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Integrity

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have fellowship with other sinners, including divorced people, without making them wear a scarlet letter?

As we view our approach today in the light of John 8, we may well ask: are we scared to death we will make a mistake and forgive someone whom God has not forgiven? The questions of life in a sinful age are difficult, and it is not always possible to be sure about how tolerant God has been. That we do not always understand his attitude is emphasized by the fact that one of his prophets, Jonah, was miserably disturbed by his lenience. If in our ignorance we are to deviate from God's way, I think he would have us err on the forgiving side, provided that does not become a cloak for indifference (which is sometimes

the basis for our attitude toward divorced persons). Can we not just withhold condemnation like Jesus did, and say, "Go, and sin no more," and leave it at that, allowing the other person to be constrained by Christ's love in us?

I cannot believe that Jesus' response to the woman did not make it much harder for her to continue in sin. There is nothing that will make us clean up our lives more than an encounter with forgiving love. What we need so often today are people who will allow God to work through them (we *are* his body, after all), as he did through Jesus, in revealing divine love and acceptance, rather than feeling they must be voices of his judgment, or even vehicles of his vengeance.
—HGL

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What Would Jesus Do?

The need for this special issue on ministering to troubled families (the third and last in a series) will be acutely felt by families who are troubled. A woman recently told me, "My father's views on divorce have become considerably milder since all of his children have been divorced." And a father said, "I am much less dogmatic on the subject now that my son has remarried." It might be said that emotional ties have blinded the eyes of these people to the demands of the gospel, but it is also possible that having to look at the problem with more loving personal attachment has caused them to seriously consider some aspects of applying God's will that they might otherwise have overlooked.

What should be our attitude and responsibilities toward those who are directly affected by divorce? Some say the best way to answer is to ask, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" and then imitate him. But that approach is extremely subjective, and the result may be that, instead of imitating him, we will only give him credit for approving what we have already decided should be done. Still it is useful to ask, "How would Jesus minister to divorced people within the church today?"

The information is very limited, for the gospels contain no statement on the subject, and we have no illuminating example of Jesus ever ministering to divorced people. Nevertheless, we may come close enough to get some good ideas in such passages as John 8, which records the story of the woman taken in adultery. But we must bear in mind that that was a special situation, one not likely to be encountered in the church today. It was also a special case of sin, since the woman had been caught in the very act of adultery (illicit sexual intercourse involving at least one married person). Since that is the case, it must be emphasized that, notwithstanding the frequent but inaccurate assertion that divorced and remarried people are "living in adultery," it is absurd to place them in the same category as the woman brought before Jesus, for second marriages,

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The Courage to Care

JOSEPH F. JONES

The intent of this third special issue on the basic theme of marriage, divorce, and remarriage has been to focus on the church's responsibility to minister to troubled families. It is the purpose of the present article to explore more fully the nature of our ministry to those persons whose marriage for whatever reason may have failed, and yet they desire to live as Christians within the fellowship of the Body. The very notion of Christians who have failed in marriage may conjure up a wide range of emotional responses or reactions; and the suggestion that the church may have an even more intense ministry toward such persons than we have accepted comes often as a threat or source of suspicion and criticism.

To care about the individual who has failed in marriage and is divorced may bring some raised eyebrows in the church; to suggest a special love for such persons brings further suspicion and questioning; and to affirm that we have a definite ministry to provide forgiveness, healing, and direction is apt to bring the conclusion that we are coddling sinners and lowering God's standards. Hence we may be afraid to care or to express concern, especially where it involves deep meaning and conviction. There is frequently a certain aloofness about Christian caring when matters of Biblical doctrine, congregational reputation, and church leaders' personal status are at stake. Veiling his judgmental feelings under the cloak of an honest inquiry, a person recently said of a congregation with which I am very well acquainted, "They sure do have a lot of divorced people attending that church, don't they?" "Indeed they do," I

replied, "but Jesus found himself criticized because sinful people clung on to Him!"

Some words of Elton Trueblood speak poignantly to this very fear of Christ-like concern and ministry. He wrote:

Caring is indeed, dangerous, but it is essential to Christian discipleship. One of the greatest contributions which the gospel can make to our confused age is that it may be the very means by which men and women can overcome their crippling fear of emotion. The gospel is highly relevant to our time if it can help produce the courage to care.¹

It is this very concern and caring which have prompted the editor and board members of *Integrity* to offer three special issues on a theological and social issue from which many leaders back away with the protective comment, "That sure is a controversial subject," while the parade of troubled marriages, divorcing spouses, and frightened children continues among us.

Ideal versus Reality

As in all the areas of our lives, God has given His ideal will and directions for behavior in marriage and family life. But as is true in other dimensions of life that we do not approximate that divine will, so it is valid to conclude that we do not perfectly realize it in marriage. It is God's ideal will for us that provides motivation, challenge, and commitment for growth toward perfection personally and in marital relationships; it is His unflinching and redemptive grace which assures forgiveness and restoration when our humanness and finitude, our sinfulness, violates that divine ideal.

The essential or ideal will of God for marriage may be summed up in four key words according to G. Edwin Bontrager. He suggests that "without the words 'monogamous,' 'permanency,' 'intimacy,' and 'mutuality,' marriage loses all its meaning and fulfillment. . . . These four characteristics are deeply woven into the fabric of marriage."² Marriage is designed ideally of God to be a unique relationship between one man and one woman for life, wherein there is the most intimate emotional, spiritual, and sexual mutuality. Within this divinely ordained arrangement is the expectation that the couple will responsibly bear and rear children; and likewise, where there is expected to be a growing intensity to their commitment and communication. But with the Fall of man came separation, alienation, incompatibility and hatred; and these sinful elements are not just affecting marriage, but all our interpersonal relationships. After sin entered the world a whole new set of complex conditions and circumstances present themselves, and sin takes its mighty toll. Bontrager again suggests that "it was inevitable that trouble would befall the most intimate and demanding of life's personal relationships--marriage."³

The focus of this article is on the element of permanency in marriage, as previously mentioned. Jesus indicates in Matthew 19:8, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." There is no question what the ideal will of God was for the marriage relationship: indissolubility of the marriage bond. But now, finding ourselves in the midst of a fallen and sinful, disordered world, we must ask if there is any room in such a world for God's perfect will be conditioned or open to man's weakness and failure? If there was at least some grace present under the law to provide for human failure and thus allow a writ of divorcement, are we to conclude that under His immeasurable grace in Christ that this ideal in marriage must at all times be absolutely reached, or there is simply no hope

or help? Has God tied His own hands so that the persons who fail in marriage are of all men most miserable and beyond the pale of divine redemption? Has God truly divined that all sins and failures can be effectively forgiven and a new dynamic granted to live better, while for His creatures who fail in marriage He simply has no word of grace or hope? Can the church refuse its ministry of mediating grace, love and forgiveness to some sinners (e.g., marital failures) in complex situations, when Christ became that figure who challenged Satan, bruised his head, and brought to all men the gift of redemptive love?

Plenteous Grace with Thee Is Known

While this writer believes the ideal will of God in marriage with all his being, he also recognizes the reality of the disordered world of men and women. As a Christian minister for more than forty years, and professional psychologist and marriage and family therapist, he has shared with thousands of persons whose lives are torn with the power of sin. He has seen the joy of disrupted marriages restored to even more fulfillment than before the sinful hurt and disruption. And he has grieved with those who for many reasons have not been able to break barriers, find answers to difficulties, and have experienced the bitterness of divorce. (In many respects death can be borne with more effectiveness and hope than divorce; but this may in part be attributed to the church's stance on the hopelessness of one who has failed in marriage.) Alice Pepler writes strikingly of the contrast between the ways we look at death and divorce.

It's all over now. One final session in court and a life together is over. If the marriage had ended in death (you muse), there would have been a funeral. Your friends would have been with your mate or you for the final service. Word and sacrament would have been a comfort. Next Sunday there would have been prayers for the survivors. The grief could

have been open, and even proud. One need not apologize for death.

But this is a divorce . . . and divorce is completely and utterly without honor. The church has no prayers for the divorced. No congregational voice will rise up to heaven on behalf of your loss.⁴

This realistic portrait of how the church frequently responds to those who have failed at marriage is a tragic reflection of how we have come short in relating God's ideal will for marriage on the one hand with the doctrine of forgiving and redemptive grace on the other. If there is, then, a vital and valid area of ministry to the divorced among us, how shall we define it?

Acceptance of the Divorced

We have confused our thinking so that acceptance of individuals implies our agreement with all they believe or do. Just as God loves and accepts without obviously approving all our behavior, so we can with genuinely loving hearts accept such persons who have experienced failure in marriage without necessarily approving their reasons behind the failure or the course of action they have pursued, e.g., divorce or termination and remarriage. This certainly is a more Christian course than the practice we have often pursued in becoming judges of behavior, that is, in our limited knowledge clouded with sexual prejudices and oversimplified conclusions, deciding who is the "guilty" party and who the "innocent" party in complicated marital relationships. Better let God be the judge!(Rom.14:7-12.)

Our non-acceptance may have been more in evidence through the actual treatment of the divorced than in our verbal messages to them. We have found little place for them in the fellowship of the church, other than a nominal welcome to the public worship services where they are likely to be rather anonymously viewed. But their involvement in the dynamic life of the church is an adroitly controlled matter by those in leadership positions, possibly under present but veiled pressure from many in the con-

gregation. The emotional feelings of some members make it quite difficult for them to think Biblically or rationally toward those who have experienced divorce; while others hold such limited or possibly legalistic views based upon their interpretative approach to Scripture that it becomes a hard choice to "welcome (receive) one another," as we have been welcomed by Christ, "for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

Mercy and Forgiveness

Divorce means that the individual is likely suffering from feelings of failure, alienation and aloneness, guilt, and unworthiness. The self-esteem usually drops to a very low ebb; self-dignity and healthy self-love (Matt. 22:39) seem to flee. One individual tells it this way, and her story is perhaps rather typical. "I tried to go to church, to worship, to feel welcome and loved. But it was difficult. I talked to the minister, and his intellectual concern over my marital status seemed to outweigh any compassion for my hurt and misery. His main concern seemed to be, 'Did you have a Scriptural reason for divorce?'"

Three positions seem to characterize the church's stance toward the divorced. First, there is the position of hostility and standoffishness, rather easily discerned by the divorced Christian. You may come here if you choose, but you may present a problem for our theological stance or disturb our social/cultural backgrounds. We would really rather not become involved with your problems, or as one body of elders made it known, we feel that marriage complications and divorce process is for professionals and the courts to handle; we'd rather not disturb our neatly organized fellowship with the messy problems of marriage.

A second position which the church may take is one of tolerance, which says that it's all right for you to come into our fellowship; and we hope that you feel okay about yourself. But this places the burden on the shoulders of the divorced person to prove self, to measure up to the expect-

tations of the church, with the possibility that if he tries hard enough and endures, he may be accepted as "full-fledged member." Hardly the mind of Christ at work!

The third alternative is for the church to take the direct initiative to welcome such persons, assimilate them as loved members of the Body, to demonstrate that we believe them to be neither second-class Christians nor deserving of the social punishment of church indifference or isolation because they have failed in the serious venture of marriage. We must practice the extension of mercy and forgiveness so that such persons can experience what James Emerson, Jr. has aptly characterized as "realized forgiveness."

The Corinthian Church had many in its membership with sinful backgrounds—that is, grievously tainted past lives. Before becoming Christian they were characterized as immoral, idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers. But they were washed, sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). It appears that whatever their past, God's grace abundantly saved them, and they were welcomed into the church of God. While it cannot be proven without question, it is very likely that among that motley crew which Paul lists there were those who had been previously married and divorced, and probably some who had been married, divorced, and remarried. Yet there is no word to the effect that such divorced and/or remarried persons were not welcome, or that they would have to go back and retrace all their mixed-up marital history, as some have in our day suggested. (The position taken here by some today is that upon becoming a Christian the divorced person must first return to his/her first spouse, or at best, leave the present spouse if it is a second marriage with a previous mate still living.) Neither is it too realistic to believe that when all such persons in the ancient world came into Christ and the fellowship of the church, that there were no marital problems and

related divorces. Yet God's grace must cover all our failings—both those sins in initial conversion and forgiveness, and those daily failings as a Christian with which the honest believer is well aware. The church's ministry is both the preaching and practice of redemptive grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Involvement of the Divorced

While we have acknowledged the limited extent to which some churches have accepted and welcomed the divorced, it has been difficult for congregations—their ministers and other leaders particularly—to involve such persons without serious reservations. There exists such fears, for example, as possible negative influence on our young people, if we allow a divorced person to teach a class of children or youth. But we might ask, could not a committed Christian, who has experienced the hurt and misery, guilt and anger, sense of failure in divorce, but who has likewise known the indescribable healing and restoration to new life which comes from the grace of God, be able to say many things about the need for premarital preparation which would be highly beneficial for those not yet married? We allow those with other recognized backgrounds of failure to take positions of involvement and leadership, and to use their past failures as means to more effective teaching the truth of God; but not the Christian who has failed in marriage.

It is this limited kind of reception and treatment of the divorced Christian that is readily obvious to such persons, for it is experienced as limited acceptance, tolerance, as second class membership. They may be offered some of the lesser kinds of tasks within the fellowship, the more menial or unimportant, perhaps less visible responsibilities. But their involvement is definitely controlled out of whatever motives—prejudice, fear, theology, or social reputation of the congregation—so that for many who need Christlike compassion, redeeming and forgiving love, and reassurance that

there is life and meaning beyond divorce, such church stances turn them away with sickly disgust, bitterness, and anger not only toward the church but even sometimes toward God. It is not adequate for the church to then say in smug response, "That's their problem."

Dangers of Grace

Christian leaders who advocate a forgiving spirit and generous attitude toward those who have failed in marriage are likely to become embroiled in controversy. Those who emphasize a more traditional interpretation, emphasizing the "innocent party as opposed to the guilty party" in matters of divorce, stressing that the church's purity must be kept intact through the minimal recognition and limited involvement of the divorced, will characterize such an approach to the divorce and remarriage question as "soft," perhaps even labelling it as "liberal." Jesus himself was similarly charged for both His teachings and behavior. To a guilty woman He offered forgiveness on the one hand and empowering grace on the other, with the divine encouragement, "Go your way, sin no more." He was accused at times because the wrong crowd followed Him, with "known sinners" crowding around Him while He refused to send them away.

It is true that the doctrine of redemptive grace or freedom in Christ will be abused, and used "as an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5:13); but abuse or misuse of a Christian doctrine should not argue for its abandonment. Some seem to feel that such a forgiving and accepting attitude will encourage the young people of the church to take the marriage vows more lightly, and thus encourage future divorces. Others suggest that divorced and remarried persons in our congregations will weaken the spiritual fiber of the church Body and contaminate the church's purity. Bontrager suggests that the best defense against divorce is "strong teaching on marriage—its permanence, its values, expectations, and responsibilities—

which will produce a church closer to the ideal"⁵ than rules, closed fellowships, and rejection in essence if not in word.

The church must clearly and convincingly proclaim the ideal of God for marriage and family, just as it must speak God's ideal in all areas of Christian life. It must likewise grasp clearly and accept God's gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ to all those who fail of the ideal—whether in marriage, or parenting, or control of the tongue, or covetousness, or business ethics. It is obviously not a consistent handling of the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) to provide the grace of forgiveness and acceptance in some areas of behavior, while making others beyond the pale of grace. We do well to reassess our hierarchy of sins in the light of Jesus' ministry; for while not condoning sins of the flesh in anywise, He had mercy and offered forgiveness. But for the intolerant self-righteous Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men (e.g., never divorced and remarried!) Jesus spoke words of divine judgment.

When a Christian brother has not been guilty of a particular sin, such as failure in marriage which results in divorce, it is understandably easy for him to become an eminent authority with ready answers to the most complex of life's problems. But the message of the beloved apostle speaks to both saint and sinner at this point, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). □

1. Elton Trueblood, *The Yoke of Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958) pp. 74, 75.

2. G. Edwin Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Harold Press, 1978) pp. 16, 17.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

4. Alice Pepler, *Divorced and Christian* (Concordia, 1974) p. 13.

5. Bontrager, *Ibid.*, p. 151.

The Christian vs. the World's Perspective on Divorce

KARL AND NATALIE RANDALL

These days so many marriages end in divorce that our most sacred vows no longer ring with truth, but rather often have no more psychological impact than campaign promises. "Happily ever after" and "Till death do us part" are expressions that seem on the way to becoming obsolete. Why has it become so hard for couples to stay together? What goes wrong? What has happened to us that close to one half of all marriages are destined for the divorce courts? How have we created a society in which 42% of our children will grow up in single-parent homes?

Many reasons have been given for these phenomena, but the principal cause appears to be the relative ease of entrance into and exit from the marital state. With no-fault divorce laws in 48 of the 50 states, leaving a spouse is now nearly as easy as getting a marriage license. In Michigan, for example, the no-fault divorce law requires only that a party desiring a divorce represent to the judge "that there has been a breakdown of the marriage relationship to the extent that the objects of matrimony have been destroyed and there remains no reasonable likelihood that the marriage can be preserved." In fact, the statute allows no other explanation of the grounds for divorce to be pleaded. It is difficult to contest the grounds for divorce. The reconciliation test is whether there is a "reasonable likelihood," not a mere possibility of reconciliation. The grounds for divorce are to be established by testimony in open court, and the court must enter a judgment of divorce once such testimony is presented.

Even before the warranties run out on the wedding gifts, couples have separated. They are swept apart by the first quarrel, or the first problem, or even the first inconvenience.

Not all marital difficulties are minor, of course. There are some people who should never have married, and who certainly shouldn't plague each other for decades. Some marriages are dangerous to abused partners, and some divorces represent a reluctant surrender to the inevitable.

But the irreconcilable differences, the drunkenness, the physical terror — these represent causes for only a small percentage of divorces. The rest revolve around what are by comparison lesser reasons, minor grievances. In extending relief to the few, we have weakened the structure for the many. Once you minimize the terms of the marriage covenant (contract), once you approve of disavowal, you begin to erode the whole concept of marriage.

Even though each broken marriage is unique, we can still find common perils, common causes for marital despair. Each marriage has crisis points and each marriage tests endurance, that capacity for both intimacy and change. Outside pressures such as unemployment, illness, infertility, trouble with children, care of aging parents, and all the other difficulties of life hit marriage the way springtime tornadoes hit our countryside. Some marriages survive these storms and others don't. Marriages fail, however, not simply because of the outside factors but because the inner climate becomes too hot or too cold, too turbulent or too numbing.

In earlier days, the family was held together by the moral force of the church and the social customs of local communities. Perhaps there were many loveless marriages in those times. Perhaps couples did persist beyond normal limits. Still, this conviction about the permanency of the marriage bond saw many people through their crises. When they agreed to stick

around for better or worse, they hoped for the former but sometimes settled for the latter. Most of them gave the marriage a chance to work. Their pride kept them from running away, and their faith supported their attempts at reconciliation. In a word, they stuck it out.

Divorce is not always sin. Sometimes it provides a form of salvation for people who have grown hopelessly apart or are frozen in patterns of pain or mutual unhappiness. Divorce can be, despite its initial devastation, like the cut of the surgeon's scalpel, a step toward new health and a better life. On the other hand, if the partners can stay past the breaking up of the romantic myths into the development of real love and intimacy, they have achieved a marvelous work. Marriages that do not fail but improve, that persist despite imperfections, are not only rare these days but offer a shelter in which we can safely show and be our true selves.

Repeating Past Patterns

When we look at how we choose our partners and what expectations exist at the beginnings of romance, some of the reasons for disaster become quite clear. We often select with unconscious accuracy a mate who will recreate with us the emotional patterns of our first homes. Dr. Carl A. Whitaker, a marital therapist and emeritus professor of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, explains, "From early childhood on each of us carries models for marriage, femininity, masculinity, motherhood, fatherhood and all the other family roles." Each of us falls in love with a mate who has qualities of our parents, who will help us rediscover both the psychological happiness and miseries of our past lives. We may think we have found a man unlike Dad, but then he turns to drink or drugs, or loses his job repeatedly or sits

silently in front of the T.V., just the way Dad did. A man may choose a woman who doesn't like kids just like his mother or who gambles away the family savings just like his mother. Or he may choose a slender wife who seems unlike his obese mother but then turns out to have other addictions that destroy their mutual happiness.

A man and a woman bring to their marriage a blended concoction of conscious and unconscious memories of their parents' lives together. The human way seems to be to compulsively repeat and recreate the patterns of the past. Sigmund Freud described the unhappy design that many of us get trapped in as: the unmet needs of childhood, the angry feelings left over from frustrations of long ago, the limits of trust, and the recurrence of old fears. Once an individual senses this entrapment, there may follow a yearning to escape, and the result could be a broken marriage.

Of course, people can overcome the habits and attitudes that developed in childhood. We all have hidden strengths and amazing capacities for growth and creative change, which are derived from our Creator. Change, however, requires work—observing your part in a destructive pattern, bringing difficulties out into the open — and work runs counter to the basic myth of many marriages: "When I wed this person all my problems will be over. I will have achieved success and I will become the center of life for this other person and this person will be my center, and we will mean everything to each other forever." This myth, which too many marriages rely on, is soon exposed. The coming of children, with their demands on affection and time, place a considerable strain on that basic myth of meaning everything to each other, of merging together and solving all of life's problems.

Concern and tension about money also take each partner away from the other. Obligations to demanding parents or still-dependent-upon parents create further strain. Couples today must also deal with all the cultural changes and pressures on

marriage — mobility, lack of understanding of permanence, changing roles of women brought on in recent years by the women's movement and the sexual revolution, and unrealistic romantic notions of love. The altering of roles and the shifting of responsibilities have been extremely trying for many marriages. People used to expect 25 years together; now it's possible to spend more than twice that time with the same person. It takes a lot more creativity to sustain a relationship for 50 to 60 years.

These and other realities of life erode the visions of marital bliss. Those euphoric, grand feelings that accompany romantic love are really self-delusions, self-hypnotic dreams that allow us to form a relationship. Real life, failure at work, disappointments, exhaustion, illness, and hard times all puncture the dream and leave us stranded with our mate, with our childhood patterns pushing us this way and that, with our unfulfilled expectations.

In recent years our lives have been characterized by continuing attempts to dissolve burdens. Everything from household appliances to fast foods bears a "convenience" label. The virtual elimination of the need for delayed gratification of our needs or desires involves some loss to our character. It has been observed by some that Americans are losing the will to persevere through difficulties. The moment something threatens pain, they back off or drop out. They want all peaks and no valleys, fulfillment without struggle.

Commitment

This pattern has had an effect on marriage. Instead of dedication to reconciliation, many young couples (and an increasing number of older ones) magnify disagreements into grounds for divorce. There is no commitment.

That is the key word: Commitment. Too many of us today seem to want to shed such entanglements. Live-in couples delay their marriage because they don't want to make a commitment. Others shun education or

steady employment for similar reasons. We want escape clauses in every phase of our existence.

The struggle to survive in marriage requires adaptability, flexibility, genuine love and kindness, unselfishness, and an imagination strong enough to feel what the other is feeling. Many marriages fall apart because either a partner cannot or will not imagine what the other wants; or cannot or will not communicate what he or she needs or feels. Anger builds until it erupts into an explosion that hopelessly shatters the marriage.

It is not hard to see, therefore, how essential communication is for a good marriage; communication with each other and with God. A man and a woman must be able to tell each other how they feel and why they feel the way they do; otherwise they will impose on each other roles and actions that lead to further unhappiness. In some cases, the communication patterns of childhood — of not talking, of talking too much, or withdrawal — spill into the marriage and prevent a healthy exchange of thoughts and feelings. The answer is to set up new patterns of communication and intimacy.

At the same time, however, we must see each other as individuals. "To achieve a balance between separateness and closeness is one of the major psychological tasks of all human beings at every stage of life," says Dr. Stuart Bartle, a psychiatrist at the New York University Medical Center.

If we sense from our mate a need for too much intimacy, we tend to push him or her away, fearing that we many lose our identities in the merging of marriage. One partner may suffocate the other partner in a childlike dependency.

A good marriage means growing as a couple but also growing as individuals. This isn't easy. A husband gives up his interest in golf because his wife is jealous of the time he spends away from her. A wife quits her choir group because her husband dislikes the friends she makes there. Each clings to the other as life closes in on them. This kind

of marital balance is easily thrown off as one or the other pulls away, and divorce follows.

Sometimes people pretend that a new partner will solve the old problems. Most often extramarital sex destroys a marriage because it allows an artificial perceived split between the good and the bad — the good is projected on the new partner and the bad is dumped onto the old. Dishonestly, hiding and cheating and the guilt they engender create walls between men and women. Infidelity is usually a symptom of pre-existing trouble. It is a symbolic complaint, a weapon of revenge, as well as a destroyer of closeness. Infidelity is often that proverbial last straw that sinks the marital camel to the ground.

All right — marriage has always been difficult. Why then are we seeing so many divorces at this time? Yes, our modern social fabric is worn, and, yes, the permissiveness of society has created unrealistic expectations and thrown the family into chaos. But divorce is so common because people today are unwilling to exercise the self-discipline that marriage requires. They expect easy joy, like the entertainment on T.V.

The recording "Evergreen" starts out "Love, soft as an easy chair. . ." Some people hear that and they think love is comfortable and easy. That's a romantic notion of love. We don't talk enough about tough commitment and long-term fidelity. We don't talk about growth at different rates so that people are often out of sync with one another. There are many songs like that. Think about the line from "People," "I was half, now I'm whole." People going into marriage with the expectation that someone else will make them whole may destroy a relationship. The song that says "Love means you never have to say you're sorry" tells us how some people fail to deal with conflict.

Marriage takes sacrifice, not dreadful self-sacrifice of the soul, but some level of compromise: Some of one's fantasies, some of one's legitimate desires have to be given

up for the value of the marriage itself. "While all marital partners feel shackled at times, it is they who really choose to make the marital ties into confining chains or supporting bonds," says Dr. Whitaker. Marriage requires sexual, financial and emotional discipline. A man and a woman cannot follow every impulse, and cannot allow themselves to stop growing or changing.

Scripture

Marriage is a commitment. It says so in those solemn vows taken at its inception, and in the Scriptures. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 and Luke 16:18 set down Jesus' teaching on the matter of divorce and remarriage. In Matthew, the only available rationale for divorce is spousal adultery. Luke addresses only the matter of remarriage, and finds it to be sin.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 admonishes that as Christian couples we should not separate from our spouse, but if we do, that we should either remain single or else be reconciled to that spouse. In verses 12-16, those with unbelieving spouses are directed not to divorce their spouses, but to remain with them if they so consent. Only if the unbelieving partner is the one who desires to separate is the brother or sister not bound to remain (v. 15).

Commitment isn't a wild illusion, an impossible ideal; it should be the norm. Unless we have some standard to aim for, we'll always fail. If you have mediocre goals, we cannot hope to achieve excellence. We need challenges, role models. If marriage is viewed as a sometimes thing, there will be less and less reason for husband and wife to be patient or constant. We need a mature outlook on marriage, a determination that involves periodic sacrifice.

Why? Because God commands it, and it has intrinsic worth, that's why. Conventional wisdom used to say that children were better off living with one parent than with quarreling spouses. Recent studies deny this; they say the children fare better if

the couple remains together.

Another reason is the chance to know each other better, to share problems and blessings, to take the good and the bad, to grow in depth of love. You find out that it isn't all sex and fun, but that there can be something deeper. That takes time. It takes commitment. You can't build that relationship if you panic at one disappointment or flee after one reversal.

And, in retrospect, the bad times seem to so diminish in their apparent frequency and consequence that they become quite small. You've accomplished something worthwhile, and increasingly rare. You've lived a lifetime together. It wasn't always easy, but that's what makes it worthwhile. □

If we believe that we can't do anything without the cooperation of God, marriage is certainly one area that requires such teamwork. We should count the costs before entering in, just as in entering the discipleship of Christ. And once the commitment has been made, we need to stick to it. Marriages may not be made in heaven, but neither should they be made in ignorance. The way toward the reduction in the number of divorces may be more serious premarital planning and counseling, and to re-emphasize the solemnity of the marriage vows. If spouses took them more seriously going in, they'd have a better chance to survive as a team — until death, not the judge, parts them. □

TEXTS FOR TENSIONS

<i>Proverbs 20:22</i>	Don't take it on yourself to repay a wrong.
<i>Proverbs 12:16</i>	When a fool is annoyed, he quickly lets it be known. Smart people will ignore an insult.
<i>Proverbs 15:28</i>	Good people think before they answer. Evil people have a quick reply, but it causes trouble.
<i>Proverbs 17:9</i>	If you want people to like you, forgive them when they wrong you. Remembering wrongs can break up a friendship.
<i>Galatians 5:15</i>	But if you act like wild animals, hurting and harming each other, then watch out, or you will completely destroy one another.
<i>Ephesians 4:31-32</i>	Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tenderhearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.
<i>Colossians 3:13</i>	Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another when any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.
<i>James 5:16</i>	So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed.
<i>1 Peter 4:8</i>	Above everything, love one another earnestly, because love covers over many sins.

Telling It to the Church

DAN MATSON

A wife knows her marriage is breaking down and is told there is no way she can prevent divorce. Another prepares for a debasing, expensive public war to retain custody of children. A business agreement between two Christians is fractured. A land transaction comes apart. A church and its building contractor are hostile to the point of lawsuit. A crime injures an innocent Christian; the victim can invoke the power of the State to punish the offender. God's children are in these "irreconcilable" situations by the thousands.

What recourse? The American legal system. Why not tell it to the church?

Jesus not only made it a duty but gave procedure for resolution of conflicts between his followers (Mt. 5:23-26; 18:15-17). Which of us can say we have followed his advice? Unlike the Biblical norm of the early church, the placement of disputes today in the hands of brothers and sisters seems ridiculously remote. We feel we lack skills, are otherwise inadequate, unworthy or simply do not want to face such a task. Paul told us that attitude is to our shame (1 Cor. 6:1-8)!

Isn't the problem deeper? Who among us can be trusted with these burdens? Somehow we sense the only solution lies with strangers in the forum of public courts. In fact we feel the need to know our legal options quickly and to start asserting rights before they vanish. So we seek champion adversaries to represent our cause.

What if an alternative did exist where panels of mature peacemakers were anxiously standing by to conciliate problems? A system where we could involve a church leader or friend from our congregation or elsewhere, an attorney, a seasoned counselor, all Christians selected or approved by us? What if the format emphasized prayer, examination of God's Word and explored the merits of the other

party's cause as well as our own? It might require concessions, waivers of "rights," sacrifice of pride. Would we risk it? What kind of risk is it if God has ordained it?

A voluntary effort now exists in nineteen states under the names of various Christian Conciliation Services. Professionals and lay people, all unpaid peacemakers, are committed to help sort through problems and to encourage responsible solutions. The service exists only because Christ the Reconciler has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

A number of us are experienced trial attorneys. We have used the adversarial process for years to the strategic advantage of our clients. Few cases have ended in improved spiritual relationships. The nature of the process is to drive wedges deeper. In the course of Christian conciliation we are now enjoying reunions at the end of conflict.

A type of trust is building in the religious community as a result of these efforts. Our local conciliation service in Michigan's capitol city reaches hundreds of churches in several countries. Our board of directors is representative of many branches in Christendom. Many of us have conservative backgrounds; mine is with churches of Christ. From earliest comprehension I was given to understand that joint endeavors with religious neighbors were foreign to God's plan. Several years ago I joined a group of lawyers in a regular morning Bible study. We were from very different religious heritages but all of us wanted to use scripture as our guide in our professional lives. The Conciliation Service was one result of our relationships.

Similar works are happening with success in more and more locations across the country. In our experience no churches have rejected the value of this ministry. Since the effects of Satan's destructiveness

touch all of creation, God's people universally yearn for more loving relief than society affords. What wisdom our Father has shown in requiring respected members of his Body to assume such roles within their own church communities.

Christians in dispute need to know that litigation is unacceptable to the Lord. It breeds the antithesis of reconciliation. It

seldom brings glory to his Name. It rejects his offer of love.

Brothers and sisters in Christ are given the greatest example of mediation when the Lord represents both God and man before each other in ultimate reconciliation. Shouldn't each of us be advocates for each other in the same cause? Tell it to the church. □

Helping Children of Divorce

HENRIETTA C. PALMER

The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that 45% of all children born after 1977 will be living in a single parent home during part of their youth. Five out of six of these homes is headed by a woman. Many of these single parent families are the result of divorce, and more than ever before, they are a growing number in our congregations. It is important that church leaders, teachers and members of the church "family" reach out and help the children of divorce through this difficult, and often confusing, period of their lives.

Children of divorce go through many stages, depending on the age of the youngster and the relationship with the parent who leaves the family. They are often angry at the parent who leaves, fearful of the future and unsure of their own roles in the family. Some of the questions they ask themselves might be:

- (1) Did I do something to cause Dad (or Mom) to leave us?
- (2) What should I say to Mom? Should I talk to her about Dad? Will she be upset if she knows I still love him? Can I tell her I am angry?
- (3) Does Dad still love me? Will I still see him? What can I do to get Dad to come home again?

- (4) Will we have to move to another house? Will I have to change schools? Will there be enough money?
- (5) What will my friends say? What should I tell them? Should I just keep quiet and pretend nothing has changed?
- (6) Will people think our family is "different" -- will they still like us?

Fear of the unknown is a great burden for children. Anger often leads to guilt. Frustration and anxiety are natural outcomes when a child's life is changed by divorce. During this time of stress and change, love and understanding is particularly needed from family, friends and teachers.

Yes, There Is Something We Can Do

As a child of divorce more than forty years ago, and as a teacher and elementary school principal who counsels with children of divorce, the following suggestions are offered to help these children develop positive attitudes towards themselves and others:

- (1) Show acceptance through your

words, your voice tone, and your body language. Avoid references to "broken homes."

- (2) Provide extra attention during stressful times. Help children of divorce know you are interested and that they are "OK." Make a special effort to talk to them about things of interest to them.
- (3) Let these youngsters know you are willing to listen. You may have to take the initiative and tell them you understand and that you are available whenever they need a listener.
- (4) Provide opportunities for children of single parents to be involved in activities. Many times these children are left out of church picnics, parties or ballgames because the single parents are unable to provide transportation. You can help by offering a ride for them. It is especially important for young boys to have opportunities to develop friendships and trusting relationships with Christian men who

represent positive male "models" for them.

- (5) Provide opportunities in classes for children to discuss different kinds of families. Help the children of single parent families to realize that many children live with only one parent.
- (6) Expect the best from these children. Help them to understand that they weren't the cause of the divorce, and that they still have the same gifts and talents they had before. Help them recognize and appreciate their potential and encourage excellence.
- (7) Help them grow into a closer, personal relationship with God. Help them understand that God loves them, listens to them, and cares for them. With God's help they can live each day with confidence and joy. God can help them learn from their parents' divorce. They can be stronger and more understanding of relationships in God's family and in their own personal families. □

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once they have occurred, are binding in God's eyes, and sexual intercourse within a valid marriage is not adultery. With this in mind, we may learn some helpful lessons from that unusual incident.

In effect, what Jesus did in refusing to pass judgment as requested by the woman's accusers was to drop the case. And if he was willing to dismiss the case against her, should not that fact encourage us to think that there may be some good reasons for not pressing charges against less notorious sinners today. Let us remember that in that instance there were sufficient witnesses for prosecuting her to the full extent of the law. But something happened that made the prosecutors' people prefer to go home without punishing her. And we may have more in

common with them than we care to admit.

When Jesus said to the woman's accusers, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her," did he not prick our consciences as well? Given the right circumstances, none of us can rely on immunity from adultery and divorce. But even if we are innocent of these sins, we all still bear a heavy responsibility for having failed to keep God's will in other matters. Perhaps we do not deserve to be stoned, but we do need to acknowledge our share in human frailty. And if we are going to abstain from casting stones because we know in our hearts we are disqualified, why do we not just admit that law is weak through the flesh, and, depending on the grace of God, go ahead and