

The Grace of God



"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us..." (Titus 2:11-12).

August 19, 2007 (Vol. 7)

Authorizing The Unauthorized

dwh

In 1877, J. W. McGarvey wrote two articles titled "Legalized Adultery" and "Legalized Adultery Again" (Life & Lessons of J.W. McGarvey p. 232-238). In these short articles he laments that people were getting married in violation of God's word. McGarvey's examples are not of brethren who did this, but of two denominational preachers who did.

In any event, he points out that these two attempted to find justification for their behavior in 1 Cor. 7:15, which says: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." McGarvey rightly says that **after** the unbeliever departs nothing in this text authorizes the Christian to remarry. The phrases "not under bondage" and "called us to peace" do not imply authority for a new marriage, because Paul has already forbidden such (1 Cor. 7:10-11). But what McGarvey misses is that in the same passage (v. 10-11) Paul also identifies not just remarriage as unscriptural, but also divorce: "Let **not** the wife **depart** from her husband... and let **not** the husband **put away** his wife." **Divorce**, for reasons other than sexual immorality, is **not authorized** by God (cp. Matt. 19:6, 9).

McGarvey then proceeds to quote an article describing a young married couple. The woman returned to her parent's house for some 7 years & would not return to her husband. The article asserts: "...There may be good reasons why he should obtain legal separation, and cut her off from all claim on him or his estate." Really? While she is no doubt in the wrong for leaving him & not fulfilling her marriage obligations, is he justified in pursuing a **legal separation** for financial purposes? What ever happened to "for better and for worse" and "for richer and for poorer" and "until death do us part"? Better still, what happened to "What God has joined let **not** man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6)?

The article repeats: "There may be good reasons for separation, which still are not good reasons

for marrying again." Then McGarvey affirms this article as a good one. But neither the article nor McGarvey's affirmation authorize what the Lord forbids. If there are any "good reasons for separation" **other than adultery** (Matt. 19:9), then let any man produce the **book, chapter and verse which authorizes it!** First Corinthians 7 does not do so, it **forbids** you from leaving your mate & then addresses if **your mate** leaves you contrary to God's will.

In McGarvey's second article he errs even more on this subject. He received a question: "*If the husband leave the wife without sufficient cause, and marry again, does this adulterous life, on his part, give the wife a scriptural ground for divorce and the right to marry again?*" When I read this I was amazed that the very issue we face today was verbatim faced in the 1800's. Solomon was correct when he said there is not anything new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). But read the question again (bold emphasis was mine). Note the cause of the divorce. Was it a scriptural cause (Matt. 19:9)? No. Thus, when a man puts away his wife without cause & remarries he would be in adultery (Matt. 19:9a). And for the woman who was put away unscripturally to remarry would be adultery (Matt. 19:9b). Yet, McGarvey boldly says: "*I think there can be no doubt that it does; for in this case adultery is unquestionably committed by the husband, and this, according to the Savior's teaching, justifies the wife in contracting another marriage.*"

Did you catch where McGarvey erred? First there was a divorce **not** for fornication. Christ forbids anyone in such a case from remarrying, yet McGarvey reasons so as to justify one person's remarriage. How so? This is his second error – he assumes that adultery **after** a divorce gives Biblical justification for the original wife to remarry. But in Matt. 19:9 when we read of a **married** couple who **divorce not for cause**, the result is **prohibition** for either of them to marry another. Some today teach "**Whenever** adultery occurs it is cause", but in the context of Matt. 19:9, adultery is to be the "cause" for the putting away.

What does "cause" mean? Matt. 19:3 & 10 "cause" or "case" is Strong's #156. It means "a cause, i.e. a logical **reason** or **motive**, an accusation, case, cause, crime, or fault". "Cause" in Matt. 19:5 is Strong's # 1752 and means "**on account of, because**, for the cause of, for the sake of, by reason of". "For" fornication is Strong's # 1909, "properly, meaning superimposition of time, place, order, etc. ...**because** of..." The common & repeated point of these different words imposes the rule that in order to put away a mate "for fornication" fornication must have already occurred! For example, if your boss fired you, then a year later stole money from you, could you rightly say you **now** quit **because** he stole money from you? Can adultery that happens **after** the marriage has ended be the "cause" for the ending of the

marriage? Friends, Jesus did **not** say or imply “whenever” adultery occurs. But you can hear and read of some “gospel preachers” who say this very thing! Such men are **not** preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-9)!

Closely tied with this is McGarvey’s third error, the assertion that the already put away woman may now take her ex-husband’s actions **as cause for remarriage**. McGarvey accepts post-putting-away adultery as “cause for divorce” (contrary to what Jesus describes) & asserts that it is “cause for remarriage”. Without a justifiable divorce, no remarriage is permitted by the Lord (Matt. 19:9 a & b). Yet McGarvey does not explain how adultery that is committed **after** the divorce can be claimed as “cause” for the divorce. How can anyone divorce for a reason that did not happen yet? How can you divorce for “cause” if it did not exist or were not aware of it?

But some today have taken up where McGarvey left off in justifying remarriage for unscripturally divorced persons. One such theory has been called “mental divorce”. Of course, those who teach this error do not like the term “mental divorce”, but consider why such a description is appropriate. If I put away my wife not for scriptural cause, then some years later remarry; is my wife put away (divorced)? Yes. Is our marriage sundered? Yes. There remains, of course, God’s legislation concerning what is right & wrong (Rom. 7:1-3 “bound by law”), but our actual marriage has ended (1 Cor. 7:11 “unmarried”). I should, of course, repent & seek reconciliation.

Now, place my put away wife squarely in the seat of the innocent. She did nothing to deserve or encourage this divorce. She did not desire it or agree to it, but it was cruelly done to her. Now, after all these years when I marry another – does this change the fact that she was **already** put away? No. Was this adultery the cause of the divorce? No. Is there anything she can do to “put away” her **ex**-husband? If so, what is it? If you define “putting away” as including what Romans 13 says (i.e. government regulations for marriage & divorce) that is **already** done. Even if you completely exclude this & recognize some other means of “putting away” (such as “sending the wife out of the house” or “breaking the marriage vows”), it has **already** been done. What is left to do? What tangible manifestation is available to carry out a “putting away”? Some say that the wife can still “put away her husband” even at this point; but that fails to recognize the fact that he has already put her away (cp. Matt. 19:9b). The only thing that would be left for her is a mental decision. She may try, to whatever degree, to carry out a “putting away” of her **ex**-husband, but it has **already** been done to her.

The fact is the marriage has already **ended**. And a mental decision by itself is not an actual divorce. Consider Matt. 1:19, “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was **minded** to put her away privately.” Joseph’s decision to put her away privately was the **decision** to do it, but not

the actual doing of it. No one denies that “putting away” **involves** a mental decision. But what we accuse the “mental divorce” position of doing is reducing putting away to just the mental decision. For whatever is “done” to put away a spouse, **has already been done**; so what is left except this mental decision? It is a mere **imagining** that they are now putting away their **former** mate, a **pretending** that it has not already been done to them.

The thing that has always amazed me is why men such as McGarvey in the 1800’s & other very intelligent men today, who can teach so much truth on so many topics; will yet become entangled in some complicated error like this. Whatever the reason, it is not right. And whatever the reasons, we cannot turn a blind eye to the dangerous influence of false teaching. No matter the amount of good they may do in other areas, if they teach error in one thing – then we must keep ourselves from fellowshiping them (2 John 9-11) & from being influenced by them (Rom. 16:17-18).

Many of us have lost associations with people we like & respect because they persist in sin. It is sad & can be discouraging to lose friends this way. But we must come to understand what Paul said, “If any man doesn’t love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. Come, Lord!” (1 Cor. 16:22)

Brethren, think long and hard about truth. Think clearly on fellowship with sin. Think correctly about what it takes to be pleasing to the Lord. For in the great and final day, what we have pursued so fervently of this world’s pleasures and nourished so carefully of this world’s treasures; will suddenly and eternally pale in importance. “But seek first God’s Kingdom, and his righteousness...” (Matt. 6:33)

PEOPLE TO REMEMBER & PRAY FOR

Johanna Fletcher, Othena Kinnard (in Nashville), Wesley Geer, Mag Bumbalough, Thelma Cunningham, Mary Cox, Monie Petty, Dave Poteet (NHC 212), Dorris Williams, Robert & Betty England, Joe Smith, Mike Tenpenny, Thelma Klein, Nathan Hill, DeLeesa Price (expecting). Lydia Poe, Larry Bumbalough, Jake Hale, Joshua & Misty Poteet, Ed & Carolyn Williams, Kenley Streeval. Matthew Taylor (leukemia).

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Radio Program** - Every Sun. 2pm, AM 1050 WSMT
- **Door To Door** - Every Tuesday @ 6pm.
- **Home Bible Study** - Sat. Aug. 4th & 18th.
- **Ladies Class** - 2nd & Last Sunday Each Month.
- **Business Meeting** - Sun. July 29
- **GM** - Raymond Castillo, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

<http://frontiernet.net/~nscoc>
nscoc@frontiernet.net