

# LIVING IN SIN

(Some random thoughts about marriage and divorce)

by Boyce Mouton

“Living in sin” is an expression not found in the Bible. It has been coined to describe those who marry, and continue in marriage, with a divorced person. The seriousness of the situation, at least in part, is based on the words of Jesus : **“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Luke 16:18)**

Everyone knows that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Everyone also knows that the church is filled with sinners who have been saved by grace. The Good News is that anyone can be forgiven by Christ. Salvation, however, involves repentance. The thief, for example, can be forgiven but must repent of his sin and “steal no more” (Eph. 4:28). The thief who continues to steal invalidates a saving relationship with Christ. Don’t be deceived, those whose life style is evil will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Even though the expression “living in sin” is not in the Bible, it might be applied to those sinners who continue committing the listed in this passage. The list includes: the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers. Many of the saved at Corinth had once practiced these sins before receiving Christ. Now, however, they were to come out from among such corruption and live holy lives.

As we have said, the expression “living in sin” is not in the Bible. A similar phrase, however, is used in 1 Tim. 5:6. **“The widow who lives for pleasure is dead while she lives”**. This passage refers to widows who forget their commitment to Christ and live for themselves. Even though these women are alive physically, the Scriptures teach that they are dead while they live. The Greek word here translated as “pleasure” is “spatalao”. The NIV translates the same word as “luxury” in James 5:5. Even though neither passage deals with divorce and remarriage, they do deal with live styles that are at odds with total commitment to Christ. Living for “pleasure” and living for “luxury” do not represent our high calling in Christ Jesus. Repentance refers to a change of mind that results in a change of life. If sinners do not repent, they will perish (Lk. 13:3 - 5).

But now let us return to our theme of “living in sin” as it relates to marriage and divorce. Understanding the many aspects of this subject will not be easy. Let’s start with the words of Moses: **“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.” (Deut**

## 24:1-4)

Jesus pointed out that divorce was not intended by God, but was permitted by Moses because of the hardness of our hearts (Matt. 19:8). Unfortunately, Bible scholars have never agreed on the “meaning” of his words. There are many questions that arise from this passage. If, for example, the first husband divorced his wife because of adultery, would the second husband who married her be “living in sin”? What did Moses mean by “displeasing” and “indecent”? Some say this refers to adultery, but others say it refers anything displeasing to the husband. Sadly, it seems that what was “displeasing” or “indecent” to the wife was not even considered. The scholars, as you know, were debating this issue 1,500 years after Moses, when Jesus was on the earth. Unfortunately, the scholars are still debating these same issues today. Even more unfortunate is the sad fact that we will probably still be debating the same questions until Jesus comes again.

All sin is an offence to God, but sexual sins are particularly serious. Note: **“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Cor 6:18 - 20)**

When we know of someone involved in any sin, we must warn them with the assurance that **“Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (Ja. 5:20).**

Those who choose to “deliberately keep on sinning” have no sacrifice left for their sins (Heb. 10:26).

## SEEKING FOR CLARIFICATION

At this juncture we must again candidly confess that disagreement about divorce will probably continue until Jesus comes again. Nothing here, or in any study, will provide the final answer for everyone. The same is true, of course, with other Biblical teaching as well. Take, for example, the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. This too has been debated for 3,500 years. Even when Moses was alive this command still required clarification from God. When a man, for example, was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, it was not “clear what should be done to him” (Nu. 15:34). Thus they put the man in custody until God clarified what should be done. In this instance, God commanded that the whole assembly stone him to death outside the camp. Since then, an infinite number of cases involving the Sabbath have been debated without clarification from heaven. Who does have the final word on what could, or could not be done on the Sabbath?

### The case of Herod and Herodias

So also there is a constant need for clarification regarding cases of marriage and divorce. Take, for example, the case of Herod and Herodias. On the surface this seems to be simple. The

Scriptures tell us that **“Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (Mark 6:17-18).**

Several things in this passage are clear:

- Herodias had been married to Philip.
- Herodias was now married to Herod.
- The marriage of Herod and Herodias was not lawful.

Several things, however, are not clear:

- Had either Herod or Herodias been married and divorced before?
- What was the proper remedy for this present wrong?
- Were Herod and Herodias to be stoned for adultery?
- Was Herodias to be returned to Philip? This “remedy”, as you know, was detestable to God (Deut. 24:4).
- Even though Herod could not lawfully remain married to Herodias, could he have lawfully had a large harem as did others?
- If Herodias was “put away”, was she condemned to live the remainder of her life without a husband?
- If Herodias did remarry, would she be “living in sin”?
- If Herod divorced Herodias, was he condemned to live the rest of his life without a wife?
- If Herod divorced his wife and married another, would he be “living in sin”?
- What circumstances would be necessary for either, or both of them to remarry?
- Are there no Biblical ways to correctly solve this problem?
- Is there only one Biblical way to solve this problem?
- Are there several ways to correctly solve this problem in the eyes of God?
- How would you solve this problem if you were Herod?
- Can you see the need of clarification from God to achieve a proper course of action?

#### The case at Corinth

Or let us take the case at Corinth of a man living with his father’s wife. In this instance Paul commanded: **“Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Cor 5:2-5)**

This case, as you know, did not involve divorce and remarriage. It did, however, involve church discipline. The discipline commanded by Paul achieved the desired results and the man was

restored. Since the discipline became excessive, however, Paul wrote: **“The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven-if there was anything to forgive-I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”** (2 Cor 2:6-11)

Even though this case of fornication did not involve marriage and divorce, it still raises some questions that need clarification.

- This discipline was to take place when they were assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, when Paul was with them in spirit, and when the power of the Lord Jesus was present. How should church discipline be administered today?
- How come only the man was disciplined, and not the woman?
- Was the woman innocent?
- Did her husband have Scriptural grounds to divorce her?
- Was her husband required to divorce her?
- Was this woman involved in fornication free to remain married to her husband?
- Was the guilty son free to later marry?
- Would the answers to these questions be different if the offending parties had been married to each other ?
- If these fornicators had married one another, would God hold them to a higher standard than if they were merely “living together”.
- Did Paul really mean that he would forgive anyone that the congregation in Corinth forgave (2 Cor. 2:10)?
- Can you not see the need for clarification from God on some aspects of this situation?

Again, we repeat that the case before us is made more simple because it did not involve marriage and divorce. It still illustrates, however, that the need for church discipline is not always easy to diagnose, and the cure not always easy to administer. Consider this list of people in the church that require discipline: **“But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”** (1 Cor 5:11)

Each offence against God that is listed here requires discretion and discernment. For example, does one case of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, and swindling require church discipline? Since a little leaven leavens the whole lump, some would insist that there be no exceptions. Others would argue that church leaders need to look for a pattern of behavior, rather than an isolated moral failure. Even if you hold to the latter view, someone still has to clarify what constitutes a pattern!

Difficulty in administering discipline, of course does not absolve the church from it's

responsibility. We are to warn the unruly, comfort the fainthearted,, support the weak, and to be patient towards all; (1 Thess. 5:14).

### Is there an exception?

While these thoughts are not directly related to marriage, divorce, and “living in sin”, they at least make clear the need for discipline, discernment and clarification. As from the beginning, texts about marriage and divorce are seldom agreed upon, even by the most conscientious and devoted scholars. Matt. 19:9, for example, is considered by many to provide an “exception” to “living in sin”. In other words, if you divorce your mate “because of fornication”, you are free to remarry. Others, however, study the same passage and disagree. The same controversy about an exception and remarriage is true of 1 Cor. 7:15. This passage teaches that if an unbelieving spouse leaves the marriage, the believing spouse is not bound in such circumstances. The meaning of this passage, however, like most other passages regarding marriage and divorce, is not clear. Does the expressing “not bound” mean that the believing spouse has the “right” to remarry. The complexity of this issue is illustrated by a Christian professor who changed his mind on this critical passage after 35 years of teaching an opposite point of view.

The situation over “living in sin” is so serious that some have even removed divorced and remarried people from their “prospect list” as beyond the reach of redemption. Others concede that divorced and remarried people can be saved, provided they properly care for their children and abstain from sex. Even more extreme are those who are comforted by the fact that David avoided “living in sin” with Bathsheba by murdering her husband. To the legal mind, “to live in sin” is to be eternally condemned. It is yet to be demonstrated, however, that God looks upon marriage and divorce in the same way that man does. Remember! The things that are impossible with men, are possible with God.

### The “innocent” party

While all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, not everyone is a fornicator. Thus, when one spouse is guilty of fornication, the other spouse is deemed innocent in this regard., The “hope” is that when divorce results from fornication the “innocent party” is free to remarry and not be guilty of “living in sin”. Unfortunately, as you know, not everyone agrees with this interpretation. Neither do the scholars even agree on what constitutes “fornication”. Moreover, the party that we deem to be “innocent” may not be innocent at all. Judas Iscariot, for example, was considered “innocent” by the other disciples right up to the time he betrayed Christ. They were in constant contact with him for three years without knowing his evil heart. Even when he left the upper room to receive his infamous 30 pieces of silver they still did not suspect him and assumed he was going out to give money to the poor (Jn. 13:39).

Most are familiar with the story of Jacob’s marriage to Leah (Gen. 29:14 - 30). Jacob was a notorious liar and cheater, but God was in the process of making him a spiritual prince. A part of this maturing process involved allowing him to be cheated. So Jacob worked seven years to marry

Rachel. On his wedding night he made love to a woman he believe to be Rachel, but it turned out to be her sister Leah.

This story illustrates how people with good intentions can marry someone with bad intentions. A woman who worked at a Christian college, for example, married a student who seemed to be an exemplary Christian. He was quite eloquent and much in demand as a speaker. It turns out, however, that he had another wife in another state whom he had not legally divorced. What should this “innocent” woman do? Then there is the story of a young man who fell in love and got married. On his wedding night he discovered that his bride was a hermaphrodite, incapable of consummating the marriage. What should this “innocent” man do? Then there are the thousands of “innocent” women who have been forced to marry a victorious soldier or some other immoral person selected by her family. What should these “innocent” women do?

Jesus warned about judging others (Matt. 7:1 - 5). One reason we need to be cautious in judging others is that invariably there are things about their situation that we do not know. Hamaan, for example, felt very confident in condemning Mordecai as this hated Jew was in direct violation of a command by the king (Esther 3:1 - 6). Based on what Hamaan “knew”, he assumed that he would be honored and Mordecai condemned. He was wrong! Hamaan knew that there was a royal decree that all the Jews should be killed (Esther 3:10 - 15). Hamaan knew that no law written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring could be revoked (Esther 8:8). In spite of this evidence in his favor, there was still some things that Hamaan didn’t know! There was something supernatural taking place in this story that transcended law. Ultimately, as you know, Mordecai was honored and Hamaan was hanged on his own gallows. As you also know, this triumph of love over law is remembered each year by Jews during the feast of Purim (Esther 9:26 - 28). Obviously Hamaan should have been more cautious in passing judgement, as there were some things he didn’t know. Perhaps we should be cautious in passing judgement for the same reason.

## THE MIND OF CHRIST

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5 KJV)

It is interesting to note that while human teachers are often hesitant and tentative, Jesus was not. Jesus always spoke with authority, and not like the teachers of the law (Matt. 7:29). Again, we repeat that while the legal scholars spoke with hesitation, Jesus did not. Note also that while many teachers of the law sought to avoid problems, Jesus did not. In fact, Jesus deliberately sought out people with problems. Jesus taught this principle in the parable of the Good Samaritan., While the priest and the Levite avoided the man who had fallen among thieves, the lowly Samaritan dared to risk ceremonial uncleanness and get involved (Lk. 10:30 - 37). The goal of all believers, of course, is to be like Jesus. Jesus was willing to risk contamination and get involved too! He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. With reference to divorce and remarriage, it is comforting to know that Jesus did not exclude anyone from coming to Him for help. Jesus repeatedly invited sinners to come unto Him for salvation. No group, or individual, was excluded regardless of their sins. Here are a few examples of the invitation of Christ to everyone:

- **“The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” (Matt 22:8-9)**
- **“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:23)**
- **“I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.” (Mark 9:41)**
- **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (John 6:37)**
- **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” (John 6:51)**
- **“If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:17)**
- **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” (John 7:37)**
- **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)**
- **Etc.**

As we have already said, not only did Jesus invite anyone and everyone to become His disciples, He specifically sought out those who were disenfranchised by society. Listen to these words: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)**

After calling Levi to be His disciple Jesus said: **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Lk. 5:32)**. After allowing a sinful woman to wash His feet Jesus said: **“I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Lk. 7:47)**. At the home of a prominent Pharisee Jesus said: **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)**. It was when the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered **“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them”** that Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:1 - 32). It was when some were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else that Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk. 18:9 - 14). It was when Jesus ate at the home of a sinful man named Zacchaeus that He said: **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk. 19:10)**. I think you get the point!

The significance of this truth for all desperate and lonely people cannot be over emphasized. For those in trouble, please do not despair. Remember! All things are possible with God! Jesus said it like this: **“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27)**

Remember! **“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17)**

The case of a woman who had been married seven times

Consider the story of a woman who had been married seven times (Matt. 22:23 - 32). When the Sadducees presented her case to Christ they wrongly assumed that there was no solution. Of course they were wrong! There is always a solution to those who come to Christ. Jesus therefore rebuked the Sadducees for not knowing either the Scriptures or the power of God (Matt. 22:29). When the crowds heard this they were astonished at His teaching (Matt. 22:33). We too can be astonished by the teachings of Jesus regarding the Scriptures and the power of God..

The case of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well

Another example of a “hopeless” situation is the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (See John 4:4 - 42). Here is a brief summary of some of her problems.

- She was a Samaritan and thus was involved in false worship (Jn. 4:22).
- She had been married 5 times and was living with a man to whom she was not married (Jn. 4:18).
- Note that she came to draw water at noon (See Jn. 1:39 and 4:6). This was not the usual time to draw water. Some have suggested that her bad reputation caused her to come at noon to avoid contact with others. Until the disciples returned, apparently she and Jesus were the only two people present.
- These few facts, of course, are only the tip of the iceberg regarding the religious, social, emotional, and spiritual problems which this woman faced on a daily basis.
- Note that Jesus did not avoid or evade this woman because of her many problems. In fact, he sought her out just as Isaiah predicted that He would. (Is. 61:1, 2).
- The Good Shepherd searches for lost sheep (Lk. 15:3 - 7)

Here are some of the things that Jesus did to bring hope to this sinful woman:

- He avoided the normal route from Judea to Galilee and chose to go through Samaria (Jn. 4:4).
- He waited at the well while the disciples went into town (Jn. 4:6).
- He broke with tradition and dared to speak with a woman in public (Jn. 4:7).
- He was even willing to drink from her “contaminated” Samaritan vessel (John 4:7).
- Even though Jesus knew of her many marriages, He offered her living water that would satisfy her thirst forever (Jn. 4:10 - 14),
- By both word and example, Jesus taught His disciples to evangelize those who are shunned by society (Jn. 4:34 - 38). He told them that the harvest was “now” even in Samaria!
- Note that the testimony of this sinful woman caused many to believe in Jesus (Jn. 4:39).
- Note also that Jesus never shunned anyone because of their sins. He even established a



- reputation for being a friend to tax collectors and sinners (Lk. 7:34).
- Even if you have been married and divorced five times, your case is not hopeless, and Jesus still wants to be your friend.

### The case of the woman caught in the act of adultery

Even more amazing from a legal point of view is the story of a woman caught in the act of adultery (Jn. 8:1 - 11). The law was clear. The adulterous woman was to be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Jn. 8:5). Jesus, however, did not condemn her. Instead, He stooped down and wrote something on the ground with His finger. Since Jesus knew what was in man (Jn. 2:25), some have suggested that He wrote the names and sins of the woman's accusers. At any rate, Jesus looked up and said that those without sin should cast the first stone. Then He stooped down again and continued writing. As you know, all her accusers left, beginning with the older ones. Then Jesus did not condemn the woman either, but commanded her to go and "leave her life of sin" (Jn. 8:11). Remember, the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17)

But we must again seek for clarification. What did Jesus mean by telling her to leave her life of sin? Was she a single woman involved in prostitution? Was she married and cheating on her husband? Whether single, or married, did leaving her life of sin require that she avoid "living in sin" by abstaining from all future sexual relations? At any rate, remember that regardless of what we think of others, our ultimate goal is to have the mind of Christ. If Jesus gave hope to a sinful woman like this, perhaps we should offer hope to sinful people too.

We need to have the mind in us that was also in Christ Jesus!

### What David did

When the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, Jesus asked them to consider what David did? (Matt. 12:1 - 8). As you know, David did something that was unlawful. He entered into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which was "not lawful" for him to do. How did David get by with this? Nadab and Abihu were killed by God for offering strange fire (Lev. 10:1 - 5). Uzzah too was killed by God for daring to touch the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:7). When Uzziah dared to do that which was not lawful, God smote him with leprosy, and he was a leper until the day of his death (2 Chron. 26:16 - 21). David, however, did that which not lawful and was not condemned. Jesus asked the Pharisees to ponder this. Perhaps we need to do the same.

Undoubtedly, a part of the answer involves David's heart. When God chose David to be the king of Israel he instructed Samuel regarding David's brother: **"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."** (1 Sam 16:7) David, as you know, was a man after God's own heart. It is indeed humbling to realize that our judgment of people is invariably based on outward appearance. God looks beyond outward appearance and

always considers the heart. Remember! All sin, including adultery, comes from the heart (Matt. 15:19).

### God wants mercy more than sacrifice

Jesus also challenged the Pharisees with another passage of Scripture. He said: **“If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.”** (Matt 12:7) This Scripture, as you probably know, is found in the book of Hosea. Against all conventional wisdom and Scriptural precedent, Hosea was commanded by God to: **“Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.”** (Hos 1:2) When Hosea’s wife committed adultery and ran off with another man, God commanded him to love her in the same way that He loved the Israelites. Therefore Hosea bought his wife for fifteen shekels of silver, and about an homer and a lethek of barley. Hosea promised to live with her if she stopped being a prostitute and quit being intimate with any other man (Hos. 3:2 - 3).

Was Hosea “living in sin” by marrying an adulteress? Was his sin compounded by buying her back out of prostitution?

But let us return to the words that Jesus wanted the Pharisees to ponder: **“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”**. While all truths are equally true, all truths are not equally important. All the commandments of God are important, but Jesus said that some commandments are more important than others. For example, Jesus said that loving God and loving your neighbor are the two most important commandments in the Bible (Matt. 22:37 - 40). Of course, both sacrifice and mercy are important, but in the eyes of God, mercy is more important than sacrifice.

Note also that sacrifice and mercy come from completely different motivations. The focus of a sacrifice is inward, and the focus of mercy is outward. Take, for example, the sacrificing of the Passover lamb. If a man wanted to save himself and his household, he had to make this sacrifice as the Lord commanded. If he erred in making this sacrifice, he was exposing both himself and his family to the wrath of God. As we have said, the focus of the sacrificial system was inward. No one sacrificed a lamb for his neighbor. Each man was to make the proper sacrifice for himself.

The focus of mercy is exactly the opposite. While the focus of a sacrifice is inward, the focus of mercy is on someone else. In the familiar story of the Good Samaritan, those involved in the sacrificial system passed by the man who had fallen among thieves. Touching this wounded man presented the possibility of ceremonial contamination.. Therefore the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side and did nothing to help. The Good Samaritan forgot about himself and had mercy. He risked personal uncleanness to help a stranger. He placed “mercy” ahead of “sacrifice”. Remember! Jesus said that we were to go and do what the Good Samaritan did. (Lk. 10:25 - 37).

In this story, it seems that the Good Samaritan reflected the mind of Christ., Jesus did not come to earth to save Himself, He came to earth to save others. Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus was

more interested in mercy than in sacrifice.

Avoiding divorced people, and their many problems, does not reflect either mercy or the mind of Christ.

### The bruised reed and the smoldering wick

Isaiah predicted that Jesus would not break a bruised reed, or snuff out a smoldering wick (Is. 42:1 - 4; Matt. 12:18 - 21). Reeds are so plentiful that poor people all over the world use them to make baskets and start fires. A “bruised reed” is of such little value that even the poorest peasant would toss it on the fire and get a good one. Jesus, however, would not break a bruised reed. Similarly, a smoldering wick is a nuisance that does not have to be tolerated. As the lamp runs out of oil, the wick gives no light, but only an offending trickle of smoke. Most people would avoid the nuisance by moistening their fingers and snuffing out the smoldering wick.

The “bruised reed” and the “smoldering wick” are symbols of “worthless” people that society has discarded. No one, however, is worthless to Jesus. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Typical of His thinking is the wonderful fact that Jesus chose to make His first resurrection appearance to none other than Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons (Mk. 16:9).

Let us not forget the challenge: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”

### The genealogy of Jesus

Matthew begins his Gospel with the legal genealogy of Jesus through Joseph (Matt. 1:1 - 17). Luke presents the biological genealogy of Jesus through Mary (Lk. 3:23 - 38). Both Joseph and Mary were biological descendants of David (See Rom. 1:3).

It is both interesting and significant that the five women mentioned in the legal genealogy of Jesus, raise some serious legal questions.

- First, the woman Tamar is mentioned (Matt. 1:3). She was apparently a Canaanite. (See Gen. 38:1 - 30). Her father-in-law, Judah, married the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. They had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah arranged for Er to marry Tamar. He was wicked, however, so the Lord put him to death (Gen. 39:7). Then Tamar married Onan but God killed him too (Gen. 39:10). When Judah did not give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar, she disguised herself like a harlot and seduced him. She became pregnant by Judah and gave birth to twin sons (Matt. 1:3). The firstborn son was Zerah. His legal identity as the firstborn was established by a scarlet thread tied to his hand. Her second son was named Perez (See Gen. 38:27 - 30). While it may seem illegal to us, the genealogy of Jesus came through Judah, his Canaanite daughter-in-law Tamar to whom he was not married, and Perez, who was not her firstborn son.

- The second woman mentioned by Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus is Rahab (Matt. 1:5). She is also known as “Rahab the harlot” (Josh. 2:1). By faith, this pagan prostitute welcomed the spies and was not killed with those who were disobedient (Heb. 11:32). God even considered her righteous because of what she did (Ja. 2:25). The fact that Rahab was an immoral gentile, and yet is still listed in the legal genealogy of Jesus, is not an accident. God is obviously teaching us something about legalism.
- The third woman listed by Matthew is Ruth (Matt. 1:5). The fact that Ruth was a Moabite also raises some legal questions. It was the daughters of Moab, as you know, who seduced the sons of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication (Rev. 2:14) 24,000 Israelite men died because of their sexual indiscretions with Moabite women (Nu. 25:9). According to Deut. 23:3, no Moabite, or their descendants, could enter into the assembly of the Lord down to the tenth generation. How strange it is that a Moabite woman would be listed in the legal genealogy of Jesus.
- The fourth, woman to be listed by Matthew is Bathsheba. Matthew does not call her by name but designates her as the mother of Solomon, who had been Uriah’s wife (Matt. 1:6). David, as you know, was guilty in the eyes of God (1 Ki. 15:5). His sin brought about the death of the child he conceived by Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:14). His sin also poisoned relationships in his family, encouraged his own sons to do wrong, and was also a stumbling block to Jews and gentiles alike. Bathsheba too may bear some responsibility for this adulterous relationship. Note that she bathed where she could be seen by David (2 Sam. 11:2). Note also that when she became pregnant she sent word to David and not her husband (2 Sam. 11:5). At any rate, it is strange indeed that in spite of several legitimate questions, the “wife of Uriah” is listed in the legal genealogy of Jesus.
- The fifth and final woman to be mentioned by Matthew is Mary (Matt. 1:16). Again, the Law of Moses was crystal clear regarding a woman who came to the marriage altar and could not prove she was a virgin. **“If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl’s virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father’s house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father’s house. You must purge the evil from among you.” (Deut 22:20-21)** Before the angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph that Mary’s child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he believed that she was guilty of becoming pregnant by illicit sex with another man. Incredibly, the Scriptures record: **“Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.” (Matt 1:19).** How can this be? How was it possible for God to consider Joseph a “righteous man” when he deliberately disregarded the Law of Moses?

The teaching of Jesus is for all the world

Everyone knows that Jesus commissioned the twelve to make disciples in all the world.

There are four commands given in what we call “the Great Commission”. 1. Go! 2. Make disciples! 3. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 4. Teach them to observe everything that Jesus taught. (Matt. 28:18 - 20).

Since they were to go into all the world, it follows that they taught the same message where ever they went. Anything they could not teach “everywhere”, they did not teach “anywhere”.

The teachings of Jesus about marriage and divorce, and everything else He taught, are for “all the world” We cannot teach one thing in one country, and another thing in another country. Christ has only one teaching that is to be delivered to the whole world.

The “civilized” world, as you know, is filled with fornication, multiple marriages and divorce. Many “civilized” people even believe in and practice same sex marriage. As the Scriptures predict, evil men are growing worse, and worse.

The problems we face in the “civilized” world, however, pale into insignificance by the problems faced by pagan people in developing countries. Take, for example, the following story told by Steve Saint in the Venture in Faith series. (The entire video interview can be obtained from Good News Productions, Intl. in Joplin, Mo.)

Steve, as you may know, is the son of the famous martyr, Nate Saint. Nate and four companions were speared to death on Jan. 8, 1956 in the jungles of Ecuador. Steve was just shy of his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday at the time. The killers were called “Aucas”. This name means “naked” or “savage”. They prefer to be known as Huaoranis, however, which means “the people”. This tribe has no history of a chief, counsel, or any form of government. Every Huaorani did that which was right in his own eyes. Their egalitarian mentality is reflected by the fact that sixty percent of the deaths within the tribe came as a result of them killing one another.

Due to the courageous ministry of Elizabeth Elliot, Rachel Saint, and others, many in this Stone Age tribe have been converted to Christ. Since Steve grew up in Ecuador, these converted killers became his friends. Since he knows their language, God has used him to help them establish an economy. Initially, their only marketable skill involved teaching outsiders about their Stone Age culture.

Just shortly before his video taped interview in Joplin, the Huaoranis hosted 34 college students and sponsors from secular universities in Washington State. A special village has been constructed in the jungle where outsiders can learn primitive ways. The students, of course, pay for the lessons and this provides the Huaoranis with a source of income. After several days in the jungle one student said that in her research she found that some very violent people once lived in the area. She was curious as to what happened to them.

Steve replied that the people there, hosting them in the camp, were the people she had read about. The American students didn’t believe it. Steve then asked them to pick any Huaorani and

ask them where their father was.. While Steve translated, the first three selected all gave the same answer. They spoke and gestured leaving no doubt that their fathers had all been speared to death. The fourth Huaorani selected was Pota, the wife of Mincaye. She pointed to a man standing near by and said that he had killed her father, mother, and brothers. One young college student expressed concern that he had just been sitting by that man not knowing he was a serial killer. “My God” said another, “we are four for four, is it safe to be here?”

Then Dawa, the wife of another converted killer named Kimo, stood up and volunteered her story. Kimo, her husband, was sitting next to Steve. She pointed at him and explained that he had speared to death her father, and mother, and her baby sister that was still nursing. Kimo had also killed her two brothers and her grandmother.

Then Steve, who realized that none of them knew his story, stood up and put his arm around Kimo and said: “This man also killed my father, now you are six for six”. (For your information, Kimo is now an elder in the Huaorani church and one of the two converted killers who baptized Steve Saint and his sister.)

But back to the subject of marriage and divorce. Due to murders within the tribe, in 1956 there were only 400 - 500 Huaoranis left. This made the problem of finding a wife to whom you were not related almost impossible. Sometimes women were kidnaped from neighboring tribes and forced to marry Huaorani warriors. Sexual relations in this pagan culture lacked the moral restraints normally associated with the influence of Christianity. Neither is it realistic to assume that new converts from this tribe would immediately have mature judgement and sensitivity regarding marriage and divorce.

Again, we must face the fact that the tangled problems regarding marriage and divorce in the developing cultures are often much worse than in those countries with a Christian history. In many parts of the world, for example, polygamy is an integral part of society. Then there are the many cases of forced or arranged marriages to men with no morals. I am also told that there are 27 million sexual slaves in the world today. Millions of others live together and have children without even bothering to get married. Many women have so many sexual partners that they cannot even identify the father of their children. **WE MUST EMPHASIZE AGAIN, HOWEVER, THAT EVERYONE WHO COMES TO CHRIST CAN BE SAVED. WE ALSO NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THE PROBLEMS THAT SEEM IMPOSSIBLE FOR MAN TO SOLVE, CAN BE SOLVED BY GOD!**

#### CONSIDER AGAIN THE INVITATION OF CHRIST

There are ditches on both sides of the road. We must not only guard against legalism, but also license. It is wrong for anyone to abuse the grace of God and believe that they can live any way they want to and still be saved. Remember! Jesus said that the way to life is straight and narrow, and only a few will find it (Matt. 7:13 - 14). The invitation given by Christ is for everyone, but the demands are so great that only a few are willing to follow Him. Jesus said:

**“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.” (Matt 16:24-27)**

Following Christ is not easy. That's why we must count the cost before making a commitment! Before building a tower we need to make an honest estimate of the cost to see if we can bring the project to completion. Before engaging in a battle with 10,000 troops against an enemy with 20,000, we need to decide in advance about sending a delegation and asking for terms of peace. Jesus said: **“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33)**

Yes! There is always hope in Christ regardless of the tangled and complicated messes we have made. The narrow road, however, is not easy. Crosses are not designed to be convenient! The sufferings of this present time, however, are not worthy to be compared with the glory we will experience in Christ (Rom. 8:18).

**“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor 9:24-27)**

**“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” (Josh 24:15)**