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The Ethics of Marriage and Divorce



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"The Leaflet dealing with the subject of Marriage and Divorce published by Rev. A. E. Allin, of Port Lambton, Ontario, has been read with very great interest. The discussion is timely and must be very helpful to Pastors who are preparing addresses upon the subject, and to people who are really desirous of fully understanding the subject dealt with. We very cordially commend it to our Ministers and People."

T. ALBERT MOORE,
General Secretary Evangelism and
Social Service, Methodist Church.

"I have read with great interest your treatise on "The Ethics of Marriage and Divorce." Your message is timely, scriptural, and scholarly. Our day needs such a word as you have spoken and I hope it may have a wide circulation for the good it will mean to the State, to the Church, and to humanity."

GEO. T. WEBB,
General Superintendent,
Baptist Church, Canada.

Copies of "The Ethics of Marriage and Divorce" can be had from the Author, Rev. A. E. Allin, Port Lambton, Ont., at 5c. each; 25 for \$1.00; 100 for \$3.75, postage prepaid; 500 for \$8.50; or \$30.00 per 1000, by express.

The Ethics of Marriage and Divorce.

“AND there came unto him Pharisees tempting Him and saying, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And He answered and said, Have ye never read that he that made them from the beginning made them male and female and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the twain shall become one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement and to put her away? He sayeth unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and he that married her that is put away committeth adultery.” Matt. 19:3-9.

The text is a statement made by our Lord on the subject of marriage. The Pharisees had come to Jesus with a catch question in order that He might be led to commit himself and so run counter to the generally accepted standards of his day. But Jesus embraced the opportunity to declare the mind of God on the whole marriage question, and as the subject of marriage, including di-

voice, is a live and pressing issue in the world today, it will be well for us reverently to study His Words.

We shall study—

- 1st. The duty of marriage ;
- 2nd. The nature of marriage ;
- 3rd. The purpose of marriage; and
- 4th. The proper grounds of divorce.

First, then, the duty of marriage :

The Christian Church, taken as a whole, has probably never held the true conception of marriage. Early in the Apostolic age the Apostles, influenced by the distressing persecutions of the time, and by the hope of the speedy return of the Lord, discouraged marriage for a time—"For the present emergency," wrote Paul. In addition to this, the lofty spirituality of the early believers, coupled with a wrong view of the purpose of marriage, made them feel that marriage was incompatible with the highest spiritual state. Prof. Ruschenbush describes the situation in these words—"Marriage, too, was regarded by many of the early church teachers as a lower moral condition, a relation necessarily involving physical defilement, a compromise with the fallen life of humanity, a concession to the weakness of the flesh. It was a relation not good in itself, but simply a preventive of licentiousness, needed by the weak." Thus the sentiment in favor of celibacy slowly spread, and in process of time the celibate state became invested with a superior moral sanctity which developed into a prohibition of marriage for the clergy and the official encouragement of the cloistered life for the laity, so monasteries and nunneries sprang up everywhere. Not that Christianity originated the idea of the cloistered life—it was borrowed from the heathen world.

The Reformation changed this view to a more scriptural one. "Marriage is honorable in all" became the watchword, although the duty of marriage was not emphasized. There was probably no need at that time that it should be. All that seemed to be required was that that most sacred of human relations should be recognized as holy and in harmony with the will of God.

But times have changed. Altered industrial and so-

cial conditions have made it necessary for us to get back to the Bible on this question. Marriage may no longer be regarded as optional. Duty must be emphasized. Wedlock has all too long been considered a matter of convenience and money has been very largely the arbiter, both as to the time of marriage and in the choice of a life partner. The words of the Saviour have practically slept for nineteen hundred years, and the world as well as the kingdom of God has suffered in consequence.

Jesus was asked a question concerning divorce, and in his answer said, "He which made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause"—or for the reason that they were made male and female—"a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife." In other words a man shall recognize God's plan for the race and get married. The law is a positive one, based on a fact of nature. "Marriage," says one, "owes its institution to nature, its perfection to law, and its holiness to religion," and the thing that essentially constitutes marriage, according to Justice Carbonneau, is "the consent of a man and a woman to unite together for common life and the preservation of humanity. This is not only the basis of the contract, but it is the contract itself; the sacrament is simply a form which gives it solemnity, and the civil functions are but another form which gives it publicity, authenticity and civil effect." Now "the consent of a man and a woman to unite together for common life and the preservation of humanity" cannot be neglected without loss—every way, physically, morally and numerically. It may be said, speaking generally, that the highest physical development is attained in the married state. One has only to compare the receding form of the unmarried woman with the plump, robust figure of the "joyful mother of children" to be convinced that the latter and not the former state is according to God's order. The fact also, as is borne out by statistics, that married persons of both sexes live longer than single ones is sufficient evidence that wedlock is the normal human relation.

Moreover, the problem of social vice in town and city will not be successfully dealt with so long as reformers try to cure the evil by repressive and rescue measures only. The social evil ought to be and may be suppressed. It must be kept under the ban of law and denied the light of day. To allow an evil to live under restrictions, even

the severest, is to give license to it, and lessens its heinousness in the public mind. The state is the law guardian of public morals, and she cannot afford to license any form of immorality. But the vile traffic will still flourish in spite of law, in spite of social purity efforts, until God's positive law be complied with and men and women recognize their duty, not only to become husband and wives, but fathers and mothers. If the monasteries and nunneries "with all the powerful religious incentives to purity that a most exacting and abandoning consecration could give them could not save them at times from running riotously into the social sin" there is not much likelihood that those who lay no claim to a Christian life will avoid for long this deep ditch. Something can undoubtedly be done by law. The state can see that immorality shall not become a business, but it is the duty of the church to show the people what is the divine law, and to tone up the individual conscience on the subject. Rev. Josiah Strong says, "Our main hope in the social crusade must be in the rousing, the development, the education of the moral sense of the community. We must exalt and insist upon, and show the ideals of the body, of the sexual life, of marriage, of motherhood and of fatherhood. We must show correspondingly the degradation, the danger, the moral baseness of impurity, unchastity and every violation of the body and of the sexual life." In other words, the moral sanctions of God's holy law must be impressed upon the public conscience and at the same time there must be plainly laid down the obligations of true citizenship which is the natural safeguard against this form of evil. Paul is very illuminating here. Speaking to mankind generally he says—"To avoid fornication let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband," (1st Cor. 7:2). This passage, it must be borne in mind, is to be understood in the light of the context, for, taken by itself it would seem to regard marriage as simply a preventive of fornication. But Paul only recognizes the fact that human nature is weak and points out the natural safeguard against fornication and then indicates the proper sex relations in the married state. The bed must be undefiled, or in other words, there must be self-control. The gauge of liberty is made to be the desire or need of the other and not one's own passion, consequently this law becomes at once a safeguard against immorality on the one hand and a prohibition of incontinence on the other. The whole passage reads, "But be-

cause there is so much fornication every man should have a wife and every woman should have a husband. Let a man pay his wife her due, and let a woman also pay her husband his. A married woman is not mistress of her own person; her husband has certain rights. Do not refuse one another, unless perhaps it be just for a time and by mutual consent so that you may devote yourselves to prayer and may then associate again; lest the adversary begin to tempt you because of your deficiency in self-control." (Weymouth's translation).

2nd. The nature of marriage—

Some base marriage on religion, some on love, and some on civil law. For the first the sanctity and indissolubility of wedlock depends on the pronouncement of the church. Those who claim mutual love as the basis seriously inquire whether there can be any true marriage if love be wanting, and they are ready to dissolve the union if either hear grow cold. But Jesus takes different ground. The true foundation for marriage according to His teaching is moral. Many considerations, such as love, culture, age and education should have great weight in the choice of a life-partner because all these powerfully affect for good or ill the marriage relation, but they form no basis for this holy relationship. Marriage has been declared a sacrament by one great branch of the Christian church. This is a logical deduction from the materialistic theory of the kingdom of God. In secular parlance a sacrament is an oath and sacred because all oaths are sacred, but religiously a sacrament is a symbol of a spiritual reality and a pledge of union with the body of Christ, which the marriage ceremony is not; so the sacredness of marriage cannot depend on the authority of the church.

But though marriage is not a sacrament, its sacred and enduring character should be impressed upon all those entering upon such a union. The Word says God has joined them together. The agreement of a man and a woman to unite for common life and the preservation of humanity is true marriage, yet it is one of the functions of the Church to "solemnize" such a marriage in God's name—providing always that the contracting parties purpose to live together according to the Scriptures, otherwise the Church has no right to pronounce upon it the sanction of God. To the Church God has committed His

oracles, and when she acts according to His Word or His Spirit she has His authority. Both the Church and the world must needs recognize this fact. The Church possesses a delegated, or rather a mediating authority; an authority not given once for all and henceforth to be independently exercised. The Spirit speaks and acts only through those who "Walk by the Spirit," and no individual and no church is authorized to speak for God ex-officio, though both the individual Christian and the Church are to be God's mouthpieces. The Lord said to Aaron, "And on this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel" and added "And I will bless them;" though later, when the Israelites became corrupt, God said "When ye spread forth your hands (to pronounce the benediction) I will hide mine eyes from you." (Isa. 1:15). A like authority is given in the New Testament—"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," the continual leadership of Jesus being assumed. "Without Me ye can do nothing" is as true in relation to the government and sacrament of the Church as it is in the winning of souls. When God speaks it is the privilege and duty of the Church to say Thus saith the Lord and if His word be a blessing it is the privilege of the Church to pronounce that blessing. Let the State give license to proper persons to marry and determine their civil relations to each other and to the State, but let the Church pronounce that they are husband and wife together so long as they both shall live. Thus marriage will have its proper legal safeguards and its moral sanctions will also be preserved.

"And the twain shall become one flesh" is a wonderful statement, and yet physiologically and psychologically true. A scientific study of the subject reveals the fact that "A physical blending of beings that is truly marvelous" takes place in both the united persons even when the union has been of comparatively short duration. The peculiar and lasting effect the bearing of children has on the mother—how that her very nature is permanently changed—partaking of the nature of the father of her offspring—is more or less widely known. But a corresponding effect of married life on the husband, though not nearly so marked, is not so generally recognized. By way of illustration: "An Englishman went to the West Indies, and while there married a Mul-

latto wife. They had no children; and after twelve years of married life together the wife died. The bereaved husband returned to England, and in course of time married an English woman, the couple remaining in England. The remarkable thing about this marriage was that the child born of this union was a Mulatto. (We do not contend that this remarkable occurrence was wholly due to the influence of the wife upon her husband; environment in the West Indies undoubtedly counted much, but the fact remains). This is only one of many instances which could be adduced to show how truly, though strangely, the twain become one flesh.

Further, the interests of two persons are made identical. "In order for me to realize the fullest possible life; in order that I may discharge my obligations to God and my country, another life must be added to mine; two wills must be blended into one common will. Another life comes to be my own because of what it demands and of what it confers."

Spiritually, this union is a type of Christ and his Church. Christ is represented as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride. The Bride, like the Bridegroom, must be holy and without blemish. John in his apocalyptic vision sees the Bride clothed in fine linen, clean and white, a token of her purity, "for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." "In their mouth was found no guile, for they are without blemish before the throne of God." "This beautiful moral condition of the Bride John contrasts with the deep dyed scarlet of the Harlot, who, though "decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, is full of her abominations and the filthiness of her fornication." The Bride and the Harlot are morally at the antipodes of each other. The contrast is not merely on the surface, it is deep and fundamental, for this blending of beings is not confined to the married relation. Paul contends that the same thing holds good when fornication is committed. "Know ye not that he that is joined to an harlot is one body?" and because of this awful fact "He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." Have we rightly apprehended the enormity of this sin, or the unspeakable vileness of it? Paul speaks of this vilest of human relations as the very antithesis of a Spiritual one, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Social impurity is the lowest possible degradation of the body, while this spiritual union with Christ is

its highest possible exaltation. Surely "the body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

It should be carefully noted that the singular number "wife" is used, not "wives." Jesus did not use language in a loose way, and his words show he had no thought of plural marriages in his mind. It is sometimes argued that what was right for the Patriarchs is right for us. But did God have his way with the Patriarchs? The Bible gives no encouragement to plural marriages, and Jesus declares plainly what was in the mind of God from the beginning. One man, one woman, was clearly the divine plan, and the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden illustrates it. Ruschenbush says again "The harem has always been the curse of oriental life. The fact that some of the people of God practiced polygamy only shows that the popular conscience had suffered an eclipse in this regard. David's harem presents a vivid illustration of a polygamous household." The harem is not the home and can never take its place. The true home is the dearest place on earth and the best earthly type of heaven, and it is love that gives the home its quality, but when love is diffused it loses its strength and purity. The deeper the love the more jealous it is of a rival, and when jealousy enters in, hell is the result, for "Jealousy burneth like fire." It has been well said that "A true union is one of mind and soul, for which cause among the brutes no place for thee is found." Any disturbance of this naturally harmonious relation ought not to be permitted. Jesus gives no quarter to the harem; "shall cleave unto his wife"—singular number. Paul further emphasizes the same principle in directing that a bishop or deacon—as a pattern in all things—shall be the husband of one wife.

In order also to develop the highest qualities of mind and heart, and to safeguard the rights of children, monogamous homes are necessary. Not the individual, not even man and wife, but the family is the social unit. Love would probably die out, at least in its highest expression, without marriage, love and legitimate children. "Among the lower forms of animal life, such as that abounding in the water, where there is no sex relation, there is no such thing as love. But as the forms rise higher and the instinct to pair is manifested, love is seen to rise also and become purer and more pronounced.

Mother love is the earliest form of love and is sex-born, (in some forms of animal life the mother finds it necessary to defend her young from the voracity of the father) and the love of a mother continues to be the deepest expression of that sublimest of passions."

3rd. The purpose of marriage—

We have already dealt with that phase of the purpose of marriage which relates to the common life of a married couple, and it remains for us to consider the all-important question of the preservation of humanity. In this both sexes are vitally concerned, but especially woman, as this is her special function. Woman's co-operation in social, industrial and political life, is hers by right, and has been denied her too long, but it must be remembered that the task of promoting and serving life is an antecedent call upon her, and necessarily limits her activities in other directions. "What shall it profit us to improve the quality of life if we let the supply fail?" The revolt from the old idea that marriage permitted free expression to the male passion and if life resulted it must be welcomed because God sent it, is justifiable. A truer idea must take its place. Both a more positive and a higher note must be struck. "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" is the divine mandate to both sexes. This all important matter is not left to caprice, passion, or human selfishness. Paul emphasizes this duty by directing, even in a time of great hardship and cruel persecution, "that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, etc." It takes a thousand generations of continuous upward trend to develop a holy seed, and if the propagation of the race be largely left to the vicious and degenerate it will take millenniums yet before the kingdom of God shall come. The Spirit of God is undoubtedly the source of all the good in the world, though we are not to think each individual starts back in the alpha of human goodness. The divine influence in one generation remains as a moral inheritance in the next; and so mankind makes progress faster or slower, or else goes back into barbarism, according as God is allowed to have his way, or otherwise, with each generation. What should consecration to God involve? Should it mean only the consecration of the powers by which the outward activities of life are carried on and not the powers that promote and serve life itself? Can any one

claim to be consecrated to God when the reproductive powers are left out of the consecration? Large families are sneered at by superficial persons who know not what they say nor whereof they affirm. To raise a large family with inherited moral principles of a high order plus a godly training is to make no small contribution to the kingdom of God, besides, contributing to the state its most valuable asset. The poet who mourned that "Many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air" failed to consider that the flower is the womb of the future plant from which must come all that is possible in plant life. The early Greeks considered a ship in full sail at sea, a ripe field of wheat waving in the wind, and a woman with child the three most beautiful sights in the world? Were they wrong? Is not life's highest expression always beautiful? And is it not bound to be more and more beautiful as the diviner qualities in human life are expressed? The greatest glory of womanhood is that it is potentially hers to mother an increasingly better and nobler race.

The abominable practice of limiting families by means is murder, and is alarmingly prevalent. May the public conscience be aroused on this subject and a genuine repentance take place ere the judgments of God overtake us. "Thou shalt not kill" covers all human life at whatever stage. Life is not more sacred at one stage of development than at another; all is God given, and only God himself has the right to take it away. One of the tragedies of our age is that many who sing "God hath made us and not we ourselves" do not scruple to kill, ere it come to the birth, the highest order of life God is able to make on the earth. Nor can this sin be committed without the sinner paying the penalty of outraged nature in her own body. The prevalence of a disease known as "uterine insanity" and the large number of deaths directly due to prenatal infanticide is a terrible witness against the too common practice of this sin.

Birth control, or perhaps more properly speaking, life control, is another though kindred question. Premising sufficient vitality in the parents, there is probably nothing at all to be said in favor of a small family and everything to be said in favor of a large one. This statement may seem overdrawn, but considering the arguments we have heard advanced in favor of a small as against a large family we do not hesitate to make it.

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That the parents of small families have more time to give to the mental and moral culture of their children is plausible in theory but that such children receive superior culture is contradicted by the facts; and that the larger family tends to greater poverty is nothing to dread. When we remember that no nation has ever yet long survived wealth we may, indeed we must, consider the comparative poverty of the large family a mighty blessing in disguise. "Woe to the land to hastening ills a prey; where wealth accumulates and men decay" always has been and probably always will be true. Andrew Carnegie writes—"You have no need to fear the competition of rich men's sons," and the Book says, "Thou settest the poor on high from affliction and makest him families like a flock." Moreover, as a recent female writer says, Why are these vaunted means of limitation nasty and demoralizing? Because they are unnatural in themselves and in their results. In themselves they do away with all romance and spontaneity in the sacred intimacy of married life. They diminish, without absolutely preventing, the natural results of matrimony, and by removing the sanctions of duty and responsibility they degrade marriage into a mere physical union, deprived of all moral and spiritual significance. These "preventives" necessarily tend to make sexual pleasure the sole end of marriage, and in doing so they remove from husband and wife the check on things lawful, which is provided by the knowledge that privilege and gratification have appropriate co-relatives of duty and responsibility. It is strange that the use of preventives should be approved and advised by women, because such use, by removing the fear of consequences, make them defenceless against undue demands on their wifely benevolence." When we know also that incontinence is a prolific source of nervous debility and various consumptions—the weaker of the twain becoming the sufferer, we need to take the more earnest heed to our ways. Moreover, in more senses than one, the country needs mothers. Motherhood denied is motherhood still; but motherhood rejected is motherhood crucified. Mothers of large families sometimes adopt an orphaned child, but the mother of one or two cannot find room in her household for another child, the real reason being that she cannot find room in her heart. God pity a race without mothers.

Fourthly, The question of divorce—

Because the severance of the marriage tie is contrary

to God's moral order, man is forbidden to grant a divorce, excepting only when the marriage bond is already broken by one of the contracting parties. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife for any cause save for fornication, causeth her to commit adultery, and whoso marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery." The innocent victim of a divorce allowed by Jesus Christ may re-marry, but the offender may not; and no Church may make lawful what God forbids. Many will say this is a hard law; there are many unhappy marriages. Surely ill-mated couples are better separated and each allowed to re-marry.

The disciples were of the same opinion. They said, "If the case of a man be so with his wife it is not good to marry." As if to say, Better to remain single than have an unhappy married life. But Jesus told them in reply that only a natural defect or some great call of God should stand in the way of marriage. The desire to sever the marriage tie when the union is not a congenial one is very natural, but does not work out for the best interests of mankind. Man would like to escape from the consequences of all his mistakes and sins, but this is not ordained of either God or man. Every transgressor of natural law, being a willful one or otherwise, pays the penalty. No doubt the more waywardness and sin there is in human nature, the greater will be the hardship in being bound by a perfect law, but this is an argument against the state of sin, not the law. Probably nothing is more needed by the human family than the discipline of self, and certainly nothing is more valuable. Many an individual has arrived at a rare beauty of character, not simply in the face of trial, but by means of it. Indeed few, if any, attain to any real soul culture without passing through deep waters of trial and suffering. Not all unhappy marriages are failures.

But there would be fewer unhappy marriages if the lust of the eye and the pride of life were less frequently the determining factors in the choice of a life-partner, and a more Christian and a more sensible view of the purpose of marriage prevailed. Dean Mathers says "Divorce is a domesticated, pathological individualism. It can mostly be prevented by sanctified common sense, the practice of common-place self sacrifice, and the revived devotion to the upbringing of children." Divorce means the

disintegration of the home, which spells the destruction of the nation. When once the marriage bond is loosely held there is no safeguard left for the sexual life. So that wherever divorces are easily obtained adultery flourishes. "But to the married I give charge, yea, not I but the Lord, that the wife depart not from her husband; but should she depart, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, and that the husband leave not his wife."

We are slow to learn that all God's laws, natural and revealed, are the very best thing for us, and the highest good of the individual and the race can only be secured by obedience from the heart to the law of service, and that individual selfishness tends to the destruction of all. "I beseech, you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service." This is the only normal, free and glad life; anything less is sin.

