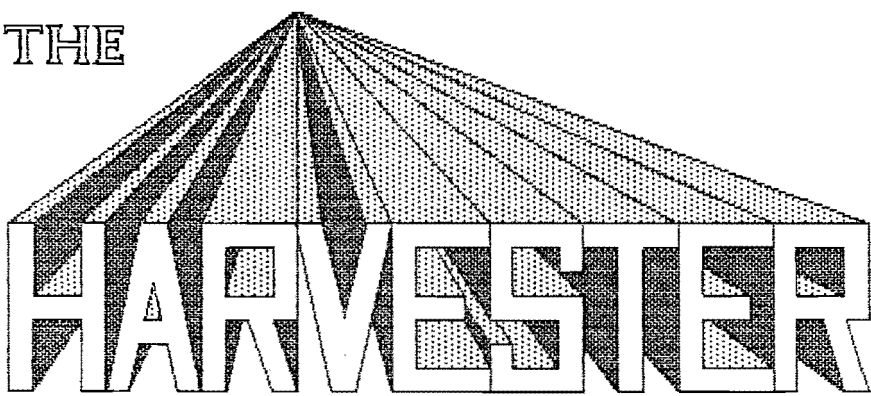


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"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10:2]

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No. 095

"BUT FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO"

(Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in last month's issue. Now we continue . . .)

Another question also often raised concerns the status of those who were divorced and remarried before they became Christians. Where do they stand in the Christian community?

It is very simple and very easy for us to take a position conforms to the acceptance of society; to defend what our children, grandchildren, or family are doing; to look at verses of Scripture in such a way as to find permission for allowing those things which we prefer. It is so easy for us to look at passages in the

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Bible regarding this issue, and other issues as well, with tinted glasses. If my glasses are green, I'll see everything green. If I look at the Bible with certain perspectives in mind, chances are I'll see it that way. What we need to do is to look at the Bible clearly, without tinted glasses. Let's see what we find.

The book of Mark, chapter 6 and verse 18, records the bold truth spoken by John to Herod, "*It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife!*" For this condemnation John's head was cut-off. Why did John condemn Herod? It was because Herod had taken his brother's wife. If God did not recognize the marriage of those who were not His children, then why should John have ventured to suggest something which would unnecessarily result in the loss of his head? If Herod and Herodias were in the world anyway, not subject to God's law anyway, then why should John have subjected himself to their wrath? This action of John, done with deliberation and in accord with God's will, shows to the contrary that God DOES recognize the marriage of those not His children.

Consider 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. The setting is found in verse 2. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, a city which lay on the west side of the Greek peninsula and far removed from where the Jews were normally found in abundance. He says, "*Ye know that ye WERE Gentiles!*" Those to whom he was writing had not been God's people. They were not even Jews. He says, "*Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led!*" We are reading about a people who had been pagan. They had not been God's people and had recognized no allegiance to God's law or His provisions.

With this background, now look at chapter 6, beginning with verse 9. "*Know ye not that*

the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, not abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God?" Notice carefully the next verse. *"And such WERE some of you!"* Before they became Christians, some of the Corinthians were fornicators and adulterers. If they were not subject to the law of God, how could they have been fornicators? How could they have been adulterers if God's law regarding adultery did not apply to them? Paul correctly referred to them as fornicators and adulterers at a time before they became Christians. Whether or not they are aware of it, God's law does apply to those who are outside His kingdom.

Speaking of marriage Jesus said, *"Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Mt. 19:4-6). Speaking of divorce, He said, *"From the beginning it was not so"* (v. 8). Thus Jesus referred to the basis of marriage as *"from the beginning,"* and in doing so, He pointed His listeners to Genesis 2:18-25. The beginning did not concern itself with Jew or Gentile, those in the family of God or those outside. Marriage *"from the beginning"* had to do with the entire human race! It still does!

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL

To submit to the Lord's will often presents a difficult challenge, for the immediate consequence sometimes appears so devastating.

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Surely it was a time of great difficulty when the men of Judah who had *"taken strange wives of the people of the land"* found it necessary *"to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them"* (Ezra 10:2-3). It was no doubt a painful decision for Abraham to prepare for the sacrifice of his son, yet he obeyed his God (Gen. 22). Centuries later the writer of Hebrews tells us of Abraham's reward for making the proper decision (11:17-19, 13-16).

I certainly do not know all the answers; and I must frankly admit that handling problems which arise regarding divorce and remarriage requires patience, understanding, and a generous portion of God's mercy. Permit me to share with you an answer which will apply in principle to so very many difficult situations.

My dear sister in Christ,

How good and yet how sad it was to receive your telephone call just now. Good in that I appreciate so very much your concern and friendship. Good, too, in that I feel it a genuine honor to be the object of your confidence. But how sad that your lingering problem has not dissipated. It is a blessing, however, when unpleasant matters must come to an end and one can proceed with God's purpose which unquestionably lies ahead for those who determine to serve Him.

The employment opportunity at (...) certainly seems to have been presented at an opportune time, but in reality I feel that it would be a sad mistake to take this job. Even though at present there might be a certain relief in "getting away from it all," there are so many factors which demand you stay and shoulder your responsibilities with the determination I know to be in you. There is the security of your present position, the influence you can and seriously need to exert on your children, involvement with a faithful congregation of the Lord's church, and the presence and support of those dear friends such as (...). There is consolation, too, in knowing that time seems to be a marvellous healer of wounds.

While you wanted and would continue to put forth every effort to have a happy marriage, this could be accomplished only if your husband would also work toward this same good end. If this is not to be (and his actions certainly indicate it is not), then you must accept the inevitable and forge ahead. You cannot waste what can still be a useful and beautiful life -- and I know you don't intend to.

While remarriage is not even a consideration for the Christian, there are so many areas in which one's life can be fulfilling and most rewarding. You have already considered at least one of them, for you mentioned to me attending to older women who were in need. What a really useful place you will find, too, in just a few years when your grandchildren come along. Consider several women whose lives found such usefulness that God saw fit to mention them in His word.

Anna (Luke 2:36-38), the prophetess, who served the Lord diligently. She was now about eighty-four years old and had apparently been a widow all but seven years since the time of her virginity.

Tabitha or Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43) who *"was full of good works and almsdeed which she did!"* She was mourned at her death, and Peter brought her back to life again.

Especially Naomi (Book of Ruth) who was influential in the life of Ruth, the Moabitess. Naomi left her land, Bethlehem-Judah, in the company of her husband and her two sons. After ten years and the deaths of her husband and both sons, she returned saying, *"Call me not Naomi <pleasant>, call me Mara <bitter>; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"* (1:20-21).

The lovely end of the story is found in the fact that through the good influence of Naomi there was a marriage between Ruth and Boaz, which resulted in the birth of Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of King David. Prior to this pleasant conclusion, however, and before they could have known what it would be, *"The women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed"* (Ruth 4:13-17).

But the marvellous, final conclusion of this lovely true story is that thirty generations after the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, and through the same line of descent, was born Jesus, the Messiah (Matt. 1:5-16). It was

through the difficulties which befell her that Naomi enjoyed the grand privilege of figuring so effectively in the ancestry of the Saviour.

I feel very strongly the Lord's influence in my own life and can confidently look in the past and see how He has used many things, some unpleasant and distasteful, to achieve His good purpose. If you could but look ahead, no doubt the same would be your conclusion about the hand of God in your own life.

It is such an honor to be able to discuss these matters with you. I do hope that these comments might be of help and assurance. Please feel free at any time to call if you feel I can be of some help. The greatest source of strength, of course, is the Lord and His will to be present in every difficulty you face.

HARRY COBB

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What prophet said, "Set up road signs; put up guideposts"?
2. Paul told the Romans he planned to stop there on his way to where?
3. What did Jesus say to His mother while on the cross?
4. What prime minister wrote a book of the Bible?
5. What blood relationship was Aaron to Moses?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Place & Time</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Nov. 5 - 7	Gilstrap Church Morgantown, KY	Kent Dickinson (Douglasville, GA)
Nov. 12 - 14 (F- Su)	Pleasant Grove Church near Alexander City, AL 7:00 pm / 10:30 & 8:00 Sun	Curtis Smith (Cullman, AL)
Nov. 12 - 14	Fayetteville Road Church Fairburn, GA	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Nov. 12 - 14	Napolean Church Woodland, AL	V. W. Boland (Gadsden, AL)
Nov. 12 - 14	Pleasant Ridge Church Woodbury, TN	Kent Dickinson (Douglasville, GA)
Nov. 12 - 14	Chestnut Grove Church Danville, KY	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
Nov. 19 - 21	Freefield Church State Line, MS	Kent Dickinson & Harry Cobb
Nov. 26 - 28	Antioch Church Douglasville, GA	Mickey Ely (Columbus, IN)

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(continued from page 7)

Remember last month's questions?

1. How many people were aboard the ship on which Paul went through the storm? 276 (Acts 27:37)
2. What relation was Eunice to Timothy? HIS MOTHER (2 Tim. 1:5)
3. Proverbs 25 through 29 were Solomon's proverbs. What king had them copied? HEZEKIAH (Prov. 25:1)
4. The last two verses of the Old Testament are a prophecy of what event? THE RETURN OF ELIJAH (Malachi 4:5-6)
5. What was Manna described as tasting like? WAFERS WITH HONEY (Exo. 16:31)