

THE "DAWN"

CHRISTADELPHIANS

Belief, Practice and Fellowship

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*"Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my  
brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3.35).*

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# Introduction

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It is now well over fifty years since the Dawn Christadelphian community commenced its separate existence, and there are now only a few surviving members who personally experienced the circumstances which led to its formation.

A summary of its Basis of Faith, together with the reasons why the Dawn maintains its separation from other Christadelphian fraternities, will therefore be helpful both to those who have joined the Dawn Christadelphian community in more recent times, and also to others who may enquire about our beliefs.

## Historical Note

In the years following the rediscovery of the Truth in the nineteenth century some basic doctrines were challenged, resulting in division within the Christadelphian community. The issues concerned the complete inspiration of Scripture, the nature of Christ, and the basis of resurrectional responsibility.

In the early years of the twentieth century the brotherhood was further disturbed by the failure of a major ecclesia to take action against brethren who did not uphold all the commands of Christ. After several years the matter still remained unresolved, with the result that in 1923 some withdrew, forming the Berean Christadelphian community. This separation was therefore on the application of the doctrine of fellowship.

In the years immediately before the 1939-45 war, the question of the ecclesial response to remarriage after divorce raised itself in the Berean community. Some were prepared to accept the professed repentance of the offender as a basis of refellowship, whilst others believed that the second union was, in God's eyes, a state of adultery which had to be ended as evidence of repentance. After some years' discussion without agreement being reached, the community later known as Dawn Christadelphians was formed in the early 1940's by those who supported the latter view.

These two topics—the application of the doctrine of fellowship, and divorce and remarriage—are the main grounds of the Dawn's continued separation from other Christadelphian fraternities, (many of whom reunited in the 1950's to become the Central Fellowship), and are therefore particularly addressed in this booklet.

## **Faith and Obedience—The basis of acceptability with God**

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Before explaining the position of the Dawn Christadelphian community, we believe it is essential to lay the Scriptural foundation for a believer's life in the Truth.

The infinitely great God has a purpose with mankind and the earth that will result in his glory being supreme. We can share that purpose only if we first believe and then obey his revelation, thus glorifying him now. Whilst today much religious thinking is geared towards man's needs and his present welfare, the real purpose of man's existence is to bring glory to God.

The first essential for this is faith, or belief, in God's words. The whole system of belief and practice outlined in the Scriptures is styled "the Truth"; and all contrary to this is error which must be resisted. Our understanding of this Truth is set out in our "Statement of Faith", a summary of which is contained in the following pages. As has often been remarked, all the major articles of our belief are complementary—none can be removed without seriously undermining the others. (This is also considered under the section on "Fellowship" on page 20).

After belief comes a life of obedience, in which God's will is paramount, and the believer's faith is shown by works. One of the errors Christadelphians resist is the notion that faith alone can save. Bro. Roberts wrote: "It is part of the modern restitution of primitive apostolic ways to recognise distinctly, that while faith turns a sinner into a saint, obedience only will secure a saint's acceptance at the judgment seat of Christ; and that a disobedient saint will be rejected more decisively than even an unjustified sinner" (*Christendom Astray*, chapter 18).

This obedience is not for its own sake, but to demonstrate our love for God and Christ. Nor will righteousness finally be attributed to us on the basis of any achievement; we will always need the grace of God and the forgiveness available through the sacrifice of our Lord. But even so, the basis of our present life in Christ must be "*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*" (John 14.21).

*This is not an easy or popular path. Our life of probation is, by God's appointment, a narrow way involving discipline, hardship and sacrifice. On that journey to the Kingdom we must show all love and kindness to our fellow-travellers on the road, but at the same time we dare not condone variation from the Divinely given standards laid down in God's Word. True love will warn against beliefs and practices that jeopardise salvation.*

## A Summary of Dawn Christadelphian Beliefs

'The Dawn Christadelphian community exists on the basis of a full acceptance of all the principles outlined in our Statement of Faith (published by "The Dawn" Book Supply). That document has been, and continues to be, very important in defining our position on doctrine and practice, especially in detailing the issues on which Dawn stands aside from other Christadelphian communities. Important issues have emerged since the Statement was originally written. Our position on these issues needs to be defined in order to provide a complete explanation of the beliefs of the Dawn Christadelphian community. Therefore, the following Summary of Beliefs is an attempt to provide a succinct but comprehensive outline of our position on belief and practice. It is complementary to the Statement of Faith, not in place of it.

No.	Belief	Comments
1.	There is only one God, who is the supreme power in the universe, and all things are known by him and under his control.  <i>Isaiah. 45.5-7; Dan. 4.17; Deut. 6.4</i>	<i>God is from everlasting to everlasting and reveals himself as the only true God. It is man's duty and privilege to serve him. The doctrine of the trinity is unscriptural.</i>
2.	God created and sustains the universe and all life that exists on this earth.  <i>Gen. 1.1; Acts 17.24-25.</i>  The Spirit of God is a term used to denote the power by which he operates.  <i>Job 26.13; Psa 139.7-12.</i>  The Holy Spirit is that same power of God focussed on special objectives, such as inspiration of the Scriptures, miracles, the birth of Christ, etc.	<i>This belief is incompatible with any theory of evolution about the origin and development of living things.</i>  <i>The Holy Spirit is not a person, nor part of a triune God</i>

*2 Peter. 1.21; Luke 1.35; Acts 10.38; Acts 2.4.*

3. God created this earth to be inhabited by men and women who would give him pleasure, by believing what he says and responding in love to his commands.  
  
*Isaiah. 45.18; 66.1-2; Mal. 3.16-17.*  
  
*God is concerned with this earth—He has not abandoned it but has a continuing purpose with it (see belief no. 8). To believe in God's Word and to trust his promises is to show faith, a characteristic that is pleasing to God.*
4. Following their creation from the dust of the ground, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's command. This disobedience was the first sin. Because of this transgression, Adam and Eve were condemned to die. Consequently, all their offspring have inherited mortality and proneness to sin.  
  
*Gen. 3.1-19; Rom. 5.12; Rom. 6.23; Jas. 1. 15.*  
  
*Adam and Eve failed to show faith and so received the promised punishment. With the exception of Jesus, all have sinned and therefore deserve death. Death is a punishment for sin, not a gateway to a better, spiritual existence. The immortality of the soul is contrary to Bible doctrine.*
5. Although God's justice demanded that man receive the due punishment for his disobedience, God's love provided a way for man to escape from the consequences of his foolishness. As in Eden, this way is based on faith and responding in love to God's commands.  
  
*John 3.16-17; 2 Tim. 1. 10; 3.15-17.*  
  
*The way to escape the consequences of sin is God-given. Therefore we must listen carefully to God's instructions and not presume that we can define the basis of acceptable worship. All our doctrine and practice must therefore be based on God's revelation of his mind and purpose, not on human reasoning or philosophy.*
6. In times past, God has revealed his will and purpose through the work of angels, prophets, apostles and, above all, through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This revealed will of God is recorded for us in the Bible,  
  
*We must not alter or dilute God's commands which are recorded in the Bible. Doing so makes the same error as Adam and Eve. Therefore, teaching which is not fully supported by Biblical evidence*

which is now the sole source of direct information about God and his purpose. The sixty six books comprising the Old and New Testaments are the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. It provides guidance for the way of life that God asks men and women to follow in order to find eternal life.

*Isa. 8.20; Acts 20.32; Luke 24.44-45; 2 Tim. 3.16.*

7. The Holy Spirit was given after Christ's ascension to heaven, to guide the apostles and the early ecclesias.

*John 14:26; 16.13; Acts 2:4*

8. God has developed his purpose by calling out a people for his name. In Old Testament times, this people was the nation of Israel. God called Abraham out of Ur and made specific promises to him which summarise God's purpose with the earth. God promised that Abraham would inherit the Land of Israel for ever and that through one of his descendants (namely Jesus Christ), all people on earth would be able to share in that same blessing.

*Gen. 12.1-3; 13.14-17; 22.15-18; Gal. 3.8, 16, 26-29.*

9. Many years later, Abraham's descendants had grown into a large nation. Through Moses, God gave them a Law to guide their national life and to mark them out as his chosen people. An integral part of

*cannot claim to be true religion. Claims of Spirit guidance or new revelation that is contrary to Biblical teaching, or that parts of the Bible were not necessarily inspired, cannot be accepted. Christ and the apostles quoted and endorsed the Old Testament. We too must accept the whole of the Bible as the accurate, authoritative and reliable record of God's revelation.*

*The Holy Spirit gifts were withdrawn after the completion of this work, leaving the Scriptures as the sole guide for believers. The Holy Spirit is not bestowed on believers today.*

*Abraham believed in God's promises and obeyed God's call. This was a demonstration of faith.*

*Abraham (the father of the faithful) will receive his reward by living on the earth for ever. God's promise is that all the faithful can share the blessing of Abraham. Our reward is therefore to be enjoyed on the earth, not in heaven.*

*This nation of Israel was the Kingdom of God as it existed in the past. This Kingdom will be re-established in the future when Jesus returns to this earth as King.*

this Law was the need for obedience. A system of sacrifice was laid down which provided a covering for man's sin.

*Exod 19.5-8; Heb. 10.1-10.*

10. Later still, God made further promises to King David, described as a man after God's own heart. God promised David a descendant (Christ) who would reign over his house for ever.

*1 Chron. 17.11-14; Isa 9.6-7.*

11. At the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, it was explained that Jesus was the promised descendant to fulfil the promises made to Abraham and David. He was to inherit David's throne, rule over Israel for ever and bring blessings to all nations.

*Luke 1.30-33.*

12. Jesus was the Son of God, conceived by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, operating upon Mary. He inherited from his mother human nature, with all its weakness.

*Heb. 2.14-18; 4.15; Luke 1.34-35.*

13. Jesus had the capacity to sin, yet never sinned in any way. He was therefore able to offer himself as a

*Sacrifice was to act as a continual reminder that the consequence of sin is death. It also, by pointing forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, showed that there was a God-provided way to escape from sin and death.*

*This shows that the Kingdom of God is centred in the nation of Israel. The throne of David was in Jerusalem. The centre of government in the future will also be in Jerusalem when the Kingdom is re-established on the earth.*

*The fulfilment of all God's promises is bound up in the person and work of Jesus.*

*Jesus was not a member of a triune God. He was capable of sin because he shared human nature. The special relationship he had with God as his Father meant that he had a deep appreciation for God's love and God's righteousness. He believed God's word and dedicated his whole life in obedience to God's will, thereby succeeding where Adam failed (see belief 4).*

*Jesus possessed a nature identical to our present one, and was only given everlasting life through the*

perfect sacrifice on the cross, thereby breaking the power of sin. God raised Jesus from the dead and granted him everlasting life. This opened up the way for others to receive the same blessing of everlasting life. Only through Jesus can the salvation of mankind be achieved.

*Heb. 4.15; John 1.29; 1 Cor. 15.20-22; Acts 4.12.*

14. Jesus did not reward his followers immediately after his resurrection. He went to heaven, but promised to return to establish God's Kingdom on earth, to fulfil the promises made to Abraham and David.

*Acts 1.10-11; 3.19-21.*

15. In order to receive the blessing of everlasting life, Jesus' followers must strive to live as he did, by believing God's Word and dedicating themselves to God's will. That blessing will be received when Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

*Rom. 10.9-11; 1 Peter. 1.13-16.*

16. The first step in following Jesus is to understand and believe the message of salvation that he preached and to recognise the need to change our lives from serving self to serving God.

*Acts 16.29-32; Mark 16.15-16.*

17. God accepts us as righteous on the basis of our faith in his purpose in

*power of God. If Jesus had been part of a pre-existent God-head, he would have been incapable of sin, and therefore not have been subject to the same test of obedience as all mankind. In that case his life and death would not have been a perfect sacrifice.*

*Jesus' followers were commanded to preach the Gospel (Good News) of the Kingdom of God to all men and women, in order that they too might be saved.*

*Following Jesus means obeying his commandments, living a life of honesty, concern for others and moral integrity. Modern society, even where nominally Christian, has rejected many of the important moral standards required by God and demonstrated by Jesus in his life (see points 21 to 23).*

*Following Jesus requires a conscious decision and real commitment. Those who have not heard or understood the gospel message cannot be saved.*

*An acceptance that Jesus is Lord does not of itself guarantee*

Christ and the repentance of our sins.

*Rom. 7.24-25; Phil 3.7-11.*

18. This change of life is signified by baptism. It involves total immersion in water as a symbolic death with Christ and a washing away of past sins.

*Acts 2.37-38; Rom. 6.3-4.*

19. Having chosen to follow God and Christ, believers will still fail to give perfect obedience because they are still affected by the power of sin.

*Rom. 7.14-20; Jas. 1.14-15.*

20. Jesus now acts as our High Priest in heaven for his followers, who can pray to God through him.

*Heb. 4.14-16; 5.1-3.*

21. Following Christ demands a high standard of morality, care and concern for others, honesty, integrity, gentleness and patience. It also requires us to reject what is increasingly common behaviour in

*salvation. Believers must strive continually to change their lives, to obey God, and follow more closely Jesus' pattern. In those instances where they fail, they must repent and seek forgiveness through prayer.*

*Infant christening or sprinkling with water is not Christian baptism. True baptism is a symbol of the death of the old self and the birth of the new man or woman, thereby associating the believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.*

*There is no superhuman devil that tempts man to sin. The devil is a personification of the power of sin that exists within all mankind. It is the tendency to please self rather than please God: the attitude that led to Adam's downfall in Eden.*

*Because Jesus shared our nature, he understands our problems and can therefore act as an effective mediator between God and man. Through prayer, we can find help, comfort and strength for the believer's life. Christ's sacrifice cannot cover willful neglect of the standards of behaviour God requires of us.*

*Although the greatest Christian virtue is love, true love does not ignore or tolerate actions which contravene God's plainly revealed will.*

modern society—promiscuity, "living together", adultery, divorce, homosexual practices and suing at law for any reason.

*Gal. 5.22-26; 2 Cor. 6.17-18; 1 Cor. 6.9-11.*

22. As well as defining the believer's role in society, the Bible gives clear instruction on true worship, of which the regular meeting to remember Christ in the breaking of bread is a vital part. This worship is based on a unity of fellowship amongst believers who adhere to the same standards of belief and practice. If God's Word is to be followed, true Christians must dissociate themselves from others who profess to follow Christ but neglect to follow Scriptural teaching.

*Rom. 16.17; 2 John 10.*

23. Commitment to follow Christ means we recognise no other allegiance. Consequently we cannot serve in the armed forces or the police force, nor be involved in other organisations which might result in a conflict of conscience if we were required to do something contrary to Christ's laws.

*Acts 5.29; 1 Peter. 2.11-17.*

24. The Kingdom of God will be re-established on the earth when Jesus returns in power and glory. He will

*A pocket epitome of the Commandments of Christ is available on request to the publisher.*

*There is a trend in Christian circles to regard the unity of the church as more important than Scriptural principles. This approach seeks to make the church attractive to human thinking rather than pleasing to God. Ecumenicalism, women priests, and "gay" clergy are all symptoms of this trend.*

*The true Christian must be a model citizen in all respects—paying taxes, giving respect to authority and obeying the laws of the land. The only justification for refusing to obey civil law is if that law contravenes the higher laws of God. The believer must behave, not as a citizen of the state or country in which he lives, but as a citizen in prospect of the Kingdom of God. He will not vote in political elections.*

*This will be the time when man's misrule of the planet will be brought to an end. The only answer to the*

subdue the nations, and those who refuse to accept his authority will be destroyed.

*Luke 19.12,27; 2 Thes. 1.6-10.*

25. Following his return, Christ will raise those who died having an understanding of the gospel (whether or not they have been baptised). These will then be judged along with those who have heard and understood the gospel and are still alive when Christ returns.

*1 Thes. 4.13-18; 2 Cor. 5.10.*

26. Those who are accepted at the judgment will be granted immortal life and will help Christ in the rulership of the world for a period of a thousand years. During this time, the remaining mortal population of the world will be taught the ways of God. At the end of the millennium, the mortal population of the millennium period will be judged and those who are then accepted will join those accepted at the first judgment in enjoying the blessings of a beautified earth for ever.

*Mic. 4.1-2; Rev. 21.1-4; 5.9-10; 1 Cor.15.22-26.*

*world's problems is the righteous and all-powerful rulership of the Son of God.*

*Knowledge brings responsibility. Those who, having understood the gospel, reject it, are still responsible to the judgment seat of Christ. Those who have died with no knowledge of God's ways will remain in the grave. The hell of the Bible is not a place of eternal torment, merely the grave where all are unconscious.*

*Those who are rejected at the first or second judgment will perish eternally.*

*At the end of the millennium, Christ will give up the Kingdom to God (thereby demonstrating God's supremacy over all, including Christ) so that God will be all and in all. God will dwell with men and so fulfil his original purpose in creation.*

Note: The references appended are only a sample. A fuller selection can be found in the Statement of Faith.

## Fellowship—Principles

The concept of fellowship with God is one of the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. Primarily, fellowship is with the Almighty, who created man with the object of extending to him eternal fellowship. God's holiness is at present a barrier between him and sinful man, but through the work of Jesus Christ that perfect fellowship can eventually be gained. Meanwhile those who have been called to the Truth have the additional privilege of joyful fellowship with each other. They continue "*stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2.42). But this sharing of a God-given hope means that individual believers, and communities of believers, must repudiate all fellowship with anything abhorrent to Him. This is a principle of Divine revelation, and the basis of repeated exhortations in the Scriptures.

Thus God requires a holy people. This was God's invitation to Israel at Sinai, and the same words were applied to Christians by Peter in his first epistle (1 Pet. 2.9). Being holy means we are to be "sacred" or "set apart". Our lives have to be dedicated to God's will, and must be clearly distinct from those of the majority of mankind, who disregard Divine standards and requirements. God declares: "*to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*" (Isa. 66.2). Humility before God, respect for his Word and belief in his promises are the characteristics of a man of faith. Faith and obedience place us in covenant relationship with God through Christ, giving us a tremendous privilege but also a great responsibility. God's Word is Truth, and there is only one true Gospel and only one standard of acceptable behaviour in his sight. Love for God and respect for his Word demand that we seek out that Truth and strive to uphold it. From time to time, all of us fail and we need God's mercy and forgiveness. Our own personal weakness does not mean we can seek to lower Divine standards, rather must we increase our diligence in trying to live up to God's holy calling.

### Old Testament teaching

When God established Israel as his holy people, he gave them a law to instruct them on how to be a holy and separated people. Much of that law was taken up with showing how easy it was for man to become defiled and separated from God. Although we are no longer bound by the Law of Moses, its principles covering ceremonial uncleanness have much to teach us. Following contact with the carcass of an unclean animal, a person was unclean till evening. If someone carried the carcass of an animal, something additional was required—he also had to wash his clothes, and then be unclean until the evening. The law defined longer periods of uncleanness arising out of contact with human birth or death. During such periods of uncleanness, the Israelite could not

approach the sanctuary nor touch a holy thing, but was still part of the camp of Israel. But there was a final category: those who were in a state of continual uncleanness, typified by the leper. Such unfortunate people were not just denied access to the sanctuary, they were put out from the camp.

In all this there is a pattern for spiritual Israel. We all sin, and we have to exercise our conscience in admitting that sin, and following the prescribed process for being cleansed. But the one who continues in sin, represented by the leper, is to be put outside the camp in order to prevent the infection spreading. The period of separation from the camp was not permanent; once free from infection, and after demonstrating that fact to the priest, the cleansed leper would be welcomed back. This gives us a clear insight into the mind of the Spirit on such matters.

### New Testament teaching

The same principles are shown very clearly in the New Testament, where there are many references to the need to separate from those who continue in wrong belief and/or practice (Matt. 18.15-17; Rom. 16.17; 1 Cor. 5.11; 2 Thess. 3.6,14-15; Titus 3.10-11; 2 John 10).

As under the Law of Moses, so in Apostolic teaching: the one who continued in error was to be separated from the community of the saints until he or she had demonstrated changed behaviour. Then the person could and should be welcomed back, as is made clear by the case of the brother at Corinth (2 Cor. 2.6-7). Withdrawal was necessary to bring the wrongdoer to repentance, and to prevent his bad example leading others astray—"*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (1 Cor. 5.6). Withdrawing is the only sanction available to an ecclesia if a brother or sister refuses to turn back from error in belief or practice. The purpose should always be to highlight the severity of the situation, in the hope of generating a change of mind. Withdrawal should always be corrective, never punitive.

### The meaning of withdrawal

Having established that withdrawal is a responsibility placed on God's people in both Old Testament and New Testament times, we should try to understand what it means. We can never take to ourselves the prerogative of judging the acceptability of any individual before God. We cannot judge another's servant, and so we certainly cannot determine the standing of a brother or sister before God and Christ. If we withdraw ourselves from someone, we are not making ourselves out to be better than that person; we are merely establishing a difference. We are saying that, according to our understanding of Scripture, we believe that the behaviour of the brother or sister is wrong, and we have to stand aside from it. Failure to take action may result in others being led astray but more importantly for us, we would be committing sin. This point is very important, although often

not appreciated. We are not being tainted by another's sin, but by our own sin of disobeying Christ's command to withdraw ourselves from persistent and unrepentant wrongdoers. We have no authority to change, ignore, or downgrade Christ's commands; and to do so on the grounds of showing love is, in effect, to say we are more loving than Christ.

The first action must be to try to restore the situation by prayerful discussion. But if unresolvable differences of a fundamental nature continue to exist, only two options are possible. We can either "sweep differences under the carpet" and ignore them, or we must separate from those who promote error, and those who tolerate error. The Dawn community believes that the second option is the right one. If we ignore differences, ecclesias will be adopting different standards, and end up "doing what is right in their own eyes".

We stress again that, by withdrawing ourselves, we do not condemn our brethren and sisters. Rather, we condemn ourselves if we fail to act, because our conscience would be compromised. We are not throwing our brother or sister out of God's family, rather are we hoping to persuade a change of mind. Such a path is not easy; indeed it is always very painful, but we believe it to be necessary.

If in this section we seem to have paid more attention to withdrawal than to the positive aspects of fellowship, it is not because we consider it more important, but because it is the one aspect of fellowship on which we differ from some other Christadelphian communities.

## Fellowship—Practice

Having established the principles, we go on to consider the practical effect these should have in ecclesial life, and the specific New Testament teaching on this topic.

Arising from individual fellowship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, comes fellowship with those who are like-minded. First we look at the way the term "fellowship" is employed. The Greek word normally used in the New Testament is *koinonia*, the English equivalents being "fellowship", "partnership", "participation", "communion". The word *koinonia* does not in itself have a solely "religious" meaning, but was used in regard to marriage, business partnerships and the like. For example, in Luke 5.10 we are told that James and John were "partners" (*koinonos*) with Simon in their fishing trade. Later they became partners in a far more exalted calling.

As the Gospel's work progressed so *koinonia* became increasingly used in relation to the Truth, those who served it, shared its work, its hope, its sufferings. We read that :

*"They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers "* (Acts 2.42).

Clearly there was far more involved in their fellowship than pleasant socialisation. There was something they all held in common, and it was something very big, very serious and of enormous importance. It was the Gospel of their salvation which bound them together.

*"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you ... for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now"* (Phil. 1.3,5).

All those who shared in that apostolic fellowship were believers of the Gospel, who had confirmed their belief by submitting to the ordinance of baptism. Above all else in importance was the fact they were each brought thereby into fellowship with God and his Son Jesus:

*"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1.3).

On this basis the Ecclesia of God is being developed. It consists of "*all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 1.2) who thus become the "body" of Christ (1 Cor. 12.12; Eph. 1.23). But although this Ecclesia of God is of necessity divided up into individual ecclesias—such as "*the church (ecclesia) of God which is at Corinth*" (1 Cor. 1.2)—each such ecclesia is part of that one

body. It therefore follows that there must be unanimity of belief and practice on all fundamental issues throughout the whole body of believers, otherwise its unity is destroyed.

### The necessity for correct belief and practice

Acts 2.42 quoted above couples fellowship with doctrine—"the apostles' doctrine and fellowship". "Doctrine" simply means teaching, and what the apostles taught is summarised in the phrase "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8.12). Each of those two concepts is fundamental to God's saving Truth. If we examine what we call the "first principles" of our faith we shall find that they all have a direct relationship with one or other or both of these two fundamentals. For example:

The promises to Abraham and David  
The restoration of the kingdom of Israel  
The return of Christ

have a direct relationship with "the things concerning the kingdom of God."

The fall of Adam and Eve  
The nature of man since the Fall  
The devil  
The sacrifice of Christ  
Resurrection  
The priesthood of Christ  
The relationship of Christ to his Father

have a direct relationship with "the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ", i.e. his mission and work as Saviour.

In addition to these, such fundamentals as the omnipotence of Deity and the work of the Holy Spirit are clearly applicable to all aspects of the Gospel.

From the above premises it will be evident that wrong beliefs, such as those that Christendom has adopted, prevent a person from having a proper understanding of God's Truth. A belief in heaven-going is incompatible with a belief in the things concerning the kingdom; likewise to believe in a supernatural devil makes it impossible to understand the redemptive work of Christ; to give just

two examples. One does not have to take on board all wrong beliefs to prevent a correct understanding of the Gospel message; one "heresy" may be enough.

It is for this reason that full instruction of applicants for baptism is so important. It is just not enough for an individual to say "I believe in Jesus as my Saviour". He can say that—quite sincerely—and still be retaining some gospel-nullifying beliefs.

There is sometimes a degree of impatience over the lengthy course of instruction before baptism. Do we have to go into so much detail? It is of course possible to place too much insistence on "head knowledge", but it is impossible to overestimate the importance of thoroughly understanding the first principles such as those mentioned above. For the Truth's sake, and for the individual's sake, it is essential to ensure that instruction is comprehensive.

As well as right beliefs, it is clear from the Scriptures that our actions and manner of life must also conform to Divine requirements. The plea of John the Baptist was: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance (*margin: answerable to amendment of life*)" (Matt. 3.8); and whether we go to Christ's "Sermon on the Mount" or to any of the epistles we shall find the same emphasis on the importance of right action. To speak, as we sometimes do, of correct "doctrine and practice" is a little misleading. "Doctrine", as we have seen, means teaching, and the teaching of Christ was as practical as could be. "Belief and practice" could be a better phrase.

### The Breaking of Bread

Along with "doctrine and fellowship", Luke includes "breaking of bread" among the basic elements of true Christian life (Acts 2.42). The frequent partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of Christ's death is a command (1 Cor. 11.23-25), one that should be kept willingly and lovingly, and which is a token of fellowship with the Father, the Lord Jesus, and with each other. The first century ecclesias met on the first day of the week for this purpose (Acts 20.7). It is recognised that some, by force of circumstances, cannot always join in this communal remembrance, and may be obliged to break bread and drink wine alone (although they will not be alone, for the Lord will be with those who are sincere and earnest in the Truth). However, deliberate abstinence from partaking of the emblems, and forsaking the assembling of ourselves together without just cause, are contrary to Christ's commands. If continued it can break the precious fellowship that the Breaking of Bread signifies.

The Breaking of Bread also brings a communal responsibility to ensure that participants "all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1.10). Those partaking of the emblems share together "one bread" as members of "one body" (1 Cor. 10.17),

and this fellowship can only occur between those who "walk in the light" (1 John 1.7). This principle is broken if we share the emblems with those who differ from us on fundamental issues.

## **Ecclesial Discipline**

As noted above, the ideal set before us in the Scriptures is that of perfect unity: *"that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor. 1.10). It is an ideal unattainable by mortal men and women; there will be no perfect fellowship this side of the Kingdom, nevertheless this is what we have to strive after.

Sadly, but inevitably, there will be times when attempts are made to introduce errors into the ecclesias. The apostles warned us that this would be so. (Acts 20. 29-30; 2 Tim. 4.3; 2 Peter. 2.1; 1 John 2.18,19). They also told us plainly what we must do if error is persisted in. For example: *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us"* (2 Thess. 3.6). This is a clear command which we cannot ignore.

Because we are conscious of our own shortcomings we may feel reluctant to withdraw ourselves from an erring member. "It could so easily have been me" is our reaction, and rightly so. Humility, not self-righteousness, is the only frame of mind when withdrawal is called for. Moreover, we need to understand exactly what we are doing. We are standing aside from the wrongdoer. We do not judge the person, but neither do we support him. We say in effect, "If you are determined to go down that path, you must go without us. We cannot stop you, but we will not accompany you nor bid you 'God speed'".

We are NOT seeking to condemn the offender or to usurp the authority of Christ in the coming day of judgment. We are NOT declaring the brother/sister to be now out of fellowship with God. This we have no power to do. The expression "withdraw fellowship from" is sometimes used. This could be misleading and dangerous. "Withdraw OURSELVES from" is the Scriptural expression and is therefore preferable.

We ARE seeking to bring home to an erring member the gravity of his position, so that he may repent and thus escape future rejection by Christ.

*"If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Thess. 3.14-15).

*"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Eph. 5.11).

*"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds"* (2 John 10-11).

This last quotation makes clear that any who refuse to support the ecclesia in its repudiation of error have to be ranked alongside the errorist himself. This principle is rooted in the Old Testament: for example, *"When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers..."* (Psalm. 50.18). It often complicates decision-making, but cannot be evaded.

Withdrawal, it must be emphasised, although undoubtedly a command of Christ, is a last resort after all effort (sometimes over a long period of time) has been unsuccessful. The errors that necessitate withdrawal are, of course, serious ones, that clearly contravene Scripture, and not the lapses we are all guilty of daily and for which we seek forgiveness in our nightly prayers. The examples that are found in the New Testament relate to errors of belief (e.g. 2 John 10-11) and practice (e.g. 1 Cor. 5.3-5,9,11,13; 2 Thess. 3.6).

In trying to discharge this sad duty when it is required, we do not have the benefit of Spirit guidance such as the apostles had, and which may sometimes have made their actions seem somewhat peremptory (for example Ananias and Sapphira). We need to proceed with great caution and humility, always indeed with much anguish and anxiety, but we must not shirk our duty. For as well as having a duty to warn and reprove the offender for the sake of his own eventual salvation, we have also a duty to the body of faithful believers. *"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven..."* (1 Cor. 5.6-7).

## **Ecclesial responsibility for unity**

The ecclesia is the body responsible, through its appointed representatives, for the discharge of all these duties: for the instruction and proper baptism of new members; for the spiritual as well as physical welfare of all its members; for the repudiation of error and, where ultimately necessary, for withdrawal from disorderly or erring members. These duties are, carried out by the ecclesia concerned on behalf of the whole body of believers, and therefore there must be complete agreement among all ecclesias as to the basis on which fellowship is shared. As previously stated, we believe that all ecclesias in a community should be regarded as part of a single body; the division into individual ecclesias being only a matter of geographical convenience. For this reason the concept of "ecclesial autonomy", where individual ecclesias accept different standards in

matters relating to fundamentals of belief and practice, is rejected by the Dawn community. But on non-fundamental matters there must be ecclesial independence. We firmly reject any idea of an overall controlling body.

## **Re-baptism**

The question has sometimes been raised as to the validity of baptisms carried out by Christadelphian communities with whom we are not in fellowship. If we believe them to be in error, how can we accept their baptisms as valid? Should we not re-immense them when they seek to join us?

Re-immersion should be carried out where it becomes clear that there were wrong beliefs, or a quite inadequate understanding of first principles at the time of baptism, or if requested by the candidate. But more often it becomes clear that the applicant has always held a sound understanding of the Truth, but has become exercised at the failure of the community he or she is leaving to uphold Scriptural standards. The validity of a person's baptism rests on the state of his own heart and mind at the time, not on those who carried out the baptism.

## **"One body"**

There is a further difficulty that some seem to experience. Because in some cases we concede that one who is not recognised as being in fellowship with us may still be in good standing with the Father, as we hope we ourselves are, ought we not to fellowship that person? The short answer is that we do not know the state of any man's heart, and we do not know the standing that any one of us has in God's sight, and can only trust in his merciful forgiveness when we err.

A similar argument runs that because there is only "one body" of Christ, it is wrong to divide it. But we do not know who is or who is not part of the body of Christ. It is not merely a question of being validly baptised, or being called a Christadelphian. Division within the body is not prevented by tolerating wrong belief or practice; inaction merely masks it. True unity can only exist where there is unanimity on fundamental issues.

## **The letters to the Seven Ecclesias**

These are frequently advanced as reasons for tolerating error in the ecclesias, leaving Christ to be the final arbiter. It is alleged that each ecclesia addressed was not held responsible for the errors in the others, and there is no evidence that the faithful ecclesias had withdrawn themselves from the unfaithful ones.

There are several weaknesses in this argument. It is unwise to try to establish principles from situations of which we today are unaware; especially if other clear Scriptures are thereby negated. The fact is that the letters pointed out the wrong

of harbouring error; Pergamos being strongly reprimanded for its failure to deal with wrong doctrine in its midst, and Thyatira for "suffering" false teachers. It is therefore disappointing to find these same letters used by some today to justify non-withdrawal from persistent error. We need to ask ourselves if we would happily be members of an ecclesia which Christ addressed in such forthright words of criticism and condemnation.

The overall message of the letters to all the churches was that errors of belief and practice were being permitted by some, and this was a cause of severe reproof from Christ, with the threat of punishment if the situation was not corrected. The warning is also for our times: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (Rev. 2.29).

\* \* \* \* \*

The present divided state of Christadelphians gives no pleasure or satisfaction to any of us, and is a reproach to our human weakness. The ecclesias known as the Dawn Christadelphian community are not glad or proud to be separated: how can we be, when families and close friendships are thereby fractured? We are simply trying in all good conscience to carry out the instructions of our Master, who made it so clear that our love for him must transcend all earthly relationships, and who equated our love for him with keeping his commandments (Matt. 10.37; John 15.14).

## **Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

### **A Summary of Dawn Fellowship Beliefs**

There is little doubt that the declining standards of marriage so evident in the world have crept into the Christadelphian body as a whole, so that what was unthinkable a generation or so ago is now tolerated. In the main sections of Christadelphians (from whom those in Dawn are separated) divorce followed by remarriage, once virtually unknown, has been permitted for an increasing variety of reasons. First, adultery was considered by some to be the sole valid reason; then the departure of an unbelieving partner was additionally accepted as grounds for remarriage; and today some who have divorced solely on the grounds of incompatibility and have since remarried, have been accepted.

This section will set out what we believe to be the true Scriptural teaching on this important subject. For clarity the *conclusions* will first be stated briefly, as set out in the Dawn Statement of Faith; followed by a more detailed discussion of the subject in the Appendices, showing some of the arguments which can lead to these conclusions.

It is imperative that we set our standards by the Word of God, and resist any tendency to accommodate our way of life to the changing standards of our age. This is especially true because the subject involves the strongest human emotions, which may colour our judgment. But in matters of our response to the will of the Creator of all things, we must not let human emotion be our guide. It is accepted that some of the conclusions thus reached are possibly different from those of some of our pioneer brethren. It is clear that they had little first-hand experience of the problem as it now presents itself: later situations alluded to in the opening paragraph have compelled closer examination of Scriptural teaching.

### **What is Marriage?**

In a civil sense marriage is the union of a man and woman, by joint consent and publicly attested, according to the due requirements and customs of the time. (Marriage is not merely the sexual union of consenting man and woman, and sexual union without marriage is fornication).

Superimposed on this is the Divine ideal for marriage as expressed in Scripture. Companionship, help, as well as procreation, were the aims (Gen. 1.28; 2.18), but especially was it clear from the beginning that God intended that marriage should be for life. The partners so joined became "one flesh" (Gen. 2.24), and only death could break that bond (1 Cor. 7.39). The mind of God in this respect was endorsed by Jesus in his teaching (Mark 10.8-9), and this is the standard set for his followers.

In most countries marriage is marked by a civil or religious ceremony, is registered, and an appropriate certificate issued. In those countries where this is not the custom or law, it is important for brethren and sisters to remember the Scriptural basis of marriage, and to ensure that their union is marked by a binding declaration before witnesses.

### **Divorce and remarriage forbidden to the enlightened**

Many Scriptures combine to teach that divorce is prohibited to the enlightened, and that remarriage after divorce is adultery:

*"And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Mark 10.8-9).

*And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife"* (1 Cor. 7.10-11).

*And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery"* (Mark 10.10-12).

*"Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery"* (Luke 16.18).

*"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man"* (Rom. 7.2-3).

*"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 7.39).

Clearly, only death breaks the marriage bond; and divorce and remarriage are prohibited: this would be adultery. Note that Christ makes no concessions to the "innocent" party to a divorce.

(For further discussion of this topic see Appendices 5 and 6, pages 46, 49)

## The "Exceptive Clause"

When Jesus mentioned the single exception to his otherwise complete ban on divorce and remarriage—"except for fornication"—he was combatting the Pharisees' attempt to trap him with a question relating to divorce under the Law of Moses:

*"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"* (Matt. 19.3).

In his reply Jesus said:

*"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery"* (Matt. 19.9).

The question and its answer related to an interpretation of the Law of Moses. The "exceptive clause" (whatever it might mean) does not therefore apply to spiritual Israel. Those "in the house" (Mark 10.10-11) were expressly forbidden to divorce or remarry. (For further discussion of this topic see Appendix 1, page 30)

**Application of the above Scriptural teaching:**

***If a brother divorces his wife for any reason and marries another during her lifetime he becomes an adulterer. If a sister divorces her husband and marries another during his lifetime she becomes an adulteress. This adultery must be discontinued, else it will result in exclusion from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6.9-10; Gal. 5.19-21; Heb. 13.4).***

## Divorce and remarriage by the unenlightened

The unenlightened are in a different position to the enlightened. Those who are in darkness, whilst sinners in a general sense, are not held by God to be responsible to the specific precepts of his law. The Scriptural principle is clearly, set out by Paul:

*"... what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law"* (Rom. 3.19).

*"... for where no law is, there is no transgression"* (Rom. 4.15).

*"... sin is not imputed when there is no law"* (Rom. 5.13).

Thus any who divorce, or divorce and remarry before coming to a knowledge of the Truth should be accepted for baptism in that situation, knowing that they will then commence a new life in Christ Jesus.

**Application of Scriptural teaching:**

***Those who, while in darkness, have divorced and remarried, shall not be required to separate if they later come to a knowledge of the Truth and desire to be baptised.***

(For further discussion of this topic see Appendix 4, page 41)

## Separation

Failure of a Christadelphian marriage leading to separation is a very sad and serious event and, in view of the many commands and exhortations directed at married life, such estrangement may well be called to account at the judgment seat. But there is no unqualified command against separation as there is against divorce and remarriage (e.g. 1 Cor. 7.10-11). Thus we believe that the ecclesia concerned must determine what is a Scriptural response to each case. The circumstances of some separations may lead the ecclesia to apply sanctions against one or both partners. In every case we believe that it is a duty of the separated parties always to work for reconciliation and reinstatement of their married life.

## Concluding thoughts

There is no easy way to the Kingdom for any of us. Jesus told us that we must be prepared to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him (Luke 14.27). Paul told us "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22). What such "crossbearing" will mean for each one of us individually will vary tremendously. God alone knows what is best for us to prepare us for the Kingdom and we must believe that our trials are designed by him for our individual needs. He has promised us two things. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13.5) and he will not try us above what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10.13). But we have to leave Him, as our loving, all-wise, heavenly Father, to decide what we are able to bear.

## Appendix 1. The "Exceptive Clause"

In Mark 10. 10-11 Jesus, in a private conversation with his disciples, forbade divorce and remarriage absolutely. This teaching is repeated by Paul (1 Cor. 7.10-11). But in the two references to the topic in Matthew (5.31-32; 19.3-12) the phrase *"except it be for fornication"* is included. Does this therefore modify Christ's teaching and Paul's interpretation of it? Many sincerely believe this to be so, and that Christ is here giving permission for his followers to divorce and remarry if one partner had been unfaithful. We believe this is misunderstanding his teaching.

### Old Testament background—Adultery punishable by death

To appreciate the references to divorce in Matthew it is necessary to allude briefly to some Old Testament commands and allusions.

In one of the most emphatic and clear edicts of the Law of Moses the death sentence was pronounced on both participants in the act of adultery:

*"And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20.10, repeated in Deut. 22.22).*

By the time of Jesus the Jews rarely exacted this penalty, although they still admitted the validity of the command (John 8.5). It is important to remember that this penalty of death for adultery was a part of the Law that Jesus said he had *not* come to destroy, but to fulfil, and from which not one jot or tittle should pass, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5.17-18). One cannot therefore simply take Christ's word "fornication" and give it the meaning of "adultery", and so claim that the exceptive clause applies to *married couples* where infidelity has occurred.

### Divorce under the Law of Moses

The whole slant of the Old Testament is towards the permanence of marriage. The Genesis edict *"they shall be one flesh"* (2.24), with its implicit ban on divorce, underlies all its teaching. Although it is clear that divorce and remarriage was sometimes practised by Israel, there are no commands *as such* that permitted divorce. There is no statement in the Law of Moses to the effect that "If a woman does thus, then her husband may divorce her and she can then remarry". Instead, there are just a few provisions that "suffer" (Matt. 19.8) the practice of divorce, and then seek to regulate it, but especially *to restrict it*. Thus the man who had humbled an unbetrothed girl had to marry her, but could not subsequently put her away (Deut. 22.28-29); nor could the man who had wrongly accused her of

infidelity (v19). Certainly the holy calling of the priests (which should surely be typical of our position in Christ) prevented any marriage with a divorcee (Lev. 21.7).

### Deuteronomy 24.1-4

The most well-known of such provisions is in Deuteronomy 24.1-4. In the Authorised Version translation this appears to be a specific command that allows for divorce for "some uncleanness", but it is in fact another of the passages that acknowledges the existence of divorce and then seeks to regulate it. In the original the passage is a series of contingencies—'ifs'—that culminate in the main point of the command—i.e. that after a divorce and remarriage the original couple should not come back together again. In fact the original Hebrew passage is one long sentence. Here is the Revised Standard Version of the passage, with the various contingencies emphasised, leading up to the prohibition at the end:

*"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD".*

It will readily be seen that here is a command restricting remarriage rather than one approving of divorce. As Dr. J.H. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi, says of this passage: "What we have here is no law instituting or commanding divorce. This institution is taken for granted as in Leviticus 21.7 and Numbers 30.9. We are merely given one regulation in regard to it; viz., that a man who has divorced his wife may not remarry her, if her second husband divorced her or died". It is evident that God through Moses neither instituted or commanded divorce. It was a practice that had become established by custom, not Divine command. As Jesus was to say later, Moses "suffered" them to put away their wives (Matt. 19.8).

However, whilst not a command to divorce, this passage does confirm that divorce was practised in Israel, and the Law accepted the situation "for the hardness of your hearts"; but at the same time regulated it. Thus the passage shows that divorce should not be at the whim of the husband: it had to be for a specific reason, and correct procedures had to be followed. What was this specific reason? It is difficult to be precise. The phrase "some uncleanness" (AV) or "some indecency" (RSV) in the original literally means "a matter of nakedness". The only other place in Scripture with the same original phrase is Deuteronomy

23.14, that refers to covering excrement so that God did not see "anything indecent" (RSV) in the camp of Israel. Thus the exact nature of the indecency was not spelled out, and to this day much discussion has centred on the meaning of the term. One thing however is ruled out. It could not mean adultery. For this offence, as we have seen, the penalty was not divorce but death.

### **The Pharisees seek Christ's interpretation of the Law**

It was this seeming ambiguity that gave rise to the Pharisees' confrontation with Christ recorded in Matthew 19. For years a controversy had raged in the rabbinical schools about the precise meaning of the "some indecency" referred to by Moses. In Christ's day there were two main views. The School of Hillel insisted on a very loose meaning. They taught that divorce was possible for almost any cause—some quite trivial reasons being permitted. On the other hand the School of Shammai believed that the only lawful reason for divorce was the unchastity of the wife.

#### **The background to the incident**

The background to this attempt by the Pharisees to trap Jesus is relevant to the account. Jesus had left Capernaum (Mark 9.33), crossed the Jordan (Matt. 19.1, Mark 10.1) and thus entered the territory of Herod Antipas. This was the territory where divorce and remarriage had political overtones. Herod had married Herodias, who had previously been married to his brother Philip. John the Baptist had already suffered the extreme penalty for declaring that this second union was unlawful (Mark 6.17-28). Thus Jesus was on dangerous territory. The Herodians had already joined up with the Pharisees in an attempt to destroy him (Mark 3.6), and no doubt they seized this opportunity to see if they could duplicate John's downfall in Jesus' case whilst he was in Herod's jurisdiction.

One thing is certain; the Pharisees were not genuinely after information. Their sole objective was to trap and thereby harm Jesus (see the same use of the word in John 8.6). His strict views on divorce were almost certainly already known, as John's had been, and they were trying to get him to give an answer that would either invoke the intervention of Herod, or go against the Law of Moses: both of which could be used to cause his downfall. They may also have sought to reduce his following amongst the people, most of whom accepted the more lax views on divorce current at the time.

This was the religious and political background to the incident recorded in Matthew 19:

3. *"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?"*

4. *And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,*

5. *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?*

6. *Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

7. *They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*

8. *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

9. *And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."*

#### **An attempt to trap Jesus**

As we have seen, Jesus was being questioned by the Pharisees in an attempt to trap him, not to gain information. Which School would he support, the liberal and popular Hillel or the restrictive Shammai? Hence the phrasing of their question. "Is it lawful ... *for every cause?*" (v3). His immediate reply bypassed these options and put marriage on the Edenic level (v4-6), and this should have been good enough for his opponents—as it should also be for Christ's disciples—i.e. no divorce. *It was only because his opponents persisted in their efforts to trap him* that the conversation was continued. He then corrected their use of the word "command" (v7) to describe the law on divorce. Rather, it was a concession, not a command, and that only for the hardness of their hearts, and he again refers back to God's original intention in Eden (v8). Under pressure of their insistence Jesus restated his prohibition of divorce (v9), with subsequent remarriage being adultery. But he did *in parenthesis* add the phrase "except it be for fornication", thus indicating that in this dispute over the Law he favoured the Shammai view. We must be careful not to focus our attention so much on the aside remark that we ignore the whole drift of his reply—i.e. "No divorce".

It is of little value to go into a detailed study of the meaning of the word translated "fornication". The one thing it could *not* mean in this context was "adultery". Jesus knew that the Law—which he expressly claimed to uphold—commanded the death penalty for adultery, so he was not here ruling about marriages where one partner had been unfaithful. To permit divorce in that circumstance would be to contradict the very Law which he said he had not come to destroy. The "indecency" had therefore to be something other than adultery.

But whatever the indecency might have been, the query under discussion related to a provision of the *Law of Moses*, and was *not* Christ's command to his disciples—he gave that later, "in the house".

It is significant that on hearing this the disciples expressed great surprise at Christ's prohibition of divorce, even when there had been fornication. "*If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*" (Matt. 19.10). This comment shows that they must clearly have understood him to mean that the ban on divorce was absolute, and that any "exceptive clause" did not apply to them. Thus on their questioning him "in the house" on this very matter (Mark 10.10-12, the accounts clearly being parallel) he confirmed this impression and, for them, forbade divorce and remarriage completely. Any subsequent union would be adultery, he said.

### **Does the "exceptive clause" apply today?**

But some Christadelphians have said that Christ's inclusion of "except for fornication" gives permission for his followers to divorce and remarry if their original partner commits adultery. We believe this misunderstands this passage. Christ did not even mention adultery in this connection. His answer on this occasion was the result of persistent questioning on the part of evil men in an attempt to trap him. Is it really to be believed that an answer given in such circumstances should be made a rule of behaviour for all his disciples?

It must always be remembered that the Pharisees were seeking Christ's judgment on an aspect of the Law of Moses. Suppose they had come to Jesus with *another* point of the Law over which they were disputing among themselves; say, for example, something connected with the Temple sacrifices. Suppose Jesus had replied in such a way as to correct any abuses that had crept in, and had put the matter back on its original Divine footing. None would suggest that such a ruling would be binding on us today. We would rightly say that it was a provision of the Law which was no longer relevant. Why then do some say that Christ's ruling on the Pharisees' abuse of the Law's *divorce* provisions should be applicable to all Christ's followers?

#### **"In the house"**

In his ministry Jesus sometimes took the opportunity to elaborate his teaching privately to his disciples: either at his own initiative or in response to their requests. These personal conversations "in the house" are recorded on several occasions by Mark (e.g. 7.17-23; 9.28-29; 9.33-37) and obviously reflect the Master's specific teaching to his disciples. The occasion we are considering is another such example (v10-12). Having heard the Master's response to the Pharisees they sought information about their own position.

*"And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery"* (Mark 10.10-12).

So in reply to their question Jesus shifts the focus from divorce—which he forbids absolutely—to remarriage. ***For his followers remarriage after a divorce is adultery.*** Adultery, both by definition and Scriptural usage, is having extramarital sexual relations when one or both parties are married. This means Christ is saying that, whatever legal process may have been conducted to procure a divorce, in God's eyes the original partners are still married to each other; otherwise he would not call them adulterers if they married again. (*See also Appendices 5 and 6, pages 46, 49*).

Another aspect of Christ's private reply to his followers is the mention of the woman obtaining a divorce. Under Jewish law and practice this was not possible, but was common in Roman society. Knowing that later his disciples would be called upon to preach Christ throughout the whole world, Jesus was giving them instructions that would cover every situation that might arise.

#### **The Sermon on the Mount**

This discourse addressed to Christ's disciples, although not given in the heat of controversy like the Matthew 19 incident, also contains allusions to the wrong interpretation of the Law of Moses by the Jewish leaders. After the series of beatitudes, Jesus in Matthew 5.17 commences a new section of his homily. He prefaces this by the express statement that he has not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it; that not one jot or tittle shall pass from the Law prior to that fulfilment; and that any who taught the breaking of any of its commands would be the least in the kingdom of heaven (v17-19).

Two things come out from this preface. First, having said this about the Law, Jesus would not have immediately gone on to *alter* the Law. But he *would* have been altering the Law if he had said that divorce was an alternative to death in the case of adulterers. Secondly by this preface Jesus was warning his disciples against those who were breaking the Law and making it of none effect *through their tradition* (cp. Mark 7.13).

Jesus proceeds to review some provisions of the Law, either bringing out the depth of its implications or giving a series of instances in which the rulers had negated the Law, by their "tradition". His allusion to divorce is an example of the latter:

*"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. 5.31-32).*

"It hath been said"—by whom? Although this is clearly a reference to Deuteronomy 24.1-4 it is not a direct quotation from it. But surely one would expect accuracy from Jesus of all people if he was reciting the very words of the Law. Nor, as we have seen, is it the actual *teaching* of the passage; for if so it would be legislation *enabling* divorce and saying how it should take place, which is the very thing Deuteronomy does not do. Jesus must therefore have been quoting the Pharisees' *traditional interpretation* and contrasting it with the true provision of the Law. It was the Pharisees, by their tradition, that said "*whosoever shall put away his wife...*" thus extending the permission to almost anybody. Once it is appreciated that Jesus is warning his disciples of the error of the Pharisaic tradition it can be seen that this reference is analogous to his confrontation with the Pharisees in Matthew 19. As in that instance he is correcting the rulers' lax interpretations and so restoring to the Deuteronomy passage its original meaning.

But for us the Law of Moses is no longer in force, so we do not need to be warned about wrong interpretations of it. But the *spirit* of the Law and the rest of the Old Testament—no divorce and remarriage—is enjoined by Christ upon all his followers, and embraced by the specific commands that are clearly laid down in other passages (Mark 10.6-12; Luke 16.18; 1 Cor. 7.11,39).

### **Divorce and remarriage forbidden in the early church**

In the same way that we sometimes examine the basic beliefs of the early church to demonstrate that their system of doctrines was largely the same as ours today, so one can examine some of their practices and see how they responded to the question of divorce and remarriage. The late first century and early second century ecclesias lived in a similar climate to ours as regards divorce. In the Roman world divorce was easily and frequently obtained by both men and women, sometimes for the most trivial reasons. It is far from surprising therefore that the early Christian writers often refer to their accepted views on the problem. Whilst this, of course, is not authoritative evidence as compared with Scripture, it is valuable in showing how those very near to the days of the Apostles viewed the references we have been considering.

Their writings (see below)\* mainly address the question of remarriage, and it is significant that they often quote from Matthew 5 and 19, and thus obviously knew of the "except it be for fornication" clause. But this is the important thing to notice: although the early ecclesias were beginning to fall away from purity of the original Truth, they *never* used "except for fornication" as an argument in favour of remarriage after divorce. They clearly did not consider it relevant to their current position. Remarriage after a divorce, even if that divorce had been for adultery, was prohibited in the early church; they considered that the original marriage bond still stood, and any subsequent union would therefore be adultery. They also considered that remarriage would deny any opportunity for repentance by the offending party, because it prevented reconciliation and reinstatement of the marriage—an aspect that we feel is not given sufficient weight today. *The obedient child of God should never get into the position where because of remarriage a repentant erring partner cannot be received back.*

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\*Examples:

**Hermas** (date uncertain but prior to AD150): "But if, after sending away his [adulterous] wife, he marries another, he also commits adultery himself". And upon the wife's repentance: "If her husband will not take her back he sins and brings upon himself a great sin. Rather one must take back the one that has sinned, and the one who repents". "This is the reason why you were commanded to remain single... because in such cases repentance is possible" (*Mandate*, 4.1.7-8,10).

**Justin Martyr** (Converted 130, died 165): In his *First Apology* Justin quotes, one after the other, Matthew 5:28, 5.32, and Matthew 19.11 and then immediately adds: "And so those who make second marriages according to human law are sinners in the sight of our Teacher" (1 Apol. 15). Note: (a) Justin makes a distinction between what is possible "according to human law" and by implication what is possible under the law of the "Teacher". Whilst human law may recognise a second marriage as valid, the Teacher considers it a sin. (b) Even though quoting Matthew 5 and 19, Justin makes no exception to remarriage being a sin.

Commenting on the views of the early Fathers one writer says: "Their virtually unanimous testimony, stated or implied, is that Christ in the Gospels—and specifically in Matthew—forbade remarriage after divorce in all circumstances, including when divorce was for adultery" (A Cornes: *Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 231 ).

## Appendix 2. Repentance and Forgiveness

What should be the ecclesia's response to one who divorces and remarries in disobedience to Divine commands and then repents of this action? This is the crucial question, and probably the one that really divides opinion. It is suggested by some of those from whom we are separated that, upon sincere expression of repentance, the remarried divorcee should be allowed to resume his or her place within the ecclesia. They say that to insist on separation from the second partner as a condition of rejoining the ecclesia would in most cases result in greater evil, especially if children were involved. Those who advocate such a course say that as "*all manner of sin*" will be forgiven unto the repentant, we must accept that the sin of the remarriage is forgiven by God. Otherwise it would become another unforgivable sin in addition to the one against the Holy Spirit mentioned in that passage (Matt. 12.31).

Central to resolving the problem of repentant divorcees is the Scriptural meaning of repentance as the basis of God's forgiveness. Of course, we cannot know the full extent of the mercy of God, but God has told us the basis on which he forgives, and this must influence our response as well. Thus God says that repentance is not merely saying "I'm sorry", but coupled with the sorrow must be an intention not to continue in the sin. "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*" (Prov. 28.13). This is the only ground on which we can assess repentance. A brother who had professed repentance of habitual robbery would not be accepted by any of us if his thieving ways were not abandoned. Similarly a person who has deliberately broken a command of the holy and righteous Creator, and become by God's own definition guilty of adultery, should at least be expected to show repentance by ceasing the adulterous activity.

Some see this as hard, impractical, and contrary to the spirit and command of Jesus which tells us to be merciful and forgiving. But this approach fails to appreciate the distinction between sins against ourselves and sins against God. We *must* forgive sins committed against ourselves, but we have no authority to forgive others' failure to keep *God's* commands. Such forgiveness is his prerogative. But if God's criteria for repentance are met as far as we can tell, we may *assume* that such sins are forgiven by Him, and on that assumption receive back the offender. But we have no power to forgive, or to receive back any where the conditions for repentance are clearly not met. Remember that by withdrawing from another we do not judge them—we simply dissociate ourselves from the offence.

To receive back one who has not been forgiven by God could be the opposite of being loving and merciful. The whole purpose of withdrawal should be to convince offenders of the seriousness of their situation, so as to lead them to

genuine repentance. If we overlook such offences it could induce a feeling of complacency in the wrongdoer that could be very detrimental in the long run. Thus in the case of a remarried divorcee, as God has clearly stated that he regards the alliance as adulterous, then all the compassion and help that we can give will not alter the situation in his eyes, and true love will point this out. No one is saying that ultimately a loving heavenly Father might not be merciful, but until the day of judgment that will not be known, and meanwhile the ecclesia must strive to uphold the commands of Christ as they stand.

This leads on to another aspect that has to be considered—the obligation to the Truth as a whole. Ecclesias have a two-fold responsibility: to provide a spiritual environment where individuals can live and grow in Christ, but also to be a "*pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3.15). Allowing false practice to infiltrate and become normal within the ecclesial world, and thus passing on a defective religion, is ultimately as ruinous as embracing false doctrine. It must be remembered that the introduction of error is almost always a gradual, insidious, process, with apparently innocuous beginnings. It is possible to be so sympathetic to individual cases that the effect of such sympathy on the Truth at large is overlooked.

What then are the options for the individual who bitterly regrets remarriage after a divorce? As far as our admittedly limited human judgment goes, the remarried divorcee should cease from the adulterous association, making suitable provision for the welfare of dependants, and be received back into the ecclesia. Otherwise the remarried brother or sister must not seek to join an ecclesia, but hope in the One whose "*mercies are great*" (2 Sam. 24.14).

None would suggest that these are easy options, but the truly repentant child of God will not give way under such difficulties, but trust in God for strength and help, and for mercy in the day of Christ. Many of God's servants past and present have perforce had to plough a lonely furrow, and have been given the spiritual strength to endure faithfully to the end.

### Appendix 3. The "Pauline Privilege"

Despite the teaching of Christ prohibiting divorce and remarriage to his followers in Mark 10.10-11, some have argued that Paul gives a reason for divorce that can be followed by another marriage. The passage is in his first letter to the Corinthians ch. 7. Referring to the possible tension arising when only one partner embraces the Truth he 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" (1 Cor. 7.15).*

In this verse the "not under bondage" is taken by some to mean that the *marriage bond* has been broken by the departure of the unbeliever, leaving the believer free to remarry. In support of this v27, "Art thou *bound* unto a wife?" and v39, "the wife is *bound* ... as long as her husband liveth", are cited as demonstrating that Paul is referring to the marriage bond, and so, to be consistent, this should also be its meaning in v15, with the result that the believer need not consider himself *bound in marriage* to his departed unbelieving partner.

We believe this is fallacious reasoning. If admitted, it would provide an exception to the complete embargo on divorce that Jesus teaches, and Paul elsewhere upholds. It arises from the assumption that the word for "bondage" of v 15 is the same as that for "bound" in verses 27 and 39. This is not so. Whilst in the two latter cases the root word is *dedetai*, correctly translated as "bound", the word in v15 is *dedoulotai* meaning "enslaved". So "not under bondage" means "not being enslaved" and is a very different thing from "being divorced and free to marry". In what sense then is the believing partner "not enslaved" or "free"? We suggest that Paul is saying that the believing partner is free to accept the action of the unbeliever in departing—he or she is not a "slave" to the situation, and need not fight against it if the unbeliever decides to leave. But that is far different from saying that the believer thus left on his or her own is free to remarry. The marriage bond still exists although the partner has gone and, as Paul shows in v39, this bond can only be broken by death.

### Appendix 4. The Position of the Unenlightened

We have considered, and answered, the arguments by which some advocate the acceptance of remarried divorcees. Some go to what might be called the other extreme and contend that if God "joins" all marriages, making the partners "one flesh", then all of mankind are responsible to his laws concerning divorce and remarriage. Thus they say that any who have divorced and remarried prior to coming to a knowledge of the Truth must separate as a prerequisite for baptism. Or, in the case of an unmarried divorcee learning the Truth another marriage is forbidden whilst the original unenlightened partner is still alive. This is clearly a serious matter, as it possibly involves denying baptism to someone, with all its implications for that person's salvation. To refuse baptism in such a case we have to be absolutely sure of Scriptural support.

#### Sin and transgression

First some basics. There is a difference between "sin" and "transgression". Sin is the failure to attain to the glory of God ("*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" –Rom. 3.23). In the Old Testament the original word is also used to describe a sling stone that missed its mark (Judg. 20.16). Or, in a more correct translation of 1 John 3.4, "*sin is lawlessness*". Judged by this standard all humans are guilty of sin, whether they know God's laws or not.

The enlightened are in a different situation. They have been given specific Divine laws to keep. When they fail in this their sin becomes transgression—a "crossing over" of a line dividing right from wrong. "*Where no law is, there is no transgression*" (Rom. 4.15). So those who sin against a specific Divine law "transgress". In the Law of Moses this distinction was apparent in the separate offerings for sins of "ignorance" and specific "trespasses".

The question is whether unenlightened man is responsible to specific Divine laws? Do the unenlightened transgress in the sense outlined above? Or is *everything* they do a "falling short" rather than each offence a sin against a specific law?

It is clear that mankind has a general responsibility to God—"a moral responsibility to Deity" (RR *Ambassador* 1867, p.22) as evidenced by the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the extermination of the Canaanite nations. In Romans 1. 18-20 Paul says that the evil ways of man are inexcusable in view of the fact that he should have deduced the existence of God from the wonders of creation (the reference in v18 to "hold the truth" is to "holding down" the truth, i.e. suppressing it). But the unenlightened are not responsible to *specific* Divine laws:

"Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4.15).

"By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3.20).

"Until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5.13).

"As many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law" (Rom. 2.12).

"If ye were blind (ignorant), ye should have no sin" (John 9.4 1).

"The times of this ignorance God winked at" or overlooked (Acts 17.30).

In Old Testament times mankind was thus divided into two classes: those who knew God's laws and who were responsible to them, and those who did not know Him. As God said to Israel "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3.2). In the Christian dispensation the two classes are (a) those who are responsible to Christ's teaching (including that on divorce and remarriage), and (b) those who are blind to it.

But it has been argued that when God pronounced Adam and Eve "one flesh" and that when Jesus spoke of subsequent marriages being "God-joined", here was a *universal* law that applies to every human being and therefore all are responsible to it, despite the quotations above.

If this were so then surely God would not have "suffered" (Matt. 19.8) Israel to put away their wives and marry again under the Law of Moses. Nor would polygamy have been tolerated. It is the law of *Christ* which insists that marriage for his followers should conform to the high level intended by God from the beginning.

Thus the unenlightened live a life of sin: their sin in failing to reach the Divine intention regarding marriage is only one example from an existence that is totally "*alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*" (Eph. 4.18).

But this past life with all its failure to honour God, is washed away at baptism. There is no exception to this general rule. In 1894 Bro. Roberts was asked: "What sins are forgiven at baptism?" and describes it as "an extraordinary question" and answers: "Every sin—all sins pertaining to the person baptised" (*The Christadelphian* 1894 p.272). It seems illogical that failure to adhere to God's original intentions regarding marriage should be an exception to this.

The New Testament does not give any exceptions to this principle:

"Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained *mercy*, because I did it *ignorantly in unbelief*" (1 Tim. 1. 13).

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and **wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22.16).

And by him all that believe are justified **from all things**, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13.39).

"And you hath he quickened, who **were dead in trespasses and sins**; wherein in **time past** ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2.1-2).

"And you, that were sometime **alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works**, yet now hath he reconciled" (Col. 1.21).

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you **all trespasses**" (Col. 2.13).

"...he was **purged from his old sins**" (2 Peter. 1.9).

It would be difficult to find stronger words to convey the idea that everything connected with the believer's past life is washed away by baptism. Therefore we conclude that divorce and remarriage by unbelievers is included among the sins forgiven at baptism. Thus we believe that a brother or sister who before baptism had obtained a divorce whilst in ignorance of Christ's commands would be free to marry "in the Lord".

If this were not so there could well have arisen an anomalous situation in the first century. It is very possible that some of the new Jewish converts had previously divorced and remarried as "suffered" by God under the Law. Would the apostles have forced them to abandon their existing partner and return to their original married situation before they could be baptised? Surely not! It would be most unreasonable to penalise a new convert for a divorce and remarriage that had actually been permitted by God in the past. But what if the new convert were a *Gentile*? Would the remarried person, unlike the Jew, be expected to separate from his existing wife (on the false supposition that his previous marriage was a God-joined one and must be reinstated or a second one abandoned)? If so, it would treat Jewish and Gentile converts differently making the ways of God unequal, in contradiction of his express statement (Eze. 18.25).

A couple of quotations from Bro. Roberts could be useful.

"It is, however, a divine principle that this result [i.e. moral responsibility] is limited to those who come within the actual sphere of its operations. Hence, in the absence of light—that is, when men are in a state of ignorance—they are not amenable to condemnation; God

"winks at" their doings, just as he winks at the actions of the brutes of the field. Barbarous nations are in this condition. They are without light and without law, and Paul's declaration on the subject is in harmony with the general principles enunciated in the scriptures quoted: 'as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law' (Rom. 2.12).

"Those in the world are 'living without law', and destined, as the result of that condition, to perish without law in Adam: inheriting death without resurrection—death without remedy; having neither the privileges nor the responsibilities of a divine relationship.

"But when called from darkness to light, by the preaching of the gospel, whether they submit to that gospel or refuse submission, they are 'not their own'. They neither live nor die to themselves as formerly. They have passed into special relationship to Deity in which their lives, good or evil, come under divine supervision. and form the basis of a future accountability, unknown in their state of darkness, at which God winked." (*Christendom Astray*, Chapter V. Bro. Thomas has similar comments in *Elpis Israel* Part 1, Ch. 3).

## **Herod's marriage to Herodias**

This is regularly raised by those who object to the above conclusions, and who say that the unenlightened are responsible to God's specific laws about marriage. It is alleged that because Herod's alliance was condemned by John, then Herod and Herodias, although unenlightened, were responsible to Divine laws in this matter, and this goes for all the unenlightened.

It would be unwise to argue principles from such an allusion. First, as the civil head of a nation that made the keeping of the Law its first priority, Herod should have been seen to adhere to the national Law; which Law he had clearly broken by his marriage to his brother Philip's wife. Any Head of State who broke the law of the land could be rightly criticised. This is not the position of an *ordinary* unenlightened person.

But more importantly, the fact is that Herod and Herodias were enlightened in the Law of Moses. The Herods had adopted the Jewish faith (at least nominally) and so could be rightly castigated if they broke the Law. Smith's *Bible Dictionary* is specific that the Herods had embraced the Jewish faith—"though aliens by race, the Herods were Jews in faith". Further, it must be noted that, to improve his standing with the Jews, Herod the Great married into the very elite of Jewry—the priesthood! Thus Philip, to whom Herodias was originally married, was the grandson of a Jewish High Priest whilst Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. It is inconceivable that with such a pedigree Philip and

Herodias would not have known God's ways. So falls down the argument that in Herod's case we have an example of a *non-responsible person* being subject to Divine law concerning marriage.

## **Use of "wife" and "marry" when speaking of the second partner**

Arising from the point about Herod, it is sometimes alleged that because Scripture calls the second ceremony a "marriage" (e.g. Mark 6.17; 10.11), it gives Scriptural sanction to the second relationship. The reader will have to decide whether this is clutching at straws in an attempt to support an otherwise indefensible position. We surely are not expected to apply almost legal definitions to the Bible's everyday terms, in contradiction to its express teaching elsewhere. Using the same basis as this argument, Joseph could be said to be the actual father of Jesus (Luke 2.48), and Nabal was still the husband of Abigail many years after his death (1 Sam. 30.5; 2 Sam. 2.2; 3.3)!

In this present discussion we similarly use the word "marriage" or remarriage" by way of convention rather than to imply that a second true marriage is possible in God's sight.

## Appendix 5. Paul's References in Romans

In Romans 7 is an important statement of the inspired apostle Paul on the topic of divorce and remarriage that should be considered:

*"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law\*\*,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man" (Rom. 7.1-3).*

Paul reiterates this teaching in his letter to the Corinthians, repeating the emphatic pronouncement that remarriage during the lifetime of a previous partner makes the second union an adulterous one.

*"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7.39).*

In both Romans and Corinthians ("not I, but the Lord") Paul is also giving the teaching of the Lord himself.

*"And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10.11).*

Even taken as they stand, these passages are conclusive in prohibiting Christ's followers to divorce and remarry.

Those who contend that for Christians divorce and remarriage are permissible subsequent to infidelity by one of the married pair, try to justify their belief on the assumption that Paul was here enunciating general principles and did not mention any "exceptive clauses" (which we have already considered in detail) because they were already well known to his readers. This is an argument from silence, and as such is valueless. Paul's assertions (e.g. 1 Cor. 7.39), and the testimony of the first century writers considered previously, show that the "exceptive clause" was never used as grounds for remarriage after divorce. But the context of the Romans passage positively excludes the suggestion that there were any exceptions to Paul's statement that marriage is for life and that divorce followed by remarriage is

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\*\*Literally "know law".

adultery. Even out of context the passage is conclusive, but in its context the conclusion is unshakeable.

What is this context? Why did Paul, as part of his exposition of a believer's new life in Christ, suddenly introduce this apparently unconnected topic of the permanence of marriage? It was to elaborate his arguments contained in chapter 6. It would help to read this well-known chapter again as a reminder of what Paul is saying. He is expounding the change that occurs at baptism. The new convert dies to his old life and is raised to a new life in Christ (v4). Having been a slave to sin he now becomes a slave to righteousness (v16-18). And all this has been accomplished because he has figuratively *died—been "dead with Christ" (v8), and henceforward is "dead indeed unto sin" (v11).*

Having explained this principle that *death* leads to a change of masters, Paul immediately goes on in ch. 7.1-3 (for the chapter division is artificial) to cite a well-known example *to illustrate the point he has just been making*. At first it may seem that there is little association of ideas, but closer reading reveals a continuation of Paul's theme of changing masters. This is the connection: he is saying that marriage is a bond just as man's slavery to sin is also a bond (ch. 6.16-18,20). And in the same way that the marriage bond can *only* be broken by death, so one's transfer from the bondage of sin and death to become servants of righteousness can also only be occasioned by death, i.e. in the waters of baptism and a subsequent "killing" of the old way of life. We can now see the link between chapter 6 and the apparently unconnected reference to marriage in the opening of chapter 7, where remarriage is stated to be possible only after the death of the first partner. A "death" is needed in each case—*figurative* in changing spiritual masters, *literal* in the case of marrying a new partner.

Then comes the point of it all. Having reminded his readers that marriage is permanent, only broken by death, and any remarriage after divorce is adultery, he then comes (ch. 7.4) to the *reason* for this allusion to the permanence of marriage:

*"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."*

The union of a believer with Christ is thus likened to a second marriage, the first (with sin) having now been terminated by death. And Paul uses the fact that marriage *can only be broken by death* as an analogy of the annulling of the previous relationship with sin (or the Law, which emphasised man's sinfulness) and the transfer of a believer's allegiance to Christ.

But a moment's reflection will show that if there was an "exceptive clause" in the case of believers' *literal* marriages—in other words, if in certain circumstances it was possible for a second union to take place whilst the original partner

was alive—then the whole of Paul's argument would have been nullified. If divorce was in fact permissible to them, then his choice of that particular example—the dissolubility of marriage *only* on the death of one's spouse—would have been most unfortunate. It would have ruined the comparison he was making. It would mean, by analogy, that despite what Paul was trying to say in chapter 6, it would have been possible to become a servant of Christ *without* dying to one's previous life—or that it was even possible to have allegiance both to Christ *and* the ritual of the Law: something he clearly did not intend. Thus we believe Paul's words cannot be used to justify divorce and remarriage by believers.

## **Appendix 6. Can the Marriage Bond of a Believer be Broken?**

### **"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10.9)**

Those who contend that divorce and remarriage is permissible for Christ's followers in certain circumstances, frequently put particular emphasis on these words of Jesus "*let not* man put asunder". Although the marriage partners are 'God-joined', with all that this should imply about permanence, some say that because Jesus said "*let not*", rather than "*cannot*", the implication is that the marriage could be sundered by man. And it is alleged that once the marriage bond is sundered, then remarriage is a possibility.

It is true that Jesus up to this point in his discussion on the topic of divorce had not declared the impossibility of "putting asunder"—although he clearly expressed a strong moral objection to it in view of the fact that God was the original joiner.

But Jesus did not stop there. Having said that divorce is wrong because it attempts to sever what God has joined together, he went on to tell his disciples that remarriage is wrong because *despite what legal steps a man may have taken to divorce his wife, the original marriage still stands, and therefore any subsequent form of marriage is adultery* (Mark 10.10-11). Adultery, by definition, is extra-marital sexual relations by or with a married person, and the fact that Christ used the term "adultery" in describing the new relationship proves that the original marriage *still exists* in God's sight, despite any attempts by legal means to sever the bond. In this sense divorce is not only wrong, but impossible. To put it another way, Scripturally it is not possible for a believer's second marriage to be valid in the lifetime of the original partner—it is only possible to *commit adultery with a third party*, despite the fact that legally the second "marriage" may have been properly entered into. It is thus not possible to undo what God has joined—only death can do that (Rom. 7.3; 1 Cor. 7.39).

### **Is adultery an act or a state?**

In view of the above evidence, those who believe that for a brother or sister of Christ remarriage after divorce is permissible in certain cases, can only do so on the assumption that the new marriage is not an adulterous union, and that afterwards a state of adultery does not exist. It is sometimes conceded by such that the act of contracting the second marriage is adulterous, but this is all. It is claimed that all the *subsequent* relations of the remarried pair are not adulterous because their marriage has been legally performed. Thus on repentance of the *act*

of entering the second marriage, fellowship with the ecclesial world can be resumed.

We know of no Scriptural support for this view—indeed it is opposed to the whole spirit of its teaching that we have been considering. Where in the prophets does God say that his "wife" (Israel) having been divorced by him for her adultery (idolatry), no longer continues in sin if she persists in worshipping Baal? And Paul in Romans 7.3 does not describe the divorced and remarried woman as "having committed adultery"—i.e. a once and for all act—but he says she is "an adulteress":

*"So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called **an adulteress**: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man" (Rom. 7.3).*

This word "adulteress" describes the present state of the woman concerned, not the act of remarriage, committed possibly a long time before.

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*Any who wish to learn more of Dawn Christadelphian beliefs, or who wish to make contact with Dawn Christadelphians, are invited to apply to the address on the following page of this booklet.*

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