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# REFORMATION TODAY



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## Contributors to this issue

The Editor unexpectedly had to spend the month of March in South Africa, attending to family responsibilities, and this issue has been edited by Bill and Sharon James. Bill is pastor of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa. Sharon has recently written *My Heart in His Hands*, a life of Ann Judson, published by Evangelical Press.

Ray Trainer is one of the elders of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa.

Richard Ross is pastor of Hillfields Evangelical Church, Coventry. He has just completed teaching a series on the Song of Songs at a study course run by the Coventry Forum, a group of reformed churches in the Coventry area.

Jack Cottrell is Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, and a council member of CBMW (see below).

### Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Several of the articles in this issue make reference to materials produced by CBMW, and Dr Cottrell's article first appeared in **CBMWNEWS**. This organisation was founded in 1987 to provide both academic and popular responses to evangelical feminism, but also to provide positive biblical teaching on manhood and womanhood. The Board of Reference includes such leaders as Ed. Clowney, Albert Mohler, Robert Godfrey and John Frame.

CBMW produces a range of resources, including booklets, tapes, review articles and a quarterly journal. The US address is CBMW, PO Box 7337, Libertyville, IL 60048. The UK address is CBMW, 9 Epsom Road, Leamington Spa, CV32 7AR.

A UK conference (open to all) is due to be held at the King's Centre, Chessington, on Saturday June 24th, 2000. For further information contact the UK office.

Front cover: *Paulos and Nelly Ntaka with their son Lunga, see page 31*

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# Editorial

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The theme of this issue is reformation in our attitudes to singleness and marriage. Rather than just repeating well-known perspectives, we have tried to keep in mind the very real challenges of today.

## *Challenge 1: The family as optional*

The British budget of March 1999 abolished the very last fiscal recognition of marriage: the married couples' allowance. Certainly it had become a mere token, and had been granted to co-habiting couples as well. But it should have been reformed, not done away with. More financial support is to be given for children, regardless of the family setting.

How have we arrived at this situation? The sexual revolution ushered in an age where sex was separated from marriage. The constraints of 'bourgeois' society were thrown aside. Marriage was regarded as a repressive and patriarchal institution which degraded women to the status of dependants. Women were to be liberated! All stigma attached to 'illegitimacy' was removed, and society stepped in to act as surrogate father and support unwed mothers. In 1975 in Britain, 9% of children were born outside marriage. In 1995 33.6% of children were born outside marriage. In 1975 10% of families were headed by a single parent. Twenty years later, the figure was 22%. Now one survey shows that over half of women under the age of 34 think that men are unnecessary for the job of raising children.

If today's society idolises sex (while seeing marriage as optional) it is vital to look back at the biblical ideal of marriage. Richard Ross gives a timely reminder that the Song of Songs is in the first instance a love song. God intended erotic love to be enjoyed between one man and one woman. Human sexuality is not to be idolised, but enjoyed in the context of a faithful monogamous relationship.

## *Challenge 2: The family as an idol*

It is so easy to react to the breakdown of the family by elevating the sanctity of marriage and home life to iconic status. The plethora of family books and ministries points to this danger. We are not to retreat into our happy little families and pull up the drawbridge! We must remember those very radical words of Jesus, that whoever puts family ahead of the kingdom will be lost. Another effect of idolising the family is to make single people feel like oddities, and we have to remember the privileged status given to the single state by the

apostle Paul. This is almost a forgotten emphasis in reformed Christianity, and we welcome the works of Al Hsu and John Piper which stress that singles play a valuable role in God's plan (review article of *The Single Issue* and *For Single Men and Women*).

### ***Challenge 3: Is the family safe?***

Sadly, there is evidence of violent abuse towards wives and children in conservative religious households. This evidence is used by those of egalitarian persuasion to argue that any teaching which maintains a distinctive leadership role for the husband opens the door for abuse. They argue that 'mutual submission' is what the apostle Paul was really calling for in Ephesians 5. We have to admit that Scripture has often been used to condone the violent behaviour of sinful husbands. Elders have even told women who have suffered gross abuse to 'go on submitting'. This is unacceptable. But we challenge the egalitarian assertion that a hierarchy in the home will always tend to lead to abuse. In *Three Models of Marriage* we contrast a repressive view of marriage with the modern egalitarian view, and the complementarian view. The complementarian model of marriage upholds the reality of headship and submission, but firmly condemns abuse. Headship and submission are unpopular concepts nowadays, but both are beautifully exemplified in the person of our Lord, as argued in the exegetical article by Jack Cottrell.

### ***Challenge 4: What about divorce?***

In 1995 in the UK there were 322,300 marriages and 170,000 divorces. Divorce has never been so easy. The secular American commentator, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (who caused a storm with her 'Dan Quayle was right' article) has now written *The Divorce Culture*,<sup>1</sup> which charts the devastating effects on society of easy divorce. She also blows apart the myth that 'divorce is better for children than parents who fight'. But believers are not immune from marital break-up. It is likely that every reader has seen at least one divorce within his or her own church fellowship. How do we respond? There is an increasingly strong lobby, especially within reformed Anglican circles, teaching that marriage is a lifelong sacrament, that remarriage after divorce is *never* permissible. Ray Trainer suggests that the biblical view is not so hard-line.

## **Reference**

- 1 Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking our Commitments to Marriage and the Family*. Vintage Books, New York, 1998. Available in the UK through internet suppliers such as amazon.co.uk.

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## Singleness: Problem? Gift? or Opportunity?

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*A review article by Sharon James.*

***The Single Issue: A Fresh Perspective on Christian Singleness.*** Albert Hsu. IVP, 1998. pbk. £6.99. (Page references from the UK edition. US title: *Singles at the Crossroads*, IVP 1997).

Recently a professional single adult moved to our church. This person was happy to find a good number of other unmarried people, and relieved to find that they were welcomed and accepted – as they were – rather than being regarded as ‘a problem’. That was liberating, and a new experience.

Many books on marriage will deal with problems that may arise within marriage. None of them categorise marriage itself as ‘a problem’. Now there is a book entitled *The Single Issue* which deals with the problems that may arise for singles, but which refuses to categorise singleness itself as ‘a problem’. Several singles known to me have said how refreshing this is. It is not very pleasant to go through life being regarded as ‘a problem’. It is oppressive to know that friends and family are saying, ‘He would be all right if we could just find him a good woman!’

This book is written by someone who is not married himself. Albert Hsu argues that ultimately singleness is not a problem to be solved by marriage; like marriage it is an opportunity in which to follow Jesus. Jesus was single. Paul was single. The New Testament honours the single state. Hsu is realistic about loneliness, and about the particular temptations faced by singles. He is critical of the whole notion of ‘romance’ and ‘dating’. But he provides a very positive vision of living for Jesus, and using the particular opportunities offered by the single state in order to do just that.

Hsu examines the oppressive expectations often placed on singles. A biblical and historical overview is provided. ‘Just as the Catholic doctrine of clerical celibacy incorrectly overemphasises celibacy as the Gnostics did, so also does Protestant “family theology” incorrectly overemphasise marriage and the family as the Jews did’ (47). Ruth Tucker is quoted: ‘We [Protestants] view the emphasis on celibacy in the Roman Catholic church as misdirected, and we can see the problems that have arisen from it. But it is entirely possible that we have gone to the other extreme, so that subconsciously we view singles as somehow defective’ (47). We now elevate family life to sacred status, much as Catholics elevated virginity. The editor of *Evangelicals Mission Quarterly* has written: ‘Some churches are putting the married state, home comfort, and the education and happiness of children before world evangelisation’ (48).

## The myth of the 'gift of singleness'

*I wish all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind (1 Cor. 7:7).*

This text has given rise to some extraordinary ideas about the 'gift of singleness'. Many say that a single with this 'gift' will be content and feel little desire to get married. Is this so? Hsu outlines the drawbacks of this view of 'the gift of singleness':

- The 'gift' is dependent on subjective feelings (we don't ask an unhappily-married person, 'Do you have the gift of marriage?')
- The reality of temptation is minimised
- We create a two-tier class system: those singles with the gift, and those without it. (We don't say that some married people have the 'gift' of marriage and some don't)
- Marriage is seen as normative, and the single state as so painful that a supernatural gifting is required to tolerate it
- It is abusive to tell people who don't 'feel' they have the gift of singleness that they 'must marry'. They may long with all their souls to do so – and for a variety of reasons may never be able

Hsu concludes: 'Christians are called to find contentment whatever their status in life. A Christian who learns to be content with areas such as socio-economic status and physical appearance will also be content with his or her marital status, whether married or single. This is not evidence of a gift of singleness. This is spiritual maturity' (57).

How then has this misleading notion of the 'gift of singleness' arisen? 1 Corinthians 7:7 has been confused with 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, empowered by the Spirit. The traditional view assumes that if the gifts in chapter 12 are Spirit-empowered, then the 'gift' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:7 must also be a spiritual empowerment. But 1 Corinthians 7 never calls singleness a 'spiritual gift'. What the passage actually says is: 'God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of married life to others.' Singles do not need to agonise over whether they have some supernatural empowerment. There are two gifts: singleness and marriage. They are descriptions of an objective status. 'Both statuses are gifts of God to be honoured and treasured' (62). They are not regarded as binding: everyone begins as single, and is free to change that status. 1 Corinthians 7 does not elevate either marriage or celibacy to a superior spirituality. It is matter of fact about the

advantages and disadvantages of both. It is equally acceptable for a person to get married (in the Lord) or stay single.

### **The freedoms and opportunities of singleness**

*I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of the world – how she can please her husband (1 Cor. 7:32-34).*

Some churches refuse to consider a single pastor. They say that an elder must be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2-5; Titus 1:6). But polygamy (not singleness) is what is forbidden in these texts. Paul is realistic about the demands of family life. In a fascinating interview included in this book, John Stott gives a positive vision of the freedom singleness offers. Francis Bacon said quaintly: 'A single life doth well with churchmen, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill the pool' (93). Negatively, it is tragic when a pastor's family is neglected because of the demands of ministry. Hsu writes bluntly: 'Many married people in full-time ministry either shouldn't be in ministry or shouldn't be married' (94). Richard Foster writes: 'One of the great tragedies of our day is the number of Christian leaders who have given themselves unselfishly to the cause of Christ, but have destroyed their marriages and their children in the process . . . Many of them simply needed to understand that their sense of call was incompatible with the responsibilities of marriage and [should have chosen] the single life' (94). This book outlines a number of the freedoms and opportunities (especially for kingdom service) open to singles.

*Does your church value singleness and marriage on an equal level, or is one more highly valued than the other?*

**The Single Issue** is strongly recommended, not only for those who are single but for church leaders. If today's generation of church members are so attached to the idol of family that they regard it as personal disaster if their children serve God as singles (and 'fail' to give them grandchildren!), then there is something badly wrong with our spiritual priorities. This book acts as a timely corrective to much worldly thinking.

**For Single Men and Women.** John Piper, 16pp. £2.00 incl. p&p available from CBMW (see inside front cover). John Piper's chapter on 'Singleness' from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* is now available as a booklet. In it the following eight points are developed:

- 1 Marriage as we know it in this age is not the final destiny of any human being
- 2 Jesus Christ, the most fully human person who ever lived, was not married
- 3 The Bible celebrates celibacy because it gives extraordinary opportunity for singleminded investment in ministry for Christ
- 4 The apostle Paul and many great missionaries after him have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God
- 5 The apostle Paul calls singleness a gift from God
- 6 Jesus promises that forsaking family for the sake of the kingdom will be repaid with a new family: the church
- 7 God is sovereign over who gets married and who doesn't
- 8 Mature manhood and womanhood are not dependent on being married

In his tape series on *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (6 tapes available from CBMW) John Piper shows that marriage was originally designed by God as an illustration of Christ's love for the church. Human marriage is the shadow. The great marriage supper of the Lamb is the reality. Singles and married people are equal participants in that reality. Those who idolise marriage forget that it is a shadow of something greater: it is that greater reality for which we should all be yearning.

**Women Helping Women: A Biblical Guide to the Major Issues Women Face.** eds. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish. Harvest House Publishers, OR, USA, 1997. 573pp. pbk. available in the UK through STL, £11.50. This is a superb resource, covering many issues. The chapter on counselling women unhappy with their singleness is particularly good. The author, a 42-year old single woman, compiled a list of the comments *regularly made by other Christians* that were profoundly unhelpful (How's your love life? Don't worry – you'll find someone. Ask XX to do it – she's single, I'm sure she has loads of free time. Don't you get lonely? When are you going to settle down, grow up, and get married? I've got just the man/woman for you! Why don't you go to the mission field? – you have no ties here. What are you waiting for? – you're not getting any younger). This is a useful chapter as it addresses the genuine concerns and fears experienced by women, a perspective not directly dealt with in *The Single Issue*.

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# *'The Very Ecstasy of Love'*

## The Theology of the Song of Songs

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*Pastor Richard Ross recently completed a series of lectures on the Song of Songs for the Coventry Forum. He kindly agreed to condense these lectures into the following article.*

The Song of Songs is a poetic pursuit of ideal love, to be approached firstly in its historical setting and then in its place in the overall scheme of Scripture, its canonical setting. We suggest a threefold purpose:

1. a simple, natural purpose
2. an apologetic purpose
3. a canonical purpose

### **1. The book's simple, natural purpose**

This is to tell 'the very ecstasy of love' (Polonius, *Hamlet* 2.i). Its assessment of physical love is in contrast to the aberrations of our fallen parents (cf. Genesis 3:10 and 16), the gross polygamy of Solomon (a new 'wife' every fortnight throughout his reign), the sterile philosophy of ancient Greece, Corinthian immorality, and Rome's cultic veneration of virginity.

'The Song of Songs' means the best of songs, the ideal song – 'best' not because Solomon was its author but because love is its subject.

Demanding to be accepted for what the Holy Spirit inspired it to be, the Song's similarities to other ancient oriental love poems leave no doubt that in intention, language and style it belongs to that class of literature; it is nothing other (though far more) than a love poem. There is no

justification from the contents, style or literary form of the book to read it as spiritual allegory. This approach, exemplified by James Durham, lacks any justification from the text and is alien to the book's nature and purpose.

Durham's insensitivity to the poetic style is obvious from remarks defending his allegorical method: '[The book] cannot be understood properly if it is taken in its proper sense, for these commendations given to the Bridegroom [and] to the Bride, if properly understood, would be monstrous, blasphemous, and ridiculous; such as to have "teeth like a flock of sheep", and a "head like a camel".' Seeing no other possibility, Durham turns from bizarre literalism to promiscuous allegory (cf. p 28f) with precious insights of grace but few of the Song of Songs.<sup>1</sup>

When read for what it is, ancient oriental love poetry, the book has a simple, natural meaning full of beauty and rich significance; this meaning is the foundation upon which all interpretation must stand.

### ***The Characters in the Book***

The Song tells of the love of two principal characters, a woman and a man. The woman, her contribution by far the larger, is the book's leading

character. Repeatedly she initiates their love-making (1:2f; 4:16f; 5:17,12f; 7:9-13; 8:1-7,14), a woman of exquisite beauty (1:8-11,15; 4:1-7,9-15; 6:4-10; 7:1-5,6-9) and considerable accomplishment (6:13-7:1; 8:13), having a fertile imagination, acutely sensitive to her environment (2:4-16; 3:1-6) – natural objects act as stimulants to her desire and suddenly transport her into flights of fantasy (1:3; 6:11f); she shows an attractive wit (1:5f,7,12-14, 16f; 2:1-3; 4:16; 5:2ff, 10ff; 6:1-3; 7:9b; 8:1), is better able than he to cope with love's adversities (5:5-7), shielding him from the pains of love (5:8), and revealing a remarkable physical, emotional and volitional strength (5:5ff; 8:8-10, 11f).

The Song of Songs may be considered as holding first place among those imposing poems which, from time immemorial, women have written to express their experience of life and love.

The man, who is *not* Solomon, is generally a foil to highlight the woman's pre-eminence – perhaps the convention which regards him as the 'lover' and the woman as the 'beloved' ought to be reversed!

Both are anonymous and their relationship is clouded by ambiguity. They are often separated yet spend their nights together (1:12-13; 2:4,16-17; 4: 13,16; 5:1; 6:2-3; 7:6-9, 10-13; 8:5b). He frequently refers to her as his 'bride/wife' (4: 8,9,10,12; 5:1) but the conclusion of the book finds the girl's brothers contemplating her betrothal/marriage as future (8:8-9).

### ***The Book's Leading Themes***

Various motifs and poetic devices are developed: themes of desire and

invitation (1:1;8.14); arrival and enjoyment (1:4; 2:12ff); losing, searching, finding (1:7-11; 3:1-4); sheer delight in each others' bodies (4:1-7; 12-15); questions – generally pretexts for further erotic descriptions of physical beauty (1:7; 5:9) and repartee (1:5, 7-11, 15 – 2.3).

There are themes of *comparison* and *contrast*, *comparisons* through metaphors of animals, plants, streams, fountains, spices, and perfumed oils – all metaphors, euphemisms or circumlocutions. *Contrasts* are developed between the two lovers and other characters: Solomon, queens, concubines, 'virgins numberless', the 'women of Jerusalem', the 'watchmen', and the girl's brothers.

The 'women of Jerusalem' are unmarried girls of marriageable age – easily infatuated (1:3), vain, impolite, insulting (1:5f), flippant, inquisitive, interfering (2:7; 3:5f; 8:4f), sarcastic (5:9), unstable, inconsistent (6:1) – and quite inconsequential (6:8)!

Solomon, in contrast to the lovers, seems a figure for thinly veiled satire, representing the extravagant, empty and futile.

*a) his bed* is an object of great opulence, theirs is a place for love – its description in chapter 3 reads like a grotesque Mahlerian parody.

*b) his 'vineyard'* – a metaphor for his wives and concubines – is contrasted with her 'vineyard' – a metaphor for her body. Her vineyard is 'her own' but, although insisting on her right over her own body, she chooses not to 'keep' it (1:6 and 8:12) but to give it freely to the man of her choice. Solomon's 'vineyard' is for commercial transaction – but only 'a fool would think he could buy love' (8:7)!

There are two contrasting scenes. The primary scene is pastoral, indicating the couple's social placing. The places, real or metaphorical, where the couple wish to be are fields, mountains, gardens, and their family homes (2:4 (cf. 8:5b); 2:9, 16; 3:4; 4:8, 16 – 5:1; 6:1-3, 11-12; 7:11ff; 8:2, 4, 14).

In contrast are the city and palace. In the city the woman loses her lover and is beaten and molested (3:2f; 5:2-8). The women of the city are an irritation and offer no real friendship (1:5; 2:7; 3:5f; 5:8f; 6:1; 8:4f, 11f). Expensive clothes, perfumes, rich foods, gems and erotic leisure are pregnant metaphors – or occasions for irony.

## 2. The book's apologetic purpose

In its Old Testament setting the book also has an apologetic purpose: to safeguard erotic love from 'religious' distortions and perversions, historically those of sexually perverse Baalism.

Since the fall every culture in every age tries to resolve the problem of human sexuality; two 'solutions' have been frequently suggested:

1) a denial that human sexuality can ever be 'worthy' and advocating either: a) preferably total abstinence from all physical sex, so-called Platonic love, or, if not possible, Lady Hillingdon's 'think of England' attitude; or b) an indulgence of every sexual whim – if sex is spiritually 'a lost cause' it may be merely an instinct to satisfy.

2) a deification of sex, with 'gods' as sexual as we. This moves sex from the place where God had placed it, in a garden, and puts it in a temple or shrine.

This implies that all forms of sexual conduct are 'moral' because they are 'divine'.

The Old Testament resisted and condemned these responses, and the Song of Songs, written when Baalism was rife, is part of that resistance.

The Song may have considerable similarities with other ancient oriental love poems but it has fundamental differences too, its studied exclusion of 'religion' being the most significant; ancient love poems almost always served some 'religious' purpose.

Erotic love in the Song is enjoyed in homes and gardens, never 'sanctified' by a migration to shrine or sanctuary. God's Word, binding Israel to the exclusion of the erotic from religious worship, exhibits a sensitivity to the corruption of fallen human sexuality and its consequent corrupting tendency upon religion.

## 3. The book's canonical purpose

The Song not only describes a world in which there is an exclusion of sex from religious worship but one in which 'religion' has been superseded by love. The book assumes that erotic love – in contrast to Solomonic lust – is a component in the spectrum of divine love. It is mistaken to suppose that Scripture regards genuine erotic love as different in kind from other forms of love, e.g. erotic love *versus* 'agape' love.<sup>2</sup> In Scripture love is essentially one, whether in a partial revelation – in the 'bed undefiled' – or in the glorious and complete revelation of the cross. This allows the easy movement in Scripture from marital love to divine love, a feature of both Testaments.

'Religion' is absent from the Song not because erotic love is 'secular,' beyond the pale of the 'sacred', but because the erotic love the Song describes is 'sacred', a truly authentic voice in the harmony of love.

Scripture proclaims love not 'religion' as pre-eminent. 'Religion' by nature and design is partial and preliminary whereas love is by nature pre-eminent – the consummation and fulfilment of 'religion'. Erotic love must not be introduced into the temple *but in 'a world of love'* (Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, Lecture 16) *there is 'no temple'!* (Rev 21.22)

In the light of the doctrine of the image of God in man and woman the love the Song expounds is revelatory not only of ecstatic human love but of the love with which God loves himself and us. The point is not that he or she 'stands for' Christ or the believer but that this is what love is and this is what, through love, the two are becoming. We are shown that love has a passion to be united with and to possess – not by destructive dominance but in the mutual freedom to be. Eros, as an aspect of divine love, reflects the possibilities of incarnation and the sanctity of human physicality, that self-giving presupposes. Both eros and agape love by choice, pulse with mystery, are unquenchable, elusive, full of wonder, surprise, and frustration. Here is love that craves interaction, interdependence, and the interpenetration and perichoresis of sharing, indwelling and circumincession.<sup>3</sup> The Song expatiates on the inexhaustibility of a love that feeds on desire and is satisfied only in its longing – the concluding paragraphs stretching beyond time into eternity. Through the

paradox of insatiable desire and total self-renunciation we glimpse the passion of divine love, in which self-giving is true acquisition and self-emptying effected through a taking that itself is self-giving (cf. Phil 2:4-11; 1 Cor 7:3-4; Eph 5:28-33). Expression of such love, its intensity and abandon, seems to require the language of eroticism, its flowing lavishness, insatiability, and perpetual renewal and rejuvenation – grace is not ascetic!

The utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God is, that we can have no thoughts of it. The perfection of our understanding is, not to understand and to rest there (John Owen, *Works*. Vol. 6, p 66).

The Song's greatest contribution is the insight it gives on the nature of God himself. Its exposition of erotic love describes the likeness of God. By a unique blend of exquisite poetry and studied rejection of 'religion' it leads us deep into the nature of love and of God himself.

*This is the most remarkable of all the powers of poetic language: to convey to us the quality of experiences which we have not had, or perhaps can never have, to use factors within our experience so that they become pointers to something outside our experience (C.S. Lewis).*

That is why poetic language is indispensable for theology. All meaningful human talk of God is by metaphor and symbol – poetry; and poetry, its terms, metaphors and images, is the language the Holy Spirit uses to speak of all spiritual reality.

*Continued on page 32*

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# Three Models of Marriage

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Sharon James

Until the 1960s there was broad agreement in the church regarding marriage. The husband is the leader in the relationship; the wife submits to his leadership. For example, in 1833 John Angell James wrote *A Help to Domestic Happiness*.<sup>1</sup> This exposition gives a lovely picture of the mutual duties of husbands and wives, as well as their unique ministries to each other. It is a testimony to the dignity the Bible affords both to the married state and to women.

However, the traditional view has sometimes been presented in a repressive way, and the mutuality depicted in 1 Corinthians 7:4 has been underplayed. Such presentations tend to portray the relationship between husband and wife in terms of superiority and inferiority. At its extreme, such a view can be used to force wives to endure even gross abuse. I have described this as the ‘chain of command’ view of marriage.

In contrast – often reacting against such repressive presentations of the traditional view – there is the ‘egalitarian’ model of marriage. The ‘roleless’ marriage has become increasingly accepted among evangelicals since the 1960s. With modern feminists, egalitarians reject ‘patriarchy’. This view maximises the equality of husband and wife. It says that essential equality is denied if you maintain an order, whereby the husband leads and the wife submits. Egalitarians call for ‘mutual submission’. But in rejecting the traditional ‘chain of command’ type presentation, and moving straight over to the ‘roleless’ marriage, egalitarians miss out on the ‘complementarian’ model.

‘Complementarians’ maintain the traditional view that there is an order in the relationship, but they also stress the biblical teaching regarding mutuality. They stress the essential spiritual equality of the partners; they avoid suggestion of superiority and inferiority. But equality coexists with a functional order. (In the Trinity, likewise, there is equality of being alongside an order in function.) This view attempts to hold together all the biblical evidence: equality, mutuality, differentiation and complementarity. Down through the ages those who have held together these differing strands have lived out marriage as God intended. For example the mutual love and respect enjoyed by Jonathan and Sarah Edwards illustrated a truly ‘complementarian’ marriage. The differing qualities brought to the relationship by the male and the female *complemented* each other in a most beautiful way.

In this article I will outline some of the problems associated with models A and C, the chain of command and egalitarian models, before describing the complementarian model B.

<p><b><i>A. Chain of command model</i></b>  Husband seen as boss  Wife's primary role seen as submission  Stresses Eph. 5:22-24; downplays 1 Cor. 7: 4-5 (mutuality).</p>
<p><b><i>B. Complementarian model</i></b>  Husband's role that of servant-leader  Husband takes responsibility for well-being of wife and family  Wife's prime role is helper-lover (role of nurturing)  Submission is not her role, but her <i>response</i> to her husband's role  Acceptance of mutuality (1 Cor. 7:4-5)  AND headship/submission (Eph. 5:22ff).</p>
<p><b><i>C. Egalitarian model</i></b>  Complete equality: interchangeable roles  Husband not the leader in the relationship  Great stress on 1 Cor. 7:4-5 (mutuality)  Eph. 5:21ff seen as mutual submission  (or else dismissed as culturally hidebound).</p>

### **The chain of command model**

The traditional view has sometimes been presented in terms of a chain of command: 1 Husband; 2 Wife; 3 Children. Military imagery may be used: the husband is the General, giving the orders. Or the image of the corporation is evoked: the husband is the boss. Maybe the language of politics is used: the husband has the casting vote (or two votes to the wife's one).

This is sometimes joined with traditional views of 'the woman's place' (in the home). It can be cruelly caricatured as 'keep the wife barefoot, pregnant and at the kitchen sink'. In fact, the role of the husband is to love his wife, give a lead and provide for the family. The role of the wife is to submit to her husband and care for her husband and children.

The problems outlined below are the repressive extremes of this view, found commonly enough to bring the very notion of headship and submission into disrepute.

### **Problems with some presentations of this view**

***1. The spiritual leadership of the husband is sometimes overstated.*** Larry Christenson, for example, teaches that the wife needs the 'covering' of her husband for spiritual protection.<sup>2</sup> Some (especially charismatic) writers have

taken this to the extreme of saying that single women need to seek a male to 'cover' all major spiritual decisions. This contradicts the Reformation teaching of the priesthood of all believers. On that view Sapphira should not have been struck dead, for she was correct to submit to her husband! This view is criticised, for example, in Beulah Woods' *Patterns of Partnership*.<sup>3</sup> She gives a number of instances where Christian wives have become passive and abdicated their own individual responsibility. Woods argues passionately (and correctly) that wives are accountable to God for their spiritual lives.

**2. The authority of the husband is sometimes overstated in such a way as to endorse abuse.** *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you* (Gen. 3:16). This is not a command! It is part of the curse! But commonly it is said that the 'role' of the husband is to 'rule'. In contrast, John Angell James (1833) remarks, 'The apostle does not enjoin husbands to rule, nor instruct them how, but merely to love.'<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:16 marks the beginning of the 'battle of the sexes' and the end of the perfect sinless complementarity of the first marriage. It marks the beginning of domestic violence, especially the fact that husbands sometimes use their superior strength to batter their wives. *He* may boil over in frustration because *her* superior verbal ability means that he can never win the argument! The syndrome of wife-battering is well documented. Often there is a pattern of denial. Typically it is the most submissive women who get beaten up: they fear confrontation, they want peace at any price. The violent husband uses the threat of leaving (his family may have no alternative economic support) to get her to keep quiet. Often batterers are so 'respectable' that if the wife ever does complain she is not taken seriously. It is tragic when a battered wife finally plucks up courage to go to the pastor, only to be told, 'If you submitted more he wouldn't do it!' Or 'go back and pray more about it!'<sup>5</sup> In reality, to submit to abuse means to encourage abuse. A violent husband needs confrontation with his own wrongdoing, not a passive wife who by her passivity enables him to go on sinning.

**3. The role of the wife sometimes appears to be passive and weak.** This is partly because the *modern* usage of the word *submit* evokes passivity, servility and weakness: a horrible prospect! Roget's *Thesaurus* includes the following synonyms for submission: yielding, acquiescence, capitulation, resignation, obeisance, homage, kneeling, genuflexion, prostration; and as a verb: reel back, bend, knuckle down, humble oneself, eat dirt; as an adjective: down-trodden, weak-kneed, non-resisting. Modern thinking equates submission with servility.

**4 There is sometimes extreme legalism concerning women's roles.** In practice, a division of labour, whereby the husband earns the living while the wife cares for the children was – and is – sensible and appropriate. But taken to extremes this view can become restrictive and oppressive: as with the Exclusive Brethren who forbid women to go out to work at all.

**5. The mutuality pictured in 1 Corinthians 7:4 is sometimes underplayed.** Paul says that the wife has authority over her husband's body just as the husband has authority over his wife's body. When Elizabeth Elliot writes, 'God created . . . the male to call forth, to lead, initiate and rule, and the female to respond, follow, adapt, submit,'<sup>6</sup> she is not herself calling for female passivity. But some use this to deny mutuality in marriage: the husband must always be the initiator in the relationship.

### **The egalitarian view of marriage**

In today's liberated society it seems ludicrous to demand that wives submit; 'submission' is a negative concept from which Christian women should be liberated. We are to strive for a partnership of equality and mutuality: the 'roleless' marriage where all responsibilities are divided out 50-50. In each case distinctive gifts and abilities will mean that the partnership is worked out in different ways. It may be appropriate for both husband and wife to take leadership in various contexts.

Many argue that Paul really wanted 'mutual submission' in Ephesians 5 (verse 21 defines what follows). Wives and husbands are to put the interests of the other first (i.e. mutually defer or submit to each other.) Craig Keener is one of the most persuasive of these writers.<sup>7</sup>

Others (such as Andrew Perriman)<sup>8</sup> say that Paul was constrained by the patriarchal context in which he ministered. He wanted Christian wives to be submissive because if they exercised their newfound Christian liberty and refused to submit that would be a stumbling block for the gospel. For the same reason Paul wanted slaves to submit, because if they rebelled the gospel would fall into disrepute.

Many have argued that when the husband is described as *kephale*, or head, there is no authority implied. It is said that *kephale* means source, and demonstrates a relationship of nourishing and provision.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Andrew Perriman argues that *kephale* implies social pre-eminence: in New Testament times the husband enjoyed a position of social pre-eminence over his wife.<sup>10</sup> The culture has now changed. If Paul were writing today he would have drawn the logical conclusion from the mutuality described in 1 Corinthians 7 and taught the full equality of husbands and wives.

Egalitarians argue that before the fall there were no role distinctions. Adam and Eve equally shared the creation mandate to fill and subdue the earth. Role distinctions were introduced with the curse. Christ redeems us from the effects of the curse. While the New Testament writers were constrained by the social realities of the day to 'go along with' patriarchy (just as they 'went along with' slavery), the overarching truth of equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28) means liberation from patriarchy (a male-dominated structure).<sup>11</sup>

This view is understandable, given the very negative perception of ‘submission’ in modern society. It is also understandable when we remember the appalling effect of human sinfulness on the relationship between the sexes.

## Problems with the egalitarian view

**1. To say that there were no role distinctions before the fall destroys the significance of Ephesians 5:32.** Here the original (pre-fall) purpose of marriage is explained. God *designed* marriage as a visual aid to illustrate the love of Christ for his bride. The relationship between Christ and the church is non-reversible! To say that ‘some days I’ll lead and some days my wife can have a go’,<sup>12</sup> is to rip the heart out of this all important passage. It is a nonsense to say that Christ submits to the church in the same way that the church submits to Christ. Clearly there is a sense in which Christ submitted *for* the church: he laid down his life for her. But it would be blasphemous to suggest that Christ should obey the church, or that the church could protect and provide for Christ. If marriage was designed by God as a visual aid to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church the roles cannot be interchangeable. Just as the relationship between Christ and the church is asymmetrical, so is the relationship between husband and wife.

**2. The word *hypotasso* (be subject to, submit to) is always used in the NT for relationships that are non-reversible.**<sup>13</sup> It means to be subject to an authority. Parents and children are not to ‘mutually submit’, neither are servants and masters. *Hypotasso* has to do with an order, a hierarchy. God is a God of order. There are orders among the heavenly beings. There is order within the Trinity. There is order in society: we are to submit to the civil authorities. There is order in the church: we are to submit to the elders. There is an order in family life: the husband is the God-ordained leader.

Some say that when Ephesians 5:21 says ‘submit to one another’ (*allelous*), that *allelous* means ‘everyone to everyone’. To be sure sometimes it can mean that (eg. Jn. 13:34; Gal.5:13). But there are plenty of instances where it means ‘some to others’ (eg. Rev.6:4; 1 Cor. 11:33 etc.)<sup>14</sup> In Ephesians 5:21 it is not mutual submission, but submission to appropriate authorities, which Paul commands.

**3. The word *kephale* (head) implies authority.** The editor of the Liddell-Scott Lexicon has denied that the word ‘head’ ever had the meaning ‘source’ in ancient Greek literature.<sup>15</sup> Wayne Grudem has demonstrated that Kroeger’s article in the *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* includes a significant misquotation of evidence.<sup>16</sup> He has also answered at length the assertion that *kephale* implies ‘pre-eminence’ without the idea of authority.<sup>17</sup> It seems that the efforts to empty the word *kephale* of connotations of authority have more to do with prior conviction than anything else.

**4. The 'roleless' marriage wilfully ignores the reality of the differences between the sexes.** While many evangelicals are advocating the '50-50 marriage' where both equally share in the breadwinning and baby-care, a number of secular commentators are describing with great clarity the differences between the sexes which fit so perfectly God's design for the husband to be the servant-leader and the wife to be the helper-lover. A division of labour, a specialisation in task, generally suits most married couples. Biologically women are 'programmed' to nurture little ones in a way that men are not. When a young wife is pregnant, and then nursing a baby, 'she needs to be cared for so that she can care for her baby' – so writes the best-selling secular author Steve Biddulph.<sup>18</sup> Certainly economic necessity, (eg. unemployment for the man) may mean there is no choice: the husband has to take care of the infants while his wife works. But this is not the ideal.

American commentator Barbara Dafoe Whitehead slices through the modern wishful thinking that says that the role of mothers and fathers is just the same.<sup>19</sup> Secular writers Anne and Bill Moir demolish the myth of the 'new man'. They ask why men are persecuted for doing so little when of the men at work 91% work full time, and of the women at work 55% work full time. Overall, men work 20 hours more a week at their paid jobs than women do: a pattern which is the preferred option for most couples. Many families find that a division of labour works well for them.<sup>20</sup>

### **The complementarian model of marriage**

Complementarians argue that men and women are different by design. Why did God create two sexes? Ephesians 5:32 shows that the marriage relationship was created to illustrate the love of Christ for his bride, the church. That relationship is non-reversible: so is the relationship between husband and wife. There is an order in the relationship. This order coexists with spiritual equality, just as there is an order within the Trinity which coexists with essential equality. Likewise there is absolute spiritual equality between the elders and members of a church, which is not threatened by the authority delegated to elders.

The many providential differences between male and female are created to produce a harmony, a complementary relationship, where the distinct qualities of each call forth the corresponding strengths in the other. Let us think of the so-called weaknesses and strengths of man and woman listed in two columns. If we were to give a numerical value to each quality, the total of each column would be the same – there is complete spiritual equality. But when you look closely at the supposed weaknesses of each, they are precisely those qualities that draw forth the corresponding 'strength' in the opposite sex – there is complementarity.<sup>21</sup>

### **What does the role of the husband look like?**

**1. He loves his wife, putting her interests ahead of his own.** He is to use his strength to protect her, not exploit her. He is to provide for her. Just as Christ

gives gifts to the church, and wants those gifts to be used, so the husband will make every effort to ensure that his wife's gifts and aptitudes are nurtured and developed. He will want her to be the best woman she can be: both in terms of natural gifts, and in terms of spiritual development. The command to love his wife is not just an effort to avoid potential abuse of the leadership position. It recognises what modern psychologists describe as the primary emotional need of the woman: 'to be loved and cherished for who she is, not for some service she performs'.<sup>22</sup> The Christ-like husband will understand that need, and constantly reassure his wife of his love.

**2. He is willing to take the responsibility for leading the family.** Leadership is not about making decisions that always suit him best! It is about taking initiatives to make family life work. It is much easier just to let things slide, to leave discipline of the children to the wife, to avoid initiating family devotions, to let finances lapse into chaos. But the Christ-like husband knows that the buck stops with him. Of course he may delegate all manner of responsibilities to his wife, who may be more competent in many areas. But at the end of the day, if things are going wrong, it is his responsibility to face up to that and get things back on track. This leadership role is thus exercised for the benefit of the family as a whole.

**3. He is a 'servant-leader'.** The single most important question to ask about a potential husband is '*Is this man Christ-like?*' In other words, does he show a capacity for caring for people even when there is nothing in it for him? Are there marks of genuine compassion and kindness? If a woman is relatively young and passably attractive *any* man can show kindness to her! It may not be the love that will remain faithful when she is old, sick and frail. The 'type' of man so appealing to young women – successful, good-looking, confident – may be so self-centred that he will make the very worst husband.<sup>23</sup>

Leadership involves exercising authority. In the church and in Christian marriage authority is not exercised for the benefit of the leader: just as Christ did not exercise authority for his own benefit. In the church and in Christian marriage there are (sadly) many instances of the abuse of authority. But abuse of authority does not negate the principle of authority! In a Christian marriage the wife entrusts herself to her husband, knowing that he loves her, and is leading the family in her best interests. If a young woman does not feel that measure of trust and confidence in the man she plans to marry, then she is taking the most appalling risk going ahead with the wedding.

## **What does the role of the wife look like?**

**1. She is to be a loving nurturer of her husband and children.** Women are relational beings in a way that men are not. The focus of her concern is to be the well-being of the family. She may well be economically productive either inside

or outside the home; she may be engaged in all manner of good works. But her core responsibility is to her husband and children. The older women, Titus was told, were to teach the younger women to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:3-5). Wives are to actively work at loving and nurturing their husbands and children. Secular commentators show that women are happiest when the role of wife and mother is respected in its own right. Women have been badly served by the feminist philosophy that forces them to achieve their identity through career. Clinical psychologist Oliver James said recently that since 1950 women have had to define themselves through occupational achievement. They are not respected as wives and mothers. Only a quarter of women are the genuine beneficiaries of feminism, the high achievers in the work-place.<sup>24</sup> A quarter of women are full-time mothers, who do not go out to paid work and are now accorded no status. The other half work, but only part-time or because of economic necessity. The high profile of the achievers creates pressure and confusion for the three quarters who do not wish to define their status by means of their work.

**2. Her response to her husband's role of leadership will be that of submission.**<sup>25</sup> The traditional presentation says that a wife's role is to submit. As a role that is hardly very exciting, positive or active. Think of the model wife of Proverbs 31. It would be silly to say her role was to submit! Positively, her role was to love and nurture her husband and children, and having done that, she had a sphere of wider benevolent (and economic) influence as well. Her *response* to her husband was one of submission: she gladly affirmed her husband as leader in the family and community. In order to support her husband as a community leader she took a very active role in the household.

When you see submission as the Christian wife's *response* to her husband's role, it becomes positive and attractive. Larry Crabb shows that submission is the way that the woman uses her femininity to minister to her husband (just as headship is the way the husband uses his masculinity to minister to his wife).<sup>26</sup> Biblical submission is not saying 'yes' for the sake of peace! It is not abandoning all initiative and muttering, 'You're the boss!' It is actively setting out to support our husbands. What does Christ want for them? How will they best be used in this life? It is affirming them in their masculinity, it is helping them to be the man God means them to be. The wife is commanded to respect her husband (Eph. 5:33). The most basic male need is to feel adequate, competent and respected. The worst fear is to 'be considered incompetent, inadequate, belittled, rejected and dominated'.<sup>27</sup> The biblical pattern, as we would expect, meshes exactly with the way we have been made.

## Conclusion

Human sinfulness has damaged and distorted God's good design for marriage. What should have been the husband's loving servant leadership has all too often lapsed into oppression and tyranny. We have seen that the traditional view has

sometimes been taken to a repressive extreme that goes beyond what Scripture teaches. In reaction, some women have become passive, others respond by striving to dominate and rejecting any notion of a hierarchy within marriage. A hierarchy, egalitarians argue, will always have the potential for abuse. Does not 'all power corrupt'? But good has come out of this controversy. The presentation of marriage as put forward by recent 'complementarian' writers (see book notes) succeeds in remaining faithful to the biblical principle of the husband as leader and the wife as helper while leaving behind those repressive aspects of traditionalism that were based more upon culture than upon Scripture.

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# Christ: a Model for Headship and Submission

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*Insights from 1 Corinthians 11:3, by Dr Jack Cottrell.*

In recent years the debate over the meaning of male headship has centred around the meaning of the Greek word *kephale* ('head') in passages such as Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3. Egalitarians have argued that its basic metaphorical meaning is 'origin, source', and that this is how it should be understood in these passages. Complementarians have contended for the traditional view, maintaining that the basic meaning of *kephale* is 'leader, one in authority'. The present article seeks to shed new light on this issue by an in-depth study of the order of pairs in 1 Corinthians 11:3: *'Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.'*

## A look at the text

In our text, Paul says that 'the man is the head (*kephale*) of a woman'. A common egalitarian argument is that in this verse *kephale* cannot here have the sense of 'leader, one in authority' because of the order of the three main elements of the verse. If *kephale* were meant to have a hierarchical sense, then the order of the pairs would have been different. The last pair would have been first: God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of man; man

is the head of woman. But this is not the given order; therefore *kephale* must mean something else.

Payne states this view very succinctly: 'The interpretation of "head" in this passage as a chain of command or hierarchy demands rearrangement of the sequence that Paul gives.'<sup>1</sup> Bilezikian makes the same argument: 'Paul's precise sequential arrangement of the three elements of this verse shows that he is not building a chain of command.' If this were his point, he would have put the God/Christ pair first. 'It is inconceivable that Paul would have so grievously jumbled up the sequence in a matter involving God, Christ, and humans.' Bilezikian says this is 'an insuperable argument against the hierarchical interpretation of 11:3'.<sup>2</sup>

But if *kephale* means 'source' (as egalitarians generally claim), then there is a natural chronological order, beginning with man's origin from the creative hand of Christ (Gen. 2:7), followed by the woman's origin from the side of the man (Gen. 2:21-23), and culminating in Christ's origin from God at his incarnation into this world.<sup>3</sup> 'If the incarnation is in view', says Keener, 'then 11:3 is in chronological sequence.... Christ is the source of Adam, Adam of Eve, and God of Christ.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus egalitarians argue that ‘source’ is the only view that is consistent with the natural chronological order of the three pairs in 1 Corinthians 11:3. If authority were the main point, then verse 3 would have the order of God/Christ, Christ/man, man/woman.

But this argument *assumes* that in the latter case the point of the verse would be to affirm an ordered hierarchy (God > Christ > man > woman), and it assumes that this is what non-egalitarians are claiming the verse does. These assumptions are erroneous, however, and to attack the non-egalitarian view of the verse on the basis of the order of the pairs misses the whole point.

### Reasons for the order

Exactly what is the relation among these three statements, then? Why do they have this particular order? This is not at all difficult to understand when we take *kephale* to mean ‘leader, one in authority’. The main point is the second statement, which succinctly affirms the complementary authority/submission relationship which God established between men and women in the very beginning.<sup>5</sup> Man is the *head* over the woman; woman is *subordinate* to the man. But in order to preclude the possibility that either the man or the woman might misunderstand the nature of his or her role, Paul adds the other two statements as illustrations or analogies for both sides of the man/woman relationship.

In the first relationship, Christ is the model for man’s role as the head of the woman; in the second relationship, Christ is also the model for the woman’s role as subordinate to the man. Thus Christ, in his incarnate state and in his role as Redeemer, becomes the model for *both* men and women, since he is the head of every man and at the same time subordinate to God the Father.<sup>6</sup>

### Objections, questions and concerns

What does it mean to say that Christ is the head (authority over) every man? This is not simply a reference to the fact that the second person of the Trinity was involved in the creation of Adam. Rather it means that Christ, as the risen and exalted Redeemer, has authority over every man. The word for ‘man’ is *aner*, which is the term used in the Greek language specifically for males. Thus Christ is the head over all human males. This includes both Christians and non-Christians, though only the former will acknowledge Christ’s authority over them.

Thus because we understand *kephale* as ‘authority over’ and not ‘source’, we are able to see beyond the dubious view that Paul must be referring to some kind of creation, whether the original or the new.<sup>7</sup> We can see instead that Christ’s headship refers to the triumphant victory that he won through his death and resurrection, and to the lordship that he exercises over

all things from his enthronement at the right hand of God. The Father has made the crucified Saviour 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36) and has given him 'all authority in heaven and on earth' (Matt.28:18). 'He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things' (Eph.1:22).

Because he has this general authority over all things, he necessarily has authority over specific individuals and groups. Thus he is head of the church (Eph. 5:23), and he is the head over every man.

Someone might observe that in this sense Christ is equally the head over every woman. So why does Paul say this at all, and why does he say it of men specifically? The answer is that the central idea in v.3 is that 'the man is the head of a woman'. The main subject of the passage is the man/woman relationship, especially the authority/submission aspect of this relationship. Thus at the beginning of the discussion Paul lays down the general principle that is at stake, that is, the man is the head of a woman. But in order to guard against any male tendency to use this principle as an excuse for autocratic exploitation of women, he reminds all men that they too have a head; and that head is Christ. Therefore they are not free to define and to exercise their headship in any way they choose, but only according to the pattern of Christ's own headship and in accordance with Christ's teaching about male headship

given through the inspired apostles (Eph. 5:23-33; 1Pet. 3:7).

Why, then, does Paul say that 'God is the head of Christ'? The headship of God over Christ involves Christ's subordination to the Father. In the same way, man's headship over the woman involves the woman's subordination to the man. Egalitarians, of course, object to this whole concept; and even many women who accept their subordinate role do so with reluctance and resentment, thinking that subordination somehow implies inferiority.

To counter such objections and to alleviate such concerns, Paul reminds us all, and especially women, that Christ himself has a head and occupies a subordinate role under the Father.<sup>8</sup> This is important, because the New Testament is very clear that although Christ is subordinate to the Father, he is in no way inferior to him in his essence: he is fully divine and equal with the Father and the Spirit in essence and glory. Neither is Christ inferior in terms of his specific role as Redeemer. Although his role involves placing himself in a position subordinate to the Father, his role or work itself is in no way an inferior work among all the works of deity. Indeed, in many ways it is the most glorious of all (Phil. 2:9-11).

### **Summary and conclusion**

The function of this statement, then, is to remove obstacles that hinder women from accepting their God-

intended role of submission to male headship.<sup>9</sup> As Neuer says, 'This comparison makes it clear that the subordination of woman to man envisaged by Paul has nothing to do with devaluing or oppressing women' or with 'any kind of contempt for women'.<sup>10</sup> 'The headship of God the Father in relation to the incarnate Son in no way diminishes the dignity of Christ's person or his full equality in the Godhead', says Bacchiocchi. 'In the same way the functional headship of man in the home and in the church in no way detracts from, or is detrimental to, the dignity and equality of woman in personhood.'<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the order of the pairs in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is not only consistent with the view that *kephale* means 'authority over'; it actually reinforces this view. The centre pair is

the main point: the man is the head or leader of a woman, implying the role of submission for the latter. The surrounding pairs present the incarnate Christ in the roles of both headship and submission, thus providing a model for both sexes. Headship is therefore not intrinsically superior to submission, and submission is not intrinsically inferior to headship. Christ exercised both roles, that of head over the human race, and that of submission to God the Father, and dignified both.

May the God of all grace give us the grace to live out our God-given callings, both of authority and submission, as unto him, for his glory.

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# Divorce and Remarriage

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Ray Trainer

Within Christian circles and churches today, there are certain subjects that can cause great consternation. Often when these subjects are raised and discussed, much heat is generated by them, but little light is shed upon them. The whole area of marriage, divorce and remarriage, for example, is one such subject. Each of us may have a different understanding of this issue – sometimes coloured by painful, personal experience – and the temptation is for us to mould the Scriptures to fit within the parameters of what we would like to be true. We must not do that. What is important is not what I think or what you think, but what the Bible has to say. The Scriptures are a sufficient rule and it is to the Scriptures we must turn, first and foremost, for instruction on this important moral issue. We must exhibit the same spirit as those Bereans who received the message from the apostle Paul with great eagerness, but who also examined the Scriptures every day to see if what he said was true.

In recent years, Andrew Cornes, in *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1993) and *Questions About Divorce and Remarriage* (Monarch Books, 1998), and Gordon Wenham and William Heth, in *Jesus and Divorce* (Paternoster Press, 1997), have written extensively about this subject and take the strict position that death, and only death, can dissolve a marriage and permit remarriage.<sup>1,2</sup> Although these authors argue their position strongly and coherently, I am not persuaded by their arguments, as will be seen by my reasoning throughout this article.

## A definition of marriage

Before we can come to grips with the matter of divorce and remarriage, it is important that we first of all understand what marriage itself is. Genesis 2:24 provides us with the foundational truths and basic characteristics of marriage. Marriage is not a social contract worked out by men for the temporary benefit of society. Rather, marriage is God's gracious gift for all time and for all peoples and cultures. Specifically, marriage is a public ('will leave his father and mother'), lifelong ('be united to his wife', c.f. Matthew 19:6) commitment between one man and one woman ('a man – his wife'), consummated by physical union ('they will become one flesh').<sup>3</sup>

## The Old Testament law

We need next to consider the Old Testament law's teaching on divorce and remarriage. This is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The primary focus of this passage is not divorce but the issue of remarriage to the first husband. However, this passage does lay down for us two important principles concerning divorce. *Firstly*, it shows us that divorce, if it occurs, is serious. Divorce is irreversible and once the marriage bonds are broken they cannot be reformed. Notice, the woman in this passage is not permitted to remarry the first husband. *Secondly*, this passage shows us that if divorce is allowed, so is remarriage (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:27,28a). The woman who has been divorced by her first husband is not forbidden to marry again. The woman is only forbidden to remarry her first husband. Divorce carries with it the permission to remarry.

However, this passage is important for another reason. It was this passage that led to the question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees in Matthew 19. In Jesus' day there were two rival parties of the Pharisees, one led by Rabbi Hillel and the other by Rabbi Shammai. One of the rivalries between these two parties was over the meaning of 'something indecent' as found in Deuteronomy 24:1. 'Indecency' was clearly not adultery or promiscuity as that was punishable by stoning and thus covered elsewhere in the law. So what did these two parties consider 'something indecent' referred to? Rabbi Hillel understood this 'something indecent' to be anything in the wife that caused annoyance or embarrassment and that this 'something', no matter how trivial, was a ground for divorce. Rabbi Shammai, on the other hand, considered the indecency to be a sexual offence of some kind, but a sexual offence that fell short of adultery or promiscuity.<sup>4</sup> Of the two, Rabbi Shammai is probably nearer the truth, but both Hillel and Shammai have misunderstood the purpose of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which was given by Moses as an accommodation to the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites (Matthew 19:8). Deuteronomy 24:1-4 merely recognises that divorce exists and it regulates divorce in one particular area, that is, in the area of remarriage to the first husband.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to both Hillel and Shammai, this passage does not give a valid ground ('something indecent') for divorce.

### Jesus and the Pharisees

With this Old Testament understanding in mind, let us now turn to and consider Jesus' discourse with some of the Pharisees over the issue of divorce. This discourse is found in Matthew 19:1-12. The central truth to notice in these verses is that Jesus endorses the permanence of marriage. Jesus bypasses Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and goes back to Genesis 2:24. Jesus tells us, 'Therefore what God has

joined together, let man not separate.' In other words, sin is always involved in a divorce and there is no such thing as a 'no-fault' divorce. Divorce, the separating of what God has joined, implies sin by one or both of the marriage partners (cf. Malachi 2:13-16).

In these verses, Jesus dismisses the views of both Hillel and Shammai, but Jesus does provide one ground – the only valid ground – for divorce and that ground is marital unfaithfulness. This can be seen in verse 9. Marital unfaithfulness is every kind of sexual immorality which is so serious that it perverts and defiles the marriage relationship (cf. Hebrews 13:3). In effect, Jesus has replaced the Old Testament's punishment for adultery, stoning to death (see Deuteronomy 22:13-29), by the provision of divorce. In both cases, the innocent partner is no longer bound to the former spouse. In the Old Testament, it is death that breaks the marriage bond, whereas, in the New Testament, it is divorce. Once the marriage bond is broken, remarriage is allowed. Let me stress however that, although there may be a valid ground for divorce, our mandate is to forgive. If there is genuine repentance and forgiveness is sought, our desire should always be to be reconciled to our partner.

At this point all sorts of questions begin to raise their heads. Let me take just two of them. First, let me consider the situation of someone who has been through a divorce but on wrong grounds and subsequently that person has remarried. This second marriage is clearly adulterous (Matthew 19:9), but is it valid? Yes, it is valid. The adultery of the second marriage has the effect of dissolving the first marriage.<sup>6</sup> Notice, the man in verse 9 is still said to *marry* the other woman.

The second question, though easily stated, is more difficult. Is the guilty party of a valid divorce allowed to remarry? For an answer to this, we must turn to Matthew

5:32. We must be careful here, but first notice that the woman, in the latter part of this verse, with whom, if a man marries her, he commits adultery, is a woman who has been divorced on invalid grounds. In other words, a woman, who has been divorced for an inadequate cause, on remarriage commits adultery. But what of a woman who has been divorced for a valid reason? The inference from this verse is clear: such a woman on remarriage does not commit adultery. If this were not so, the exception clause of this verse would not have been needed.<sup>7</sup> Thus the guilty party of a valid divorce is free to remarry. The guilty party has committed sin, but the marriage has been broken. Once a marriage has been broken, remarriage can happen.

### The teaching of Paul

The final passage we must consider is 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. In this passage we have the apostle Paul's additional teaching on the subject of marriage. As with Jesus, the central teaching of Paul is to confirm the permanence of marriage. In verses 10 and 11, Paul says, first, that the wife must not separate from her husband and, second, that the husband must not divorce his wife. That is the principle – marriage is permanent. 'What God has joined together, let man not separate.'

Now, in these verses – particularly verses 10 to 16 – notice that Paul is meticulous to apply his instruction to men and women equally. The only exception to this is in verse 11. Paul adds, in this verse, an aside or a parenthesis, namely: if a woman does separate, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. There are two important things to notice with regard to this parenthesis. *Firstly*, it only applies to women. It does not apply to men. On this one occasion, Paul does not apply his teaching equally. *Secondly*, Paul is not assuming this separation of the

woman from the man is wrong. If Paul were, he would state that she must not remain separate, but rather she must be reconciled to her husband. Paul doesn't do that. So for what legitimate reason – a reason that is not also valid for men – can a woman separate from, but not divorce, her husband? I would suggest that physical cruelty and abuse is at least one such reason. Generally speaking, wives do not batter their husbands. If a wife is in physical danger, she is allowed to separate from, but not divorce, her husband. It is worth noting that such situations rarely remain static. Often such a husband will subsequently desert his wife and we are then within the scope of Paul's teaching in the following verses.

From verse 12 onwards, Paul is considering the case of 'mixed' marriages – the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever. In such a situation, a believer, who has been deserted by an unbeliever, is not bound (1 Corinthians 7:15). In other words, the deserted partner is free to remarry. Paul is not here contradicting Jesus and giving another ground for divorce. Rather, Paul is dealing with the acquiescence of the believing partner in the desertion by an unbelieving spouse. This is a recognition that the marriage has already been ended by the partner who left and that divorce, the dissolving of the marriage, has occurred. It is striking to note, at this point, that there is a correspondence here between what constitutes a marriage and what ends a marriage. What can end a marriage? Marital unfaithfulness – that which undermines and strikes at the heart of physical union. What can end a marriage? Desertion – that which undermines and strikes at the heart of public, lifelong commitment.

However, there is a difficulty with 1 Corinthians 7:15 and it is this: is this special case of Paul's just a special case or is it the outworking of a more general principle? In other words, do we have

here, in these verses, the recognition of divorce on the general ground of desertion? On this question in particular the evangelical, conservative world seems to be divided. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, for example, seems to take the more general view,<sup>8</sup> whereas John Stott<sup>9</sup> and Professor John Murray<sup>10</sup> take up the narrower position. At this point, Jay Adams' definition of divorce as a repudiation and breaking of the marriage covenant or agreement is helpful.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, desertion is a declaration by one partner to the other partner that the marriage has ended and, as such, desertion is a repudiation of the marriage commitment. It is this understanding of what has happened that allows Paul to state that the deserted partner is free to remarry and it is on this ground that I consider Paul to be dealing with a more general principle. Desertion is, in its nature, a divorce.

However, be that as it may, in practice within the Christian church desertion takes two forms – either the explicit case described by Paul or the case of a professing Christian deserting his or her spouse. In the second case, the professing Christian is behaving as an unbeliever and at that point they begin to fall within the orbit of 1 Corinthians 7. This is the position John Murray takes in his carefully reasoned and detailed book on divorce when he states: 'A professing Christian may exhibit such perversity in departing from his or her Christian spouse and show such opposition to the demands of the Christian ethic that the desertion, in view of all factors involved, may be regarded as abandonment of the Christian faith. In such an instance the person deserting could be placed in the same category as an unbeliever and desertion construed accordingly. In this situation 1 Corinthians 7:15 could be regarded as applicable and its provision applied.'<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, let me draw two applications. *First*, we must beware of becoming entrenched in an extreme position on this issue. The extreme that marriage can be dissolved for any and every conceivable reason clearly demeans marriage. The other extreme that the marriage bond can never be broken for whatever reason also belittles the seriousness of marriage. This second extreme gives a husband or a wife complete liberty to be flagrantly, deliberately and continually unfaithful to his or her spouse and the spouse has to accept and acquiesce in that behaviour. That understanding demeans the seriousness of marriage.

*Second*, we must beware of treating divorce as the unforgivable sin. It is not. We are all sinners before God. We are all in need of the forgiveness and grace of God. Some of us have private sins, others of us have sins that are much more public, but, whether public or private, we have to live with the consequences of our sins. Let us not add unjustly to the burden of those consequences.

## Further reading

There are numerous books on this issue of divorce and remarriage available today. *Questions About Divorce and Remarriage* (Monarch Books, 1998) by Andrew Cornes and *Jesus and Divorce* (Paternoster Press, 1997) by Gordon Wenham and William Heth, which take a strict position on this issue, have already been mentioned. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Zondervan, 1980) by Jay Adams and *Divorce* (Christian Focus, 1998) by Frank Retief both take a much freer line. Frank Retief's book, in particular, shows the tenderness of a pastor's heart. The chapter on

*Continued on page 32*

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## Book Notes

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*Sharon James notes some of the available resources on marriage. Books are listed in alphabetical order by author.*

Crabb, Larry. ***Men and Women: the giving of self.*** Marshall Pickering (HarperCollins Religious). £6.99. (US title: ***Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference***). Crabb argues convincingly that the husband serves by exercising Christ-like servant leadership, the wife serves by affirming that leadership. 'In marriage, headship is what a man does when he is living as a godly man, and submission is what a woman does when she is living as a godly woman....they are mature and loving expressions of our distinctive sexuality in the marriage relationship' (p.214).

Edwards, Brian and Barbara. ***No Longer Two: A guide for Christian engagement and marriage.*** Day One. 1994. 144 pp. pbk. £5.95. This is the best book around for pre-marital counselling: it covers biblical principles and the whole range of practical issues. Some may have slight reservations with the way that submission is defined, and some will find that the idea that wives should stay at home does not take account of the many ways in which women are suited to contributing to society. But other than that, this book is very warmly recommended.

Gray, John. ***Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus.*** Thorsons, 1992. A secular best-seller on the differences between the sexes. Very

many couples testify to how it has thrown light on why they find communication difficult, and how it has helped them to understand each other.

Huggett, Joyce. ***Two into One.*** IVP. 1981. rep. 1995. 128pp. pbk. £4.99. Short and readable; there are helpful questions for a couple to work through together.

James, John Angell. ***A Help to Domestic Happiness.*** 1833. Reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publications, PA, USA. This is a reprint of a classic; it has not been modernised, and will seem quaint and difficult to some. It reflects the culture of one hundred and sixty years ago: modern readers are not advised to implement every specific instruction! But timeless biblical principles are beautifully expounded, and it contains real treasures.

Jehle, Paul. ***Dating vs. Courtship.*** Plymouth Rock Foundation, MA, USA. A biblical and comprehensive critique of the modern practice of 'dating'.

La Haye, Tim & Beverly. ***The Act of Marriage.*** Marshall Pickering (HarperCollins Religious), 1984. A detailed treatment of sexuality, useful to have by for those occasional situations when a married couple come for help because of acute sexual problems.

Lewis, Robert and Hendricks, William. ***Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage***. NavPress, pbk. 251 pp. The best book we have come across on marriage. The authors apply biblical principles to the real-life situations facing couples in the modern world. This is not a book which enforces 1950s-type traditional marriages on 1990s young couples, but it demonstrates that the modern myth of the 'roleless' marriage is a non-starter. Challenging and thought-provoking, this book has been used by some churches in the US to teach young people about biblical manhood and womanhood.

Mallory, James D. ***Ending the Battle of the Sexes: reconciling gender expectations in marriage***. Crossway, 1996. 188pp. pbk. £5.99. Mallory draws on the best of what has recently been written about the differences between the sexes, placing the material firmly within a biblical framework. He shows that marriages only work when each partner focuses on ministering to the other. Husbands need to know what their wives need in order to minister to them; wives need to know what their husbands need in order to minister to them.

Parsons, Rob. ***The Sixty Minute Marriage***. Hodder & Stoughton. 1997. pbk. £5.99. 106pp.

This is good for 'non-readers' and also suitable for giving to non-Christians. This short book contains much common sense and is humorous and fast moving. Parsons points to the main points of tension in any marriage, and there are plenty of pithy points that will help couples to move beyond these sources of conflict. There is no overt biblical teaching, but the

assumption that 'marriage is for life' is ever present.

Parsons, Rob. ***Loving Against the Odds***. Hodder & Stoughton. 1994. pbk. £6.99. 224 pp. A rather fuller work than the above; similar in tone.

Payne, Tony and Phillip D. Jensen. ***Pure Sex***. St Matthias Press, 1998. This is an excellent discussion of the failure of the 'sexual revolution'. It shows that the fallacious thinking of such as Freud, Kinsey, the Bloomsbury group and Mead have permeated the mindset of our whole generation. It argues convincingly that real sexual fulfilment is only found within marriage, which is 'God's way'. This could be recommended to non-Christians, and would be good for any young people asking questions about sex before marriage, homosexuality etc. St Matthias Press also offers two excellent tapes series by Phillip Jensen, entitled ***The Family (and other false Gods)*** (5 talks), and ***Love, Sex and Marriage*** (4 talks). Both tape sets cost £7.99, available from St. Matthias Press, PO Box 665, London, SW20 8RU.

Piper, John and Grudem, Wayne (eds). ***Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood***.

Crossway, 1991. With 22 contributors and 576 pages this is a comprehensive treatment of the subject of biblical manhood and womanhood. The key chapters have been produced as booklets, available from CBMW (see inside front cover). Most relevant to the theme of marriage are ***What's the Difference?*** (Piper) and ***50 Crucial Questions about Manhood and Womanhood*** (Piper and Grudem). Booklets are £2.00 each incl. p&p (within the UK).

# News



*Emmanuel Baptist Church, Oradea with Christian Secondary School to left*

## Romania

*From a report by Dr Robert Oliver following a visit, 27th February to 6th March 1999.*

The dominance of Communism has ended but the opposition of Romanian Orthodoxy to the gospel remains. In an interview with Dr Emil Bartos I was told that about 85% of the population would claim to be Orthodox. In that situation there is need to establish a strong Reformed theology in a country which has not really experienced the blessings of the Reformation.

There is a vigorous Baptist movement in the Western part of the country especially. It was to this area that I went, spending a week in and around Oradea. The main purpose of the visit was to teach the Reformation in 'The School of the Prophets'. This is an evening class programme for Christian workers who are

not able to attend full time courses. The subject matter was new for the students who showed great enthusiasm. Most were from Baptist churches, but a few came from Brethren and Pentecostal churches.

On the Sunday evening Pastor Colin Dawson of Westoning, Bedfordshire and I both preached at Pastor Bartos' village church in Tulca where some 200 assembled. On the Thursday evening I preached in Emmanuel Baptist Church Oradea to a congregation of about 1500. Emmanuel, formerly known as the Second Baptist Church, enjoyed the blessing of revival in the 1970s. I also attended Sunday morning worship on this visit and had the privilege of seeing 45 people baptised. There was a congregation of some 3000.

God has greatly blessed the evangelism of the churches in Transylvania, but there is

a great need for teaching. The *Centre for Reformation Studies* has been set up in the Bible Institute of Oradea under the direction of Dr Bartos. This seeks to encourage a vigorous theology in the face of the challenge of Orthodoxy and also of other teachings hostile to the gospel which can easily enter the country.

It is very important that helpful literature should be available and in particular examples of good expository and doctrinal preaching. My hosts in Romania were Dinu and Lidia Moga. Dinu is a former LTS (London Theological Seminary) student who has set up a publishing house called *Faclia* (The Torch). Already a number of valuable works have appeared in Romanian including John Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* and Edmund Clowney's *The Unfolding Mystery*. Lidia has translated a number of children's books. Dinu is working on the translation of volume 1 of the sermons of Dr Lloyd-Jones on *Romans*. Sponsorship is necessary to produce such works at affordable prices.

**Middle East Reformed Fellowship**  
*PO Box 265, Hayes, Middx UB3 3AU*  
*Dec 98 report, South Sudan*

Last November a MERF delegation met with leaders of the Reformed Churches in S Sudan. The meetings included a field trip to three Reformed congregations in the refugee camps by the Sudanese/Kenyan borders. The purpose of the trip was to learn first hand the state of the Reformed community in the 'liberated' areas of Sudan (The areas outside the Muslim government control. The delegation was touched by the way the

Lord continues to bless these brethren under most difficult living conditions. The Reformed churches throughout S Sudan continue to see tremendous numerical growth. One of the most pressings needs is in the area of training the growing number of volunteer evangelists. More than 900 are actively engaged in evangelism. Their doctrinal knowledge, however, is very little and their understanding of the Scriptures is very superficial. Much effort is needed to train these evangelists as well as provide more in-depth training for pastors, elders and deacons.

It was determined to take immediate action to appoint two mobile teams, each composed of two young South Sudanese pastors to start the effort of providing training for lay evangelists. MERF is now committed to provide the necessary training material and support for these two teams, and for other teams to be appointed before the middle of 1999.

**South Africa**  
*Encouraging church growth in Kwazulu*

Paulos Ntaka is pastor of Edameni Baptist church in a village of approximately 10,000 people some 30 minutes drive from Durban. He has recently been called to full time ministry having served there for a number of years as the only elder. He is a humble man with a heart to reach the lost. The church has been growing under his leadership has now about 80 adherents. Paulos and his wife have a young son named Lunga.

Pastor Paulos has close links with Jonathan Holdt, pastor of the nearby Hillcrest Baptist Church.

## ‘The Very Ecstasy of Love’ (continued from page 10)

Poetry offers help as we try to think of God and immortality, by means which cannot be precisely defined but which we all feel; and religion is glad to avail itself of this help. Poetry affords to religion its store of symbols and metaphors; religion gives them back to poetry, but sparkling in their new light.

You are led upwards from beauty to beauty, quietly and serenely, step by step, with no sudden leap from depth to height. The treasure of truth is hidden from the idle and unready, to be seen only when the eye of the mind is pure (John Keble).

### References

- 1 ‘I cannot now endorse the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon. I think the vagaries of interpretation given in terms of the allegorical principle indicate that there are no well-defined hermeneutical canons to guide us in determining the precise meaning and application if we adopt the allegorical view. However, I also think that in terms of biblical analogy the Song could be used to *illustrate* the relation of Christ to his church. The marriage bond is used in Scripture as a pattern of Christ and the church. . . . One would have to avoid a great deal of the arbitrary and indeed fanciful interpretations to which the allegorical view leads and which it would demand’ [the late Prof. John Murray quoted in Carr, p.24].
- 2 ‘An examination of the Old Testament and the LXX reveals clearly that [the] distinction made between [agape and eros] was not part of the Hebrew mind up to and including the early centuries of the Christian era. Agape, at least in the Old Testament ... is a word filled with all the Hebrew concepts of passion, sexual attraction, friendship, obedience, loyalty, duty, and commitment to the other person’ [Carr p.62f].
- 3 ‘The opening of the circle of trinitarian life to admit the church’ D. Macleod, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, S.B.E.T., Vol.3, No.1, p.19ff.

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## Divorce and Remarriage (continued from page 26)

‘Marriage and Divorce’ in *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Marshall Pickering, 1990) by John Stott is helpful and is typical of Stott’s clear thinking and insight. For me, the best and most thorough book remains *Divorce* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961) by Professor

John Murray. If you read no other book on this issue, buy and read this one. Murray is always meticulous and this book has yet to be surpassed. After studying Murray, one is beginning to get to the heart of an issue.

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7. *Ibid*, pp99-100.
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10. Murray J (1961) *Divorce*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. pp76-78.
11. Adams J (1980) *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, Zondervan p32.
12. Murray J (1961) *Divorce*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. p76 (footnote).

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