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Matt. 19:9 "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

As respecting divorce and its implications this is on all accounts the most pivotal passage in the New Testament. It occupies this crucial position particularly for the reason that it is the only passage in the New Testament in which we have the combination of two clauses, namely, the exceptive clause (mh; epi; poreia) and the remarriage clause (kai; gamhsh/ allhn). Both of these clauses occur elsewhere, the former in Matthew 5:32, in the parekto" logou porneia" and the latter in Mark 10:11, as also in the form kai gamwn eteran; in Luke 16:18. But only in Matthew 19:9 are they coordinated.

It might not be proper to maintain that the question of the legitimacy of remarriage on the part of the innocent spouse after divorce for adultery would not arise if we did not have Matthew 19:9. The question might well emerge in connection with Matthew 5:32. For if a man may rightly divorce his unfaithful wife and if such divorce dissolves the marriage bond the question of remarriage is inevitably posed. And, again, though there is no allusion to adultery as an exception in Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18, yet the Old Testament law respecting adultery and the peculiar character of the sin of adultery might well compel us to inquire whether or not, after all, adultery might not have been assumed as a notable exception to the principle affirmed in these two passages. Furthermore, I Corinthians 7:15 would certainly face us with the question of the effect that desertion by an unbelieving partner would have upon the marital status of the deserted believer.

Nevertheless, Matthew 19:9 is distinctive in that here the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of remarriage after divorce for adultery is thrust upon us directly and inescapably.

At the present stage of the discussion we shall assume that the correct text of Matthew 19:9 reads as follows: legw de; u min oti o" anapolush/ thn gunai kai; autou mh; epi; pornei;a/ kai; gamhsh/ allhn, moicatai. The matter of textual variation will be discussed later. On the above reading of the text it may be well in passing to note some of its distinctive characteristics.

(a) This text does not reflect upon the character of the man's sin if he puts away his wife (for any other cause than that of adultery) but does not himself remarry. As found already, Matthew 5:32 deals very directly and decisively with that question and views the sin of the man from the standpoint of his responsibility in the entail of consequence involved for the divorced woman. In Matthew 19:9, however, it is the sin of the man who contracts another marriage after illicit divorce which is the express subject of our Lord's judgment.

(b) The man who puts away his wife (except for fornication) and marries another is expressly condemned as an adulterer. This is an inference properly drawn from Matthew 5:32 but here it is directly stated.

(c) The rights of a woman in divorcing her husband for adultery and the sin of the woman who remarries after divorce for any other reason are not reflected on in this passage. Only in Mark 10:12 is there any express allusion to divorce action on the part of the woman and there, as we shall see later, no reference is made to the intrinsic right of divorce but only to the adulterous character of remarriage.

The real crux of the question in Matthew 19:9 is, however, the force of the exceptive clause, "except for fornication" (mh; epi; porneia). In the actual terms of the text the question is: does this exceptive clause apply to the words gamhsh/ allhn and therefore to moicatai as well as to the verb apolush? There can be no question but the exceptive clause provides an exception to the wrong of putting away. The kind of wrong from which it relieves the husband is not intimated as in Matthew 5:32 but, like the latter passage, it does enunciate a liberty granted to the innocent husband. It does not intimate, any more than Matthew 5:32, that the man is obligated to divorce his wife in the event of adultery on her part. It simply accords the right or liberty. The question then is: does this exception, by way of right or liberty, extend to the remarriage

of the divorcing husband as well as to the putting away? Obviously, if the right extends to the remarriage the husband in such a case is not implicated in the sin of adultery in the event of his remarriage.

On this question the professing church is sharply divided. On the one hand, there are those who claim that while Matthew 19:9 (as also Matthew 5:32) gives to the innocent husband the right to put away the wife who has committed adultery, yet this does not give any warrant for the dissolution of the marriage bond and for the remarriage of the guiltless spouse. In other words, adultery gives the right of separation from bed and board (a thoro et mensa) but does not sever the bond of marriage nor does it give the right to dissolve that bond. Perhaps most notable in maintaining this position is the Roman Catholic Church. The position should not, however, be regarded as distinctively Romish. The distinguished Latin father, Augustine, can be enlisted in support of this interpretation. Canon law of the Church of England, while allowing separation for adultery, does not permit of remarriage for the parties so separated as long as they both live.

If the text of Matthew 19:9, quoted above, is adopted as the genuine and authentic text, then there is considerable difficulty in holding to this position. The reason is apparent. It is the difficulty of restricting the exceptive clause to the putting away (apolush) and not extending it also to the remarriage (gamhsh/ allhn). This is, however, the construction that must be maintained if Matthew 19:9 is not interpreted as legitimating remarriage after divorce for adultery. The Romish Church is insistent that the exceptive clause modifies the first verb in the statement concerned but does not apply to the second. This exegesis is stated quite clearly by Aug. Lehmkuhl as follows:

The complete exclusion of absolute divorce (divortium perfectum) in Christian marriage is expressed in the words quoted above Mark x; Luke xvi; I Cor. vii). The words in St. Matthew's Gospel (xix, 9), 'except it be for fornication', have, however, given rise to the question whether the putting away of the wife and the dissolution of the marriage bond were not allowed on account of adultery. The Catholic Church and Catholic theology have always maintained that by such an explanation St. Matthew would be made to contradict St. Mark, Luke, and Paul, and the converts instructed by these latter would have been brought into error in regard to the real doctrine of Christ. As this is inconsistent both with the infallibility of the Apostolic teaching and the inerrancy of Sacred Scripture, the clause in Matthew must be explained as the mere dismissal of the unfaithful wife without the dissolution of the marriage bond. Such a dismissal is not excluded by the parallel texts in Mark and Luke, while Paul (I Cor., vii, 11) clearly indicates the possibility of such a dismissal: 'And if she depart, that she remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband'. Grammatically, the clause in St. Matthew may modify one member of the sentence (that which refers to the putting away of the wife) without applying to the following member (the remarriage of the other), though we must admit that the construction is a little harsh. If it means, 'whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery', then, in case of marital infidelity, the wife may be put away; but that, in this case, adultery is not committed by a new marriage cannot be concluded from these words. The following words, 'And he that shall marry her that is put away'—therefore also the woman who is dismissed for adultery—'committeth adultery', say the contrary, since they suppose the permanence of the first marriage.

This construction of Matthew 19:9 is admitted to be "a little harsh" even by the foregoing apologist for the Romish interpretation. We shall see that this is very much of an understatement.

It must indeed be allowed that an exceptive clause is sometimes used in the Greek to intimate "an exception to something that is more general than that which has actually been mentioned". We have examples of this use of *eij mhv* in Matthew 12:4; Romans 14:14 and probably in Galatians 1:19. In such a case the exception stated here (*mh; epi pornevia*) would not be an exception to the principle that whosoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery but simply an exception to the principle that a man may not put away his wife. Consequently the real intent of the whole sentence would be, "But I say to you that whoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery—only, a man may put away his wife for the cause of fornication". Such a rendering does in itself make good sense and would solve a good many difficulties in harmonising the accounts given in the three synoptic Gospels. The question remains, however: is this construction defensible? There are preponderant reasons for rejecting it.

(1) If the exceptive clause is of the sort indicated above, namely, not an exception to that which is expressly stated but an exception to another closely related and more general consideration, then this is a most unusual, if not unparalleled, way of expressing it. In other instances where we have this kind of exception the construction is quite different from that in our text. In these other instances the statement of that to which a more general exception is appended is given first in its completeness and then the exception in its completeness follows. But this is not the case here— the exception is inserted before the statement is completed. Analogy does not, therefore, favour this rendering.

(2) While it is true grammatically that an exceptive clause may modify one member of a sentence without modifying another

her, yet it must be noted that, in this particular case, the one member which the exceptive clause, on the Romish construction, is supposed to modify does not and cannot stand alone in the syntax of the sentence concerned. Even if eliminate the clause *kai; gamhvsh/* from any modification by the exceptive clause we have not reached any solution far as the grammatical structure is concerned. In order to complete the sense of what is introduced by the clause *o" an apolvsh/ thn gunai kai; autouv* we must move on to the principal verb, namely, *moicatai*. But if we do this without reference to the remarriage clause (*kai; gamhsh/ allhn*) we get nonsense and untruth, namely, "whoever puts away his wife except for fornication commits adultery". In other words, it must be observed that in this sentence as it stands no thought is complete without the principal verb, *moicav tai*. It is this thought of committing adultery by remarriage that is the ruling thought in this passage, and it is quite indefensible to suppress it. The very exceptive clause, therefore, must have direct bearing upon the action denoted by the verb that governs. But in order to have direct bearing upon the governing verb (*moicatai*) it must also have direct bearing upon that which must occur before the action denoted by the principal verb can take effect, namely, the marrying of another. This direct bearing which the exceptive clause must have on the remarriage and on the committing of adultery is simply another way of saying that, as far as the syntax of the sentence is concerned, the exceptive clause must apply to the committing of adultery in the event of remarriage as well as to the wrong of putting away.

A comparison with Matthew 5:32 will help to clarify this point. There it is said, "Everyone who puts away his wife except for the cause of fornication makes her to commit adultery". In this case the exceptive clause has full meaning and relevance apart altogether from remarriage on the part of the divorcing husband. This is so because the sin contemplated on the part of the divorcing husband is not the committing of adultery on his part but the making of his wife to be an adulteress. But in Matthew 19:9 the case is entirely different. The burden thought here in 19:9 is the committing of adultery on the part of the divorcing husband himself. But this sin on his part presupposes his remarriage. Consequently, in the syntax of the sentence as it actually is, the meaning and relevance of the exceptive clause cannot be maintained apart from its application to the remarriage as well as to the putting away.

(3) What is contemplated in this sentence is not merely putting away, as in Matthew 5:31, 32, but putting away and remarriage on the part of the husband. In this respect it is to be carefully distinguished from the logion of Matt. 5:32 and must be placed in the same category as Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18. The subject dealt with, therefore, is putting away and remarriage in coordination, and this coordination must not be disturbed in any way. It is this coordination that leads up to and prepares the ground for the principal verb, namely, the committing of adultery on the part of the divorcing husband. It would be unwarranted, therefore, to relate the exceptive clause to anything else than the coordination. Furthermore, the exceptive clause is in the natural position with reference to the coordination and with reference to the resulting sin to which it provides an exception. Where else could the exceptive clause be placed if it applies to all three elements of the situation expressed? And if it is in the natural position as applying to the coordination the natural construction is that it contemplates an exception to the statement of the sentence in its entirety.

(4) The divorce permitted or tolerated under the Mosaic economy had the effect of dissolving the marriage bond. This Mosaic permission regarding divorce is referred to in the context of this passage as well as in Matthew 5:31 and in the parallel passage in Mark 10:2-12. In each of these cases the same verb (*apolvsh*) is used with reference to this Mosaic provision. Now since this was the effect of the divorce alluded to in this passage and since there is not the slightest indication that the actual putting away for adultery, legitimated in Matthew 19:9; 5:32, was to have an entirely different effect, we are surely justified in concluding that the putting away sanctioned by our Lord was intended to have the same effect in the matter of dissolving the marriage tie. It should be appreciated that the law as enunciated here by Jesus does not in any way suggest any alteration in the nature and effect of divorce. The change intimated by Jesus was rather the abolition of every other reason permitted in the Mosaic provisions and the distinct specification that adultery was now the only ground upon which a man could legitimately put away his wife. What is abrogated then is not divorce with its attendant dissolution of the marriage bond but rather all ground for divorce except adultery.

If divorce involves dissolution of the marriage bond, then we should not expect that remarriage would be regarded as adultery.

(5) It is surely reasonable to assume that if the man may legitimately put away his wife for adultery the marriage bond is judged to be dissolved. On any other supposition the woman who has committed adultery and who has been put away is still in reality the man's wife and is one flesh with him. If so it would appear very anomalous that the man should have the right to put away one who is permanently, while life lasts, his wife and is one flesh with him. To take action that relieves of the obligations of matrimony while the marital tie is inviolate hardly seems compatible with marital ethics as taught in the Scripture itself. It is true that Paul distinctly contemplates the possibility of separation without dissolution and propounds what the law is in such a contingency (I Cor. 7:10, 11). But to provide for and sanction permanent separation while the marriage tie remains inviolate is something that is alien to the whole tenor of Scripture teaching in regard to the oblig

ations that inhere in and are inseparable from the marital bond.

(6) The position that adultery warrants putting away but not dissolution of the marriage bond would appear to conflict with another principle of Scripture that applies to the aggravated case of harlotry or prostitution. If adultery does not give ground for dissolution of the marriage bond, then a man may not secure dissolution even when his wife has abandoned herself to prostitution. This seems quite contrary to the principle of purity expressed by the apostle (I Cor. 6:15-17). It would appear, therefore, that dissolution of the marriage bond must be the proper means and, in some cases, the mandatory means of securing release from a bond that binds so uniquely to one who is thus defiled.

On these various grounds we may conclude that it is not feasible to construe the exceptive clause of Matthew 19:9 as applying merely to the putting away and not to the remarriage on the part of the divorcing husband. The considerations preponderate rather in favour of the conclusion that when a man puts away his wife for the cause of fornication this putting away has the effect of dissolving the bond of marriage with the result that he is free to remarry without thereby incurring the guilt of adultery. In simple terms it means that divorce in such a case dissolves the marriage and that the parties are no longer man and wife.

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