherless—*He cares.*

He even sees the mistakes, the wrong choices, the disastrous scenarios; and He stands listening, ready to help. He watched the sins done in ignorance, the sins done in hard times, and the sins done blatantly to His face; and to all these He offers *blood*—the sacrificial blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, to atone, redeem, forgive, reconcile and empower these destroyed lives, so that they can become beautiful, fruitful children of God once again.

He sees the “impossible situations,” and just like He does with so many other “impossible” things in our lives, He promises to bring beauty from ashes, streams in the desert, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. God is glorified when He takes the impossible and says—*“DONE.”* As it says in Romans 4:17, “...even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.”

The lives affected by divorce are real people with real pains. Many have suffered betrayed trusts and bear deep scars. They are not an “argument” or a “doctrine,” they are souls—souls that Jesus died for. Because of this, they cannot be dismissed, ignored, maligned, or marginalized. As a people of God, we are called to minister to them. Moreover, as a church in America, we must recognize that this “people group” is not merely a passing fad, but an ever increasing element of our morally declining society.

With these hard situations, like all hard situations, the temptation is to ignore it and hope it will just go away. This seems to be the prevailing tendency among the churches which maintain a conservative, Biblical attitude toward divorce and remarriage. Defeating words such as, “Let someone else minister to them,” “They will never fit in here,” or “They’ll never stay,” are not words of faith. The purpose of the Church is not to exist as some sterilized, fictitious “Precious-Moments-like” figurine displayed on a shelf. We are to face the hurts, the pains, the ugly, the despised, the dark, the diseased, the impossible, and then, administer Christ to them. The subway station

graffiti often reads “*Jesus Saves,*” and if this isn’t true, then we’re wasting our time.

In the next few issues we will be examining the Biblical guidelines for marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It is my prayer that, by the grace and anointing of God, the truth of Jesus will be uplifted, and not my opinion or the opinion of an agenda or a denomination. “*Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar*” (Rom. 3:4). I’m certainly not the final word on divorce and remarriage. I am a pastor, not a theologian, and I have no desire for a religious debate for the sake of academic exercise. It is my hope that these articles might encourage all of us to reach out and minister to those who are victims of divorce, and mostly, that the scores of souls which feel caught in “impossible situations” would discover the light of the Gospel, and find Jesus there waiting with the key of faith that opens any door! Overall, it is my prayer that God would strengthen that which remains, as we seek to hold up what the Word of God has to say on these issues.

## Another World

Daily in the midst of the market place, the water well, and the synagogue—laughing at weddings and crying at funerals—observing the wink of the money changer’s eye, and the tremble of the widow’s hand, Jesus walked for 30 years—watching, pondering, and comparing. He compared all that was “man” with all that was “divine,” and taught that by grace men could become partakers of the boundless storehouse of the Kingdom of God. Although He had voluntarily laid down His divinity, He knew, even as a child, who His true father was. Even though His celestial throne was awaiting His return, Jesus knew Heaven. No idealistic thoughts were needed to remind Him to “*seek those things which are above.*” All the holiness, purity, order, majesty and worship of that place were created by Him, and it was in that place that Jesus taught us to pray: “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*” (Matt 6:10).

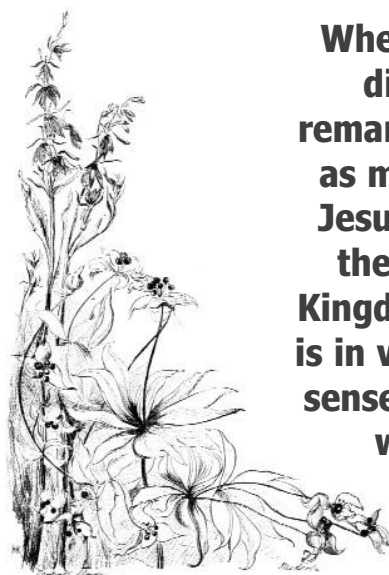
What must it have been like to be *Him*—in the everyday hustle and bustle of shopping, working, synagogue-ing, etc.? When Jesus’ time had come and he began to teach the people, His words cut through to the very heart and motive of everything we do. Even our everyday necessities were challenged by Him. He did not shrink away from bringing attention to our propensity toward living careless and godless lives. Jesus warned, “*For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark*” (Matt 24:38).

He challenged earthly securities, self-defense, judicial vindication, and all other efforts of human strength and set them at naught. He took purity and sin beyond the outward and proceeded to challenge even the inward motives of our hearts. Revenge, anger, covetousness and lust had never been taken this far before. He split the society, changed the world, and brought us a flawless image of our God.

When discussing divorce and remarriage, as well as many other of Jesus’ teachings, the clearer the Kingdom of Heaven is in view, the more sense the teaching will make. Also, the more the Church represents a faith-filled expression of the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount, the more clearly a message of repentance like this will be demonstrated, “*not just in word but in power.*”

## Marriage

Married life was, in the time of Jesus—perhaps even more than it is today—the very center of Jewish life. Indeed, it would appear that it would have been quite a strain for them to have considered the unmarried man complete. As it was recorded in the Jewish Talmud, “*The man who is not married at 20 is living in sin.*” And also, “*Any man who has no wife is no proper man for it is said ‘male and female created He them and called their name Adam.’*” However, while the married state was certainly prominent in Jewish society, divorce had also become an unfortunate experience of their time. Additionally, while the marriage bond was highly revered, the bond for the man differed somewhat from that of the woman. Polygamy, which by Jesus’ time was becoming very out of fashion, was inevitability still a part of their heritage and domestic



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identity. What affect this mindset had on the sense of responsibility from the men is unknown; but judging from Jesus' teaching, it seems that their view was off balance, at least in part, because of their misunderstanding of what marriage really was.

Jesus raised the duty and majesty of marriage higher than it had been for a long time—"since the beginning." His illustrations to it and parables about it demonstrated that Jesus saw in the marriage relationship a type or likeness that was so close to His heart that it typified salvation, redemption and eternal fellowship in heaven. (Matt 25; Eph 5; Rev 20)

That said, as honorable as Jesus makes marriage out to be, He also showed us that marriage, itself, was not to be the very center of our identity and focus. He taught that this sacred place in our hearts was to be reserved only for Him. *"And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:25 -26).

Radically challenging the entire vision and understanding of our life in heaven, He even disclosed that in that place, many parts of the normal married life as we know it will not even exist. *"For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven"* (Mar 12:25 ).

## The Beginning

As Jesus was traveling into the coast of Judea, he was met by a group of Pharisees who wanted to "tempt" him, by asking what his position was on divorce. However, before Jesus would enter into this discussion about divorce, he apparently felt it necessary to correct their view of marriage. As Andrew Cornes suggests in the book *Divorce and Remarriage, Biblical Principles & Pastoral Practice*, the reason the Jews were off on their doctrine of divorce and remarriage was because, like the modern church, the Jews came about it from the wrong perspective: "They began

with the Biblical passage about divorce...he began with the key passage about marriage. And one of the points he was certainly making was that their mistake stemmed from starting in the wrong place."

*"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"*

The passage of scripture that Jesus took the Pharisees to was back to the very first marriage between Adam and Eve, found in Gen 2:18-25. Jesus answered the Pharisees saying,

*"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"* (Matt. 19:4-6)?

Here, taking the Pharisees back to the original marriage in the Garden of Eden, Jesus stated to them what the fundamentals of marriage actually are. He taught that since the dawning of creation, marriage essentially requires:

- **One man and one woman**
- **A man must leave his father and mother**
- **A cleaving together**
- **Becoming one flesh**

**1 One man and one woman:** Modern attempts to disparage the sanctity of marriage by suggesting the union of same sex partners defies nature, historical precedent, and common morality. However, most importantly, it defies the Law of God at the very core. History itself has borne out that even when secular nations have ignored this ordained creation principle, total moral breakdown inevitably follows. So, the primary element necessary for a lawful marriage is to have one man and one woman.

**2 The man must leave his father and mother:** Interestingly, the focus here is on the man. The changing of their place of residence naturally



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comes to mind. However, since in the Jewish culture moving was not always the norm, its connotation suggests even more than this. It suggests a moving of the place of loyalty, identity and emotion. Before the marriage, the man was completely a part of his parents' "household." All of his identity came from there. Now, in this new household, this chief place of identity, benevolence and loyalty was to be rendered unto his wife. Cornes suggests that in our modern culture, which puts little emphasis on the honor and loyalty given to our parents, this seems but a minor and insignificant point. However, to the Israelite, this change of household identity, authority, and loyalty had a profound effect on all relationships. (ibid., 57)

**3 A cleaving together:** "...For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall *cleave* to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" The Hebrew word for "cleave" in this passage suggests the idea of being glued together. This word is used in Job 38:38, speaking of dirt clods which stick together after the rain. In another place, it is used by Joshua, referring to a military alliance (Josh 23:12). The word is also used referring to the leprosy that would cling forever to the dishonest and greedy Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). In marriage, the husband and wife are "glued" together—bound inseparably into one solitary unit. (Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth*)

In the Greek, the word "*cleave*" (pros-kol-lah'-o) means: to glue upon, glue to, or to join one's self to closely. I'll never forget a brilliant, real-life object lesson of this passage I once saw in a children's lesson. A few years ago, in order to graphically demonstrate the meaning of this word, Bro. Paul Lloyd from Charity Christian Fellowship, took a piece of wood that had been glued together the night before and attempted to separate it with great force as the children looked on expectantly. I'll never forget the result—as we all looked on in astonishment, the board indeed splintered into pieces, but the union was still intact! The message was clear.

**4 Becoming one flesh:** The most obvious use of this phrase is realized in the marital affection between man and wife. This is certainly in view in Paul's rebuke to the men at Corinth in their sin with prostitutes, "*Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What?*

*know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh" (1 Cor. 6:15-16).*

Although God ordained that there be strong emotional and spiritual ties created through marital affection, the Bible clearly shows that in marriage, this "one flesh" identity goes beyond mere physical affection. Taken in isolation, the "one flesh" attachment of fornication is certainly sharing in a privilege granted only to the married, and is a serious offence to God. However, the conjugal act, in and of itself, does not "*make*" the marriage. If this were the case, then there would have been no reason to differentiate between Solomon's wives and Solomon's concubines.

Taken in the creation context of Genesis quoted by Jesus, this miraculous union of the "*two becoming one*" is something that is accomplished supernaturally, by God. God is present at the marriage, and it is God who makes this union. The first two parts of marriage quoted by Jesus indicate an active process, "*leave and cleave.*" This last part, and the one that Jesus seems to bring the most attention to, is spoken of as an accomplished fact, "*and they twain shall be one flesh.*"

Commentator Andrew Cornes, discussing the phrase "*become one flesh*" from the Hebrew, states: "The Hebrew phrase does not describe the process, but the accomplished fact, the changed situation." In other words, the reality of becoming "one flesh" is not just an *idea* for the married couple, it is something spiritual and supernatural that God accomplishes at marriage. This is something that goes beyond basic human comprehension. In this light, it is indeed a "*mystery*," as Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "*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" (Eph 5:28-31).*

## Becoming Blood Relatives

When God made Eve out of Adam's rib, He was very graphically demonstrating the authenticity of this "one flesh" relationship. When Adam saw her for the first time he cried out with joy. A literal translation of what he said is, "*This one at last. Bone—my*



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*bones! Flesh—my flesh! This one shall be called woman because from man this one was taken!*" (Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth*)

It is a very interesting fact that this concept of becoming "one flesh" was taken so far by Mosaic law, that once a person was married, their spouse's family then became related to them, just as if they were their own flesh and blood.

The various prohibitions of incestuous marriage found in Leviticus 18 are based not only on literal blood lines, but also on these 'blood' relationships created through marriage. Marriage thus created both vertical blood relationships in the form of children, but it also formed horizontal 'blood' relationships between spouses. In Lev. 18:18 and 20:14, it is written that a man was not allowed to marry his wife's mother or sister. Incest laws were common among ancient civilizations. What made the Hebrew culture different was that the prohibitions against marrying one's own family included not just your own blood relatives, but also those who *married* your blood relatives. (Lev. 18:8, 14-16) (Wenham & Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*)

## No Longer Twain

To these basics of marriage, Jesus added his profound, dominical explanation point!—"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Matt. 19:6). The entire focus of the debate was resolved in this God-ordained fact. The Pharisees were asking about the various legalities of splitting the two individuals up. However, Jesus attempted to change their entire way of thinking, informing them that contrary to what they were thinking, the married couple remained no longer as two individuals that even *could* be split up, "they are no more twain, but one flesh."

## What God Has Put Together

Jesus then concludes the question of whether or not it was ever allowable to permit divorce with this weighty command, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt.19:6).

This phrase suggests the idea of a covenant—a covenant in which God was an active witness in the marrying process. This is a significant point because it takes the question about the validity of a marriage out of the numerous human scenarios and possibilities, and places it entirely in the hand of God. He is saying that man may contrive any manner of legal proceedings and name it all kinds of various things, but the



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bottom line is that marriage is a covenantal unity between man and woman that the Lord God, himself, has performed. Regardless of how oblivious the couple may be to the mystery of the spiritual truth of the union, it is God who has made them one flesh.

The prophet Malachi, more than any other writer, bears testimony to this covenantal aspect. When the people of God were crying to God because they didn't understand why their prayers were not being heard, Malachi told them it was because they were divorcing their wives. He warned them that by doing this they were breaking their covenant and violating their "one flesh" relationship.

*"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" (Mal 2: 14-16).*

The covenantal aspect of marriage cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, conservative commentators on divorce and remarriage usually divide, for the most part, into two camps—those who believe that marriage is simply the forming of "one flesh," and those who believe that marriage is strictly a covenant. I believe both concepts are involved in a Biblical understanding of marriage. While I believe the emphasis of Jesus' and Paul's words were certainly on the "one flesh" relationship, the covenantal concept, especially as it pertains to the heart of God, is undoubtedly expressed in the Scripture and should not be disregarded. To ignore this aspect of God's involvement in the marital union would be dishonest and perhaps even irresponsible. We are uphold the entire Word of God. Let's remember, too, we are told it is a "mystery."

Contemporary thinking makes very little of covenants, vows and promises. Almost every culture

has some kind of marriage ceremony. The prophet Malachi is telling us that God is witness to these ceremonies and does not take the vows spoken lightly.

Ronald Martin, in his paper *“Divorce, Remarriage and Reconciliation”* speaks strongly about vows and covenants saying, “The only vows that did not stand as spoken, were the vows of a wife or an unmarried daughter, and then only if they were disallowed at the first hearing by the husband or father. All other covenants, based on a promise to God, stood as they were uttered (Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:21-23). Oaths that turned out in be for the hurt of the one who uttered them stood (Ps 15:41). This keeping of covenants was considered that important to God that He required that an animal dedicated to him could not be switched for another animal even if the dedicated animal turned out to be flawed. He would rather have a sacrifice that was less than perfect than to have a man change a vow (Lev 27:9-11). Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 clearly teaches us that it is a sin not to perform our vows, even ones that we later realize were in error. Jephthah discovered this much to his dismay (Jud 11:30-36). Joshua also realized this after he made a covenant that clearly violated the command of God (Ex 23: 32-33 Josh 9:15-21). Yet this covenant needed to stand: and even generations later, God punished Israel for violating it” (2 Sam 21:1).

## Can any vows ever be broken?

Some ask about vows that have been made to satanic secret societies like the Masons, or vows of celibacy by converted Roman Catholic priests, such as Menno Simons. Others ask about religious groups which require vows at membership, many of which are spoken without any true sincerity or conversion of

the heart. What happens if the person later realizes their vows were made fraudulently, out of peer pressure or for any other insincere, illegal or dishonest reason. Can these vows be “broken”? I can’t answer all the various angles in this particular article on marriage. Perhaps we will be able to address this concern in a future article, but let it suffice it to say that vows have always been a very serious thing in the eyes of God, from the Old Testament right on through to the teachings of Jesus. Do you think it is just coincidence that after Jesus’ teaching on adultery, divorce and remarriage in the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus immediately introduces his teachings on oaths? (Matt 5: 36 Jas 5:12) I don’t think so.

## To Conclude

The essence of the teaching of Jesus is the cross—complete self-denial, complete abandonment of self-rights and self-interest. To look at our marriages through the eyes of the cross puts our marriages in their proper perspective. A healthy marriage is about each partner seeking to lay his or her life down for the other. This world’s pursuit of a happy marriage, with its barrage of self-help books, self-improvement seminars and “getting the most out of your spouse” attitudes are not to be the focus in a marriage where Christ is Head. As God has mysteriously joined man and wife together into one person, He has done so for a reason. He does this for a channel of grace—to seek a godly seed, a receptacle of the divine image, a beacon to the world, which testifies magnificently of the existence of another realm, one which exists for no other reason than to bring glory to God! May our marriages and all of our lives, by the grace of God, do just that. □