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# GRACE AND TRUTH

THE DIVINE BASIS OF FORGIVENESS AND  
RESTORATION

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## INTRODUCTION

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The first response we often have upon receiving a letter or article on the general subject of divorce and remarriage is to cast it aside, and we may do this for a variety of reasons. I urge my brethren and sisters to bear with the me; for I approach this subject not just on a theoretical basis, or as one who has diligently sought out the matter over many years, but crucially as one who has lived through the sorrow and despair of marriage breakdown. I understand the feelings of those who have suffered years of protracted marriage difficulties, holding to the sincere belief that loving patience and forgiveness would remedy these marital problems. I know the feeling of regret, of wanting to rise above the despair and wretchedness of the flesh that envelops you and not being able to do so. I understand the heartache and disbelief that, despite all efforts, your spouse chooses to at last depart. I have experienced the debilitating loneliness of years within a loveless marriage and the darkness of depression. I understand the feeling of betrayal when one you count as a close friend betrays you and takes what is not lawfully theirs to have!

I also know the healing power of Yahweh's word in which is made plain 'the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth,' who consoles us in all our trials that 'his strength is made perfect in weakness'. By **His** strength I learnt how to 'do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you' (Matthew 5:44, KJV). I have, sadly, seen ecclesias and entire fellowships torn apart by the divorce and remarriage question. However I have also seen the ecclesia as a place of divine therapy, healing and restoration, despite all the seemingly human impossibilities, because there was an understanding of the weightier matters of God's law—love, justice, mercy and faith—by which Yahweh is honoured and glorified as the basis and divine condition of redemption and forgiveness.

There is a scriptural answer to every question that this subject in all its complexity of human emotion and experience presents. Those answers however are not always pleasant or agreeable to fleshly thinking. "For my ways are not your ways nor are my thoughts your thoughts says Yahweh" (Isaiah 55:8). In diligently seeking out the answers to many questions on this subject it becomes a matter of whether we are prepared to allow Yahweh's word to elevate us above our natural inclinations—our ways which we may earnestly insist are motivated by God's principles, our thoughts which we may have convinced ourselves reflect righteousness!

**The key** to understanding this most important subject and its broader theme is how Yahweh does not count a sinner's iniquity against him, and how his transgression may be forgiven and sin covered (Psalm 32:2; 2 Corinthians 5:19). **God must first be seen to be "just"; only then may He be the justifier of the one who humbly and contritely comes unto Him through faith in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:26).**

I have heard it said that one can 'correctly' argue the divorce and remarriage question in various ways. However, Yahweh is one; there is one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5–6). There is only one way that declares **God's righteousness** as the basis and condition of divine mercy and forgiveness. On the subject of the atonement, Yahweh requires the humble acceptance of, and exercise of faith in only one correct doctrine as the only basis of acceptable approach unto Him. **On the general subject of divorce and remarriage there is in fact only one way that is able to reconcile all the inspired statements in Yahweh's word that lifts up and exalts Yahweh as holy, holy, holy. Any other interpretation will, in some aspect, diminish or deny that His way is "just" and that the humble recognition of this is the only means of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.**

When divorce and remarriage for reasons other than ‘porneia’ occur; a request for re-fellowship by a repentant brother or sister may understandably cause much grief and anxiety especially amongst ecclesias whose members are relatives of those involved. Such cases invariably produce a wide range of reactions either because of close emotional connections with those involved, or one’s own life experiences. These extremes may take the form of **man’s** mercy which is quick to forgive sin without regard to Yahweh’s righteousness or **man’s** righteousness quick to condemn with little reflection of that “glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth”.

Precedence should not be the guiding principle of how to respond to those who have broken Christ’s commands and desire re-fellowship. Every case must be “judged” on the basis of individual circumstances (1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:2, 5) as well as the attitude and response of the brother or sister concerned, according to the teachings of the Lord and his inspired apostles. The acceptance back into fellowship of any brother or sister who has been “judged” to have broken the commandments of Christ should be entirely contingent upon their **humble acknowledgement of God’s righteousness and holiness (Psalm 51:4; 32:2,5)**. It should also depend on their understanding that what they did was an affront to Yahweh’s character, goodness and truth (Psalm 32:9; 51:6, 7). They need to acknowledge how their actions put them out of fellowship with God (Psalm 51:11; 2 John 9). “Fellowship with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ” consists in walking in the Light as God is in the Light (1 John 1:3 -7). Likewise “Fellowship with one another” depends, says bro. Roberts “entirely upon our conformity to this first and necessary principle of all fellowship”. When scriptural repentance has taken place and transgressors now “walk in the light as he is in the light” the divine reassurance is “we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Christ cleanses us from **all sin**”<sup>1</sup>. This scriptural repentance depends upon a “spirit” (Psalm 51:17, 13) that is motivated by a clear understanding of the Lord’s teachings.

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### “YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

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For the above reasons we must therefore pause and consider the fundamental principles contained in Christ’s teachings of the inner-man with respect to adultery (Matthew 5:27–32) and more broadly, how Christ wants his disciples to be motivated by “the righteousness that comes from God” in contrast with the righteousness of man (Matthew 5:20). The Lord Jesus Christ’s law of the **inner-man** with respect to adultery forms only one aspect of a broader interlocking theme encompassing six examples (Matthew 5: 21-48) by which **the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20)** is **contrasted** with what Paul, the great interpreter of his Master’s words calls, “the righteousness which is of God by **faith**” (Philippians 3:9). This remarkable contrast, which forms such an important element of Christ’s introductory teaching, is played out until the very end between those who “**trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt**” and he whom they mocked, “trusted in God”, and “saved others but cannot save himself” (Luke 18:9; Matthew 26:42–43). Christ’s teaching and example established a great gulf between false shepherds who were ravenous wolves, and the good Shepherd; between healthy trees that bear good fruit, and diseased trees that bore bad fruit; between those who do the will of the Father and those who the Lord declares “I never knew you”; between those who “hear and do his words” and those who “hear and do them not” (Matthew 7:15–27). To correctly understand Christ’s teachings with respect to divorce and remarriage, we must see how it forms a part of his broader doctrine, and in searching out the matter, we must accompany the Lord in his ministry to behold Yahweh’s “true religion”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Christadelphian No. 255, September 1885 “The Nature and Conditions of Fellowship in the Truth.”

**Man's** religion has a tendency either towards a Judaistic spirit or a belief that "God's grace is all sufficient for salvation". This tendency can be present in the body of Christ, as is illustrated by the Lord's warning to the seven ecclesias (Revelation 2 & 3). The Judaistic spirit is illustrated with the first of the seven, and the "Grace is all sufficient" by the last of Christ's seven messages. Both are particularly applicable to the Christadelphian body of this age before the thief like Advent of the Lord.

The Laodiceans had a confidence but not a true faith, for what Christ describes as the Laodicean spiritual condition is the antithesis of faithfulness. True faithfulness is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen, as illustrated by that woman who knew she was "wretched, pitiable and poor", who said in herself "if I only touch his garment, I will be made whole." But the Laodiceans thought they were whole! (Matthew 9:22; Revelation 3:17). True faith encourages the hopelessly blind to be able to respond to Christ's gracious, faith-inspiring offer of healing, "do you believe that I am able to do this?" The answer is emphatically "yes!" But it did not enter the mind of the Laodiceans that they were blind (Matthew 9:28-29; Revelation 3:17). Despite their wretchedness, love will draw the disciple to Christ to wash his feet (Luke 7:38) by responding to the needs of even the least of his little ones (Matthew 25:40). Though such a faith is convinced that any mountain blocking the disciples' path to the kingdom (1 Corinthians 13:2) can be removed, Christ only deems as "**the righteous**" (Matthew 25:37; Luke 7:50) those who demonstrated that they understood "**if I have not love, I am nothing**" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The woman of Luke 7:37-50, in faith and love, washed the feet of the "Amen" or true "faithfulness" (Revelation 3:14; Isaiah 65:16). This love was the first thing to decline in those seven ecclesias and in its place there arose **a harsh Judaistic spirit** that was manifested in their treatment of others (Luke 18:9; 1 John 2:7-11).

The problem with the ecclesia in Ephesus was that they had relaxed their first love; the cause is implied in the opening title used by the Lord who "walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks". The spirit of Christ was no longer seen in them that they might be constituted the ecclesia of the "living deity". If as a "witnessing" community we are to burn brightly, then the light exhibited must be a reflection of "the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of **grace and truth**" and makes plain that Christ is in us individually and as an ecclesia. The warning for us is that although Ephesus was an apparently vigorous, strong ecclesia opposed to error, and would not "bear with those who are evil"; they in fact did **not** exhibit the characteristics and very purpose of a lampstand! If they did not change, Christ, whose teaching they so vigorously defended, would come and remove their light stand! (Revelation 2:1-5). The spirit word and its power were not causing them to grow in love. They were industrious in defending the truth, but the truth was not working in them individually or ecclesially to reflect (i.e. make alive as a witness) "the glory of the only son full of **grace and truth**" ESV. They had forgotten and consequently fallen from their first love. They had abandoned that love which was evidenced by works that characterise their thankful appreciation of Christ's sacrifice (Ephesians 2:12-13). For that reason the Lord exhorts them to do the first works (Revelation 2: 6); works which reflected Paul's exhortation—"speaking **the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ**, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love"(Ephesians 4:15-16).

"Except **your righteousness** exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees you shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20)

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses's inspired explanation of the law, to that which the law was designed to lead, even to the righteousness of faith. Israel however, "being ignorant of the righteousness

that comes from God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:3-4). Paul could therefore say that God made Christ "our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1Corinthians 1:30). In Deuteronomy 6: 20-25 a father teaches his son the meaning of the law, humbly describing that it was not by his wisdom or any man's wisdom, nor by his might or any man's might that he or Israel was delivered from the power of sin; that Yahweh had given commandments that we might fear Him for our good; that He will keep us to the coming of His kingdom and that **"it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to do all this commandment"**. This section of Deuteronomy 6 illustrates **the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees**—humble thankfulness for what Yahweh had done for a man who knew that there was nothing in him for which he could boast; except by the trials through which Yahweh had caused him to pass, he learnt about Yahweh "who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth" and that in these things Yahweh delighted (Jeremiah 9:24). This knowledge transformed his life and filled him with a determination that as the heavenly Father is, so this humbled man, despite his sins, would be in the world.

In Luke chapter 18:9-14 the Lord Jesus told a parable "to some who **trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt**". It was a parable about two men who went up to worship, one a Pharisee and the other "a sinner" (verses 10 & 13). The Pharisee separated himself from this sinner and "standing by himself, prayed" for all to hear, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, **adulterers**, or even like this tax collector". By contrast the tax collector who stood afar off, conscious of his fellow worshipper's righteousness, adopting the spirit of Deuteronomy 6 prayed "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" This humble confession justified this man, and is the "righteousness" which the Lord said must "exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees" for entry into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5: 20). **The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees nullified the spirit of the law and negated the first and greatest command expressed in the context of Deuteronomy 6, because this type of thinking is incapable of loving Yahweh and "thy neighbour as thyself" and therefore incapable of beholding "the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth"**.

This digression I hope will help the reader appreciate that the Lord's teaching on adultery of the heart (Matthew 5: 21-48) needs to be understood in its spiritual context and when taken as a whole, it is the way by which we might "enter the kingdom of heaven". These general principles have a direct bearing on every aspect of the disciple's relationship with the heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus Christ shows that true perfection of that relationship is governed by the nature of our inner self towards our fellow men and women. We can at this time only consider a few aspects of this most important part of our Lord's teachings.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF SACRIFICE IN SEEKING RECONCILIATION

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In Matthew 5: 21-24 the Lord immediately establishes the arena of judgement in which he alone will sit to examine. In contrast with the act, the Lord considers the mind and spoken word as if it were the deed already performed. The Lord had said in verse 17 that he had come to "fulfil the law". Its fulfilment, he states in another place, rested in one's undiminished love of God who "loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins". The disciple, in thankful response **under trial**, makes plain the Father's character by "loving one another" as the Father loved us, who "while we were **enemies** were reconciled

to God by the death of his son". This knowledge strengthens one's faith so that **under trial** we are able to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37, 38; 1 John 4:10, 11; Romans 5:10; 1 Peter 2:20–24).

**Anger** is primarily the displacement of the love of God from our minds, a wilful disregard of what God has done for us in Christ. If anyone has reason to be angry because of one's **rights** being violated, it is Yahweh. If anyone has **the right** to call transgressors "thou empty and worthless one", it is Yahweh. If anyone has **the right** to say "thou fool", it is Yahweh. The apostle Paul reminds us, "You that were some time **alienated and enemies** in your **mind** by wicked works yet now has he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight" (Colossians 1:21–22).

If we through God's grace have been so constituted, how can we manifest a mind that is of the world, the angry, abhorring, vengeful mind of the children of disobedience? From where then **does adultery of the mind arise**; from the mind of God or from the spirit of this world? **From where does an angry, unforgiving, intolerant, unmerciful, irreconcilable spirit arise**? Is it from friendship with God or friendship with the world? James states, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust and have not: you kill and desire to have... You fight and war..." By so doing the minds of these brethren were **joined with the world** and James calls them, "**adulterers and adulteresses**!" "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:1–4). Paul adds, "that **all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice: And be kind one to another tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you**" (Ephesians 4:31–32).

The Lord has called us to do this because **Yahweh has first reconciled and forgiven**. We can love because Yahweh first loved us. The gift we therefore bring to the altar of Christ (Matthew 5:23–24) is that which God has already first given to us by way of example, as set forth in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. If that gift which by our acknowledgement is provided by God, then it can only be received by God **if we are reconciled** towards those who have "something against us". The Lord Jesus Christ is not interested in seeing his disciples upholding **their rights**; this is not the example he left us to follow, but rather **have we done all in our power to heal, forgive and be reconciled**? There may be in our brother's or sister's mind an enmity that we know of, that has caused them to have "something against us" and it may stand in the way of their salvation. It does not matter therefore whether our actions in causing this enmity were right or wrong, because "when **we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son**, much more, being reconciled, **we shall be saved by his life**"—that is, **his resurrected life in which we are commanded to walk in newness of life, following his example** (Romans 5:10; Romans 6:4; 1 Peter 2:20–24).

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## JUSTICE, MERCY AND TRUTH—MATTHEW 5:25–26

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Immediately preceding Christ's words on adultery (Matthew 5:27–32), the Lord, not without significance, speaks of a debtor and his creditor. In this parable the Lord presents three principal characters—the creditor, whose rights have been abused and seeks redress, the debtor, and the judge who is Yahweh. The creditor being fully persuaded that the facts of the case are all in his favour, has no hesitation in appealing to Yahweh's law to vindicate his rights. He dogmatically appeals to the letter of the law, which he feels no doubt will reveal the true character of his debtor. However in so doing, he

lovelessly condemns his debtor to judgement without mercy, and unknowingly abrogates the very essence of the law to which he appealed. It is these words of Christ that leads James in his consideration of this very law to which the creditor was so quick to appeal, to speak of “the royal law”, because it is intimately connected with “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...”

“If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself you are doing well’ (James 2:8).

Where does such consideration leave the creditor in Christ’s parable and in James’s consideration? For if the old covenant taught anything, it taught that **all were under condemnation** because of sin. This realisation should have evoked the spirit of mercy. This spirit should have likewise permeated the debtor in his willingness to settle their differences. How much more should we have this spirit; we who live under the bonds of the everlasting covenant, purged through God’s unbounded love and mercy with the blood of Christ, who did no sin, who died and redeemed us from the burden of incalculable debt!

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgement is without mercy to one who showed no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement” (James 2:12–13).

We are to be judged by the law of liberty, not the law of an eye for an eye or just recompense for damage incurred. How thankful we ought to be for this, for what flesh will stand before the great judge if grace and mercy are not the characteristics of his law of love? It is this grace which must find its spontaneous outworking in the newly created lives of the children of light as manifestations of Yahweh’s character. We follow him who suffered for us, **“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:21–23)**. The “law of liberty” frees us both in this life and that which is to come from the continuous chain of sin and retribution. Woe unto us who without exception, longingly desire God’s mercy, if we make Christ’s example—the law of liberty and the law of love—a law of condemnation and of judgement that in any way **erects barriers or even destroys the principles of reconciliation and forgiveness! I have seen individuals and entire fellowships utterly destroyed because they refused to face these pressing responsibilities.**

We deceive ourselves if we think that by adopting unscriptural principles we can compel ecclesial debtors to pay unscriptural penance, **erecting unscriptural barriers in the name of maintaining ecclesial peace, that only serve to prohibit any possibility of reconciliation.** When I have seen ecclesias do this, more and more cases arose which only served to compound the unscriptural, unloving, unChristlike position they adopted, eventually tearing them apart until their witness for Christ was no more! **However, when as a fellowship, we take the yoke of Christ upon us and learn from him who is gentle and lowly in heart, we find “rest for our souls” in surrendering to his example, though at first the mind of the flesh may think that it is too hard and we recoil at the prospect. Regardless of how difficult the problems are that may arise in ecclesial life, when Christ is by our side “his yoke is easy and his burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–29).**

When the facts of a particular dispute are examined and we inevitably appeal to God’s law to support our respective positions, it will not be a simple question of whether we are right or wrong, but whether the spirit of Christ was the governing principle at the heart of our actions. When we stand before the great King, he will not be interested in whether we can justify our actions by an appeal to his law in a cold legalistic manner, but will **judge our spirit or disposition towards our fellow man or woman irrespective of the facts. Have we allowed any opportunity for reconciliation to pass?** And even if all attempts failed, has love been our patient rejoinder, declaring that the path to reconciliation remains

open, and if it was closed, that it was not by our doing? Why? Because by our new birth being “born from above,” born “not of blood nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13) we are a godly seed. We know that he (God) is righteous and “that everyone that **does righteousness** is born of him” (1 John 1:29) and “are of God” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

What is this ‘righteousness’ that the sons of God are to do? Bro. Thomas explains in one of his many treatises on God manifestation, “The manifestation of the Yahweh name is only **initiated, not completed in the person of Jesus Christ**. The manifestation of Deity in flesh by the Holy Spirit or truth is amplified in the characters of true believers among men, who are ‘partakers of the divine nature’ in its constitution, as the earnest of their future participation in the divine substance... He is manifested in them through the truth affectionately and righteously believed. If ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ is in men, thus Christ who is the truth, is in them and the spirit of Christ is in them, for ‘the spirit is the truth’” (1 John 5:6).

The evidence of God’s love was His reconciliation to Himself of His **enemies**. The supreme sacrifice was the giving of His beloved son, forsaken, violated, wronged, despised, rejected, whipped, spat upon and cursed, for truly what man did to Christ was done unto his Father. Tragically, we can return to that “old man” state as enemies arrayed against Yahweh, if by our actions we hinder the revelation of God’s work in us by consciously choosing not to follow Christ’s example in our responses to the personal and ecclesial trials through which we pass. **Situations will arise in our lives which will help us gain a deep appreciation of that work and its motivation, that is, the spirit of forgiveness, mercy and love. If His work of reconciliation is central to that revelation of God, how much more should be His children’s, if we are His children indeed?**

**Reconciliation** becomes the paramount issue of Christ’s parable; “whilst thou art with him in the way” (Matthew 5:25 RV). Of course the debtor must acknowledge his/her sin, must forsake his/her way. But **the disposition of the creditor is often the primary means by which repentance can be facilitated and a true and lasting reconciliation forged**. Yahweh in His grace, mercy and forgiveness becomes the great example of what the mind of every wronged brother or sister should strive to be. Upon a purely human basis, this reasoning obviously has certain shortcomings, for the debtor could very easily point out the blatant shortcomings of his creditor, if not on the current dispute, then most certainly on many others. Such a realisation ought constantly to temper the creditor’s attitude, who should perceive, that both he and his debtor are unredeemable debtors to God if His grace was not extended, lest he fall into the position of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–25).

The lot that is therefore common to all God’s servants is our need for **continual reconciliation and mercy**. As Yahweh is our creditor, we must “seek Him while He may be found”, to “call upon Him while He is near” and to forsake our wicked ways and thoughts and “return unto the Lord” while we are in the way, in the day of opportunity, before we come and stand before Him as our judge, that He will have “mercy” and “abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6–7).

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## CHRIST'S LAW OF THE HEART WITH RESPECT TO ADULTERY (MATTHEW 5:27-32)

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Christ in his teaching on the doctrine of **the new covenant** and its bearing on the inner man fulfilled and superseded the old covenant and condemned the practices of the scribes and Pharisees which the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24) regulated. The Lord contrasted His supremely higher law of the inner man with the then current morally insipid and motive driven pharisaic interpretation of the Mosaic Law. The pharisaic interpretations dramatically altered Yahweh's intent with Israel under Moses. The extent of their immorality on this question is illustrated by Josephus, himself a Pharisee, who stated "that there are **many causes** for a man to put away his wife". The greatest abuses had arisen in regard to divorce that was permitted on very trivial grounds. One rabbinical saying was, "if any man hates his wife, let him put her away".

The tradition of the scribes and the Pharisees was to quote one rabbinical opinion upon another, each opinion being tainted by the popular sentiment of the day. By the time of the coming of the Lord the nation was entering that final phase of corruption in which that generation would fill up the iniquities of their fathers. The scribes and Pharisees were addressed by Christ's forerunner in these words "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" The Lord Jesus takes up the same language to address the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 12 describing them as, "an evil and adulterous and wicked generation" (Matthew 12:34, 39, 45). This "adulterous generation" passed over the penalty due for what Job calls "an heinous crime... an iniquity to be punished by the judges" (Job 31:11). The Lord laid bare their inner man, the motive in all their dealings. The Law which condemned them all to a violent death (Leviticus 20:7, 8, 10, 23) was taught through their traditions in a way which seemed to elevate Israel's rulers beyond the Law's condemnation.

**The basis of judgement in relation to the new and everlasting covenant rests on higher principles altogether.** The Lord Jesus Christ will not ultimately enter into eternal fellowship with someone through entrance "into the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 5:20) if that person's spirit or disposition of mind is not brought into servitude to Christ's.

Christ's teachings (Matthew 5:28-32) elevates the seventh commandment, "thou shalt not commit adultery," to encompass two aspects, one mental, the other moral. This was a new way of thinking for his disciples, who had been indoctrinated by the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord's teaching brought them uncomfortably to consider the undisciplined musings of the heart upon "deceitful lusts" which if not brought under servitude to Christ would lead to the condemnation of adultery. This laid bare the real motive for divorce. The Lord in his teachings concerning adultery (verses 28-32), though he continually refers to the man's position, does not of course exclude the woman from the type of thinking that can lead to the practice of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than unrepentant unfaithfulness. The Lord's words are applicable to all, male and female, as is illustrated in Mark 10:12. This being understood, the object of Christ's consideration in Matthew 5:32 is the same type of man who has adulterous intentions as described in verses 27 and 28. It is this **adulterous motive of the heart** that led this man to quote the "it hath been said" Pharisees' tradition of verse 31 which falsely interpreted the Mosaic Law of Deuteronomy 24:1-3, to provide permission for divorce for every cause. **It is also possible for brethren and sisters to use Christ's teachings of the new covenant in a way in which he never intended, to circumvent his motive of transforming principles!** This man's righteousness did not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, who for the lust of his heart believed the law allowed divorce for any cause or ground. It is this adulterous man of verses

27–30 who is the predominant subject of Christ’s words in verses 31–32, **the man who puts away his wife who is innocent of unfaithfulness**. The Lord reveals this man’s terrible sin (versus 28–32) in terms of the consequences for his wife who was put away for improper grounds.

The Lord shows that this man’s motive is not the known and verified fact of his wife’s persistent unfaithfulness which the word “fornication” (Greek “porneia”) indicates, as Christ states in his words “**apart** from the cause of fornication” (Young’s literal translation). The reason we know this is evident is by Christ’s next words; for in the putting away of his **innocent** wife this man “**causes,**” or makes his wife to “commit adultery”. **If sexual immorality was the reason for this man’s putting away of his wife, his putting her away would not “make” her commit adultery, because she was already doing so.** If she was responsible for the illicit union and not her husband, then could he be accused of “causing her to commit” something, if she was already guilty of it?

By the act of divorce, this man causes his wife, who was innocent of “porneia”, to commit adultery because she would ultimately remarry under the circumstances of Jewish life. Furthermore, he who marries his divorced wife also commits adultery. This in itself proves that under Christ’s new law, the divorced wife, **put away for reasons other than her known unfaithfulness, remains the wife of the man whose adulterous heart caused the putting asunder**. Thus Christ’s doctrine (verse 32), sweeps away the Pharisees’ contention that divorce for **any** cause severs the marriage bond, for upon what grounds could the Lord then say that he who marries her who has been put away also commits adultery? **It is this fact under Christ’s new law that prohibits remarriage where separation has occurred for causes other than continued unfaithfulness (1 Corinthians 7:10–11), ensuring the reconciliation hoped for of the separated spouses.**

Bro. Roberts, in the April 1882 Christadelphian states, “There is nothing in the law of Christ to interfere with the remarriage of a man and woman who have been previously divorced from one another. The law of Christ rather favours every kind of reconciliation and triumph of peace”.<sup>2</sup>

What is to be done, however, where a spouse is guilty of “porneia” and the condition exists in which the other spouse could “put away” and be free of the charge in doing so of causing to commit adultery? Indeed, necessity may leave no other choice but like Hosea, to separate and send his erring wife away from his house. Does this give the innocent spouse the right to divorce and remarry? The Lord answers this in Matthew 19:9. Where no other commands of Christ is violated (i.e. suing at law etc.) divorce from an unrepentant adulterous spouse is **not a sin against either Christ’s teachings or against the spirit of them. However, Christ does not in his words encourage, let alone command it.**

Bro. Roberts in the 1891 Christadelphian answering a request to explain Matthew 5:32 states, “Christ’s words relate to divorce for insufficient cause as was at that time common among the Jews. He recognises no divorce as lawful ‘save for the cause of fornication’. (Notice bro. Roberts states Christ’s words relate to divorce, not just separation and that Christ’s teachings do recognise divorce for the cause of fornication and that he is speaking of divorce in the context of Christ’s day.) This severs the bond. Human law recognises this, and we are commanded to submit to human law where it does not conflict with divine law. **Where the law recognises man and woman in any case as husband and wife, there can be no question of adultery**”<sup>3</sup> (notice bro. Roberts dismisses the idea of a continued state of adultery where remarriage has taken place).

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<sup>2</sup> The Christadelphian No. 214—April 1882 Notes

<sup>3</sup> The Christadelphian 1891, Inside front cover

I would like to reiterate that the injured husband is not **commanded** to put away his wife who is committing porneia. The Lord's words are very carefully chosen. His words of verse 32 are compassed about by a multitude of other precepts that highlight the continual unabated characteristics of Yahweh manifested in the Son—long-suffering, mercy, forgiveness, patience, tireless seeking of reconciliation, which must find their representation in all God's sons and daughters that grace might be pleurably extended. Christ's own example of laying down his life for those who the apostle calls "enemies," (Romans 5:10) is the basis of our redemption, the recognition of which and manifestation of its principles in our own lives towards the undeserving, are our garments of beauty (Revelation 19:8). It is interesting to consider why the Lord did not give definitive commands regarding the rights or otherwise of the injured partner either in Matthew 5 or 19. This of course is the reason why over many years there has been so much contention over these verses. Why didn't the Lord make the matter absolutely clear?

**It is a trait of human nature to love to have everything clearly defined so that man does not have to seek matters out and exercise his mind to understand great truths.** But this matter of divorce and remarriage touches perhaps the greatest spiritual type revealed in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. The reason the Master is not as clear and decisive about the injured partner as he is about the guilty, is because **the sons and daughters of God would not interpret Matthew 5 in isolation from all their Master's other teachings in chapters 5-7; principles by which "we judge (or discern) ourselves truly, that we might not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31).**

We are ever called upon to exercise our minds on the overall principles Yahweh has revealed to us through His son's example and teachings. The writer is fully convinced that this process cannot be without suffering, trial and tribulation, because integral to the understanding of Yahweh's mind, is the development of a character that is receptive to it. By this process alone, the disciple can "attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; and by "speaking the **truth in love** grow up in every way into him who is the head", into Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 4:13-15, ESV).

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## FORGIVENESS AND ITS BASIS

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The prospect of Christ's imminent return and the belief that our sins are too great to be forgiven or that we have not performed enough righteous acts in our life can often fill our heart with fear. Similarly the ecclesia may feel that the offending parties, despite their contrition, are in a "state of sin" and cannot be received back into fellowship unless repentance is evidenced by deeds that have no Scriptural basis! This is a modern form of Judaistic thinking that contributes to how we as individuals cope with our personal failings, and how ecclesias deal with cases of sin and transgression. These problems of which we speak were graphically illustrated in the Lord's meeting of the demoniac of the Gadarene country (Mark 5).

This man called himself "Legion" and embodied in his mental torment the "many" neuroses and schizophrenia that could ever possess the stricken mind. Legion's plight emphasised the deranging effect that sin has at different times upon us all, seizing us often without warning, and causing us, like Legion, to dwell in the land of the dead (Mark 5:2-3) "... no man could bind him, no, not with chains", no matter how great a man's effort; no! Not by man's "might" or by man's "power" could Legion be restrained from the effects of his madness. This is symbolic of the sin power and the nightmare of its

imprisonment upon a mind that remained untouched by the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet there was one redeeming thing about this man. During those fleeting times between the fits of malady, he considered his desperate need and the hopeless devices of man to help him, and came and fell down at the feet of Jesus in abject humility, worshipping him. In this very act, he experienced what all God's servants feel at times very acutely: the holiness of the Lord and our own utter wretchedness, even madness.

In the Lord Jesus' day there were many who thought that by their own "works" they could be "justified" and consequently did not recognise their desperate need to come to Christ in faith. But many, burdened with every type of mental, moral and physical illness, did come in faith and hope. The united authority of the Gospels tells us simply, "**he healed them all**". Is there any reason to believe that what Christ did then, he cannot do now—cast out Legion's madness and destroy it in the depths of the sea?

Here is the practical solution to all our problems; the comfort and unutterable peace of all those who, being healed, "sit" no longer naked but "clothed" with the righteousness of Christ's sin-covering garments and in our "right mind" (Mark 5:15). For many, this experience is the renewal in us of a "right spirit" (Psalm 51:10) i.e. a "Steadfast constant spirit" (RV); the spirit of faithfulness to God. It is this new state of mind that pleads; "Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). This constant steadfast spirit of faith must also be a holy (set apart) spirit, a mind set upon God's holiness determined to do his will.

Thus, as Jesus was about to depart, the man who "had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him" (Mark 5:18). The Lord's command to this man and to all of us who have also been similarly affected is, "**go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you**" (verse 19; ESV).

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## THE BREAKING OF BREAD IN SIMON'S HOUSE

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There may be those who feel that certain cases of divorce and remarriage (not for "porneia") cannot be received back into fellowship; that they could never break bread with the offending party no matter what they say, thereby cutting off the sinner from the path to redemption unless "falling into the hand of man" (1 Chronicles 21:13) they were prepared to submit to unscriptural conditions! It remains a marvel of marvels to the writer's mind that Yahweh, who is so holy, condescended to extend His love toward man and created a plan of salvation that could declare His just claims of righteousness **without** cutting off, in that very process, the path to redemption of us sinners! It is the comprehension, appreciation and the making plain of these same principles in the life of the disciple that set him/her apart as a friend of the Master. We do well to remember Bro. Thomas' words in *Eureka* that the manifestation of the Yahweh Name in Christ with all its glorious attributes of grace and truth, "is only initiated, not completed, in the person of Jesus Christ" (Volume 1 pg. 105).

God's grace as well as His truth must become integral characteristics of all those who desire to be among that glorious multitude who will comprise the Yahweh name. The Lord warns us in Matthew 7:2, "for with what judgement you judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again". **In our desire to behold the glory of our Lord full of grace and truth, we may have to sit uncomfortably for a time with Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50)**. Simon's problem was not his inability to judge what the truth was when a certain woman, a notorious sinner,

came uninvited to his feast and began to wash the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. His estimation of her was correct; **she was a sinner indeed**. Simon's problem was "the grace of God". The Lord did not cut short this woman's need to pour out her soul in such a public manner, nor did he hasten to end this period of profound embarrassment that all at that table felt, particularly Simon, who though he had invited the Lord into his house to break bread, had no comprehension at this stage of his life as to what that truly entailed. This incident was recorded that those who would fellowship the Lord Jesus might identify themselves with one of the two classes presented here; the one represented by their spokesman, Simon; the other by this woman who was guilty of "porneia". Before we proceed we must honestly examine ourselves and ask, to which class do we most closely identify? We have but two choices.

In the parable of the two debtors, the Lord extracted from Simon his judgement of which of the two forgiven debtors loved his lord more. Simon's answer was a stark lesson in justice, mercy and truth. "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.' And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Then those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'who is this who even forgives sins?' " (Luke 7:44-49, ESV).

The tears this woman so reverently shed upon those "beautiful feet" (Isaiah 52:7) were tears of inexpressible appreciation for what she believed her Lord could do despite her present "**state**" described by Simon as that of 'a sinner!'" Her belief motivated her **to do** something that **took great courage in the presence of Simon's friends**. Though a word was not uttered, for what could she say, burdened with the guilt of iniquity, transgression and sin? Yet her tears constituted one of the greatest confessions in all Scripture. The Lord's words "her **sins** which are **many** are **forgiven**—for she **loved much**" provide the divine guidance as to what constitutes scriptural repentance that incurs the blessedness of divine forgiveness.

It is our conviction that long after the Lord and Simon's other guests had departed, Simon would have sat in the darkness of his room thinking about what the Lord had said, thereby opening Simon's ears. Simon's name means, "Hearing." **At times we also need dramatic incidents in our personal and ecclesial lives to open our eyes to behold God's grace and truth, and our ears to the cry for help.** The problems surrounding the divorce and remarriage question may well be circumstances in which the Lord Jesus appeals to us to open our eyes so that we might comprehend what in reality constitutes Yahweh's truth. Like Simon, we may believe that we see the truth so vividly that we cut off the means of recovery to the repentant sinner, and likewise showing how we have failed utterly to comprehend Yahweh's grace.

In the Lord's words and example there is an earnest appeal for the sake of the love of God to search out this subject diligently and pray to Yahweh for guidance to understand what is His will, to perform it ourselves and be empowered in all humility to teach it in a balanced, comprehensive way to others.

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## THE ENACTED PARABLE OF CHRIST'S HEALINGS

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"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

This work was one principally of grace. As such, it was and is, directed towards those who the Master refers to in Matthew chapter 5 as "the poor in spirit" (i.e. poor in disposition and character who know they are in dire need of Christ's mercy.) "I'm not come," says he in another place, "to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32).

"Sinners" know that they are poor, blind and bruised. They are broken-hearted because the broken heart and contrite spirit (Psalm 51) are the sacrifices of repentance which alone are acceptable in the Lord's sight. Those alone, who possess these attributes, are the ones to whom Christ came to proclaim "the acceptable year of the Lord", the year of release and liberty (Isaiah 58:6). This proclamation is of forgiveness; liberty from the mental and moral servitude to sin by which man can draw closer to the divine truth, as manifested in God's character and the promise of deliverance from the bondage of death. This is the substance of Christ's teachings in Matthew chapters 5-7.

There is an incident recorded by Matthew that occurred immediately after the Lord's discourse upon the mount, which illustrates the purpose of those teachings and man's response to them. This incident was the Lord's meeting with a leper in the last stages of that hideous disease (Matthew 8:1-4). Leprosy was a disease which, more than any other in the Old Testament times, God said he would inflict on Israel for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:27, 35). Sin and disease become synonymous in certain types in the scriptural record. We can well understand why under the Law, those inflicted with leprosy were rendered unfit for fellowship with God. It is important for us to never forget that at one time we were all leprous in God's sight, the living dead. "Dead," says Paul, "in trespasses and sins... Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath... But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us... Quickened us together in Christ and by grace saved us" (Ephesians 2:1-5).

Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 warned Israel who were baptised into Moses that leprosy can recur after its initial healing. It can "break out again". So the sin that we were forgiven and cleansed of at our baptism can contaminate anyone of us again.

In ecclesial life today, we have seen lepers excluded from the ecclesia because of sin and the neglect of God's word. The reason for their exclusion, whether it be the sin of jealousy (Miriam's), or greed (Gehazi's), or pride (Uzziah's), seems irrelevant, when one is in that hideous condition, unable to appeal to law to save, but desperate for God's mercy. I have heard it said of those who have committed adultery as a result of divorce and remarriage, **"they have had their chance, and they knew it was wrong, they cannot be forgiven because they did it deliberately, they can never come back while they remain in that condition"**. While this may be partially correct, this is a pharisaic attitude condemned by the Lord both in his teachings and in his practice. To consider the correct appreciation of this problem, we cheerfully undertake the matter of rightly dividing God's word with respect to mercy and judgement, for in doing so we accompany the Lord Jesus and consider how he made plain the Father's grace and truth.

Perhaps early in this leprous condition (Matthew 8:1–4), this man went back many times to the priest hoping that the leprosy had stopped its tenacious advance, only to be rejected. His notoriety amongst the people would have made him instantly recognisable and his pitiful cries of warning “unclean, unclean”, to the passers-by would have alienated him even from those who may have taken pity. Now, after many years, all hope lost, a walking corpse, the living dead, yet hearing the fame of the Lord and the joyful cries of those who had been healed by the son of David, he girds up his last remnants of strength and faith and goes and falls at the Lord’s feet.

We can only imagine the pitiful sight our Lord would have beheld—the flesh around his eyes eaten away, his head without a nose or hair, covered over to hide his identity, his fingerless hands held closely to his chest, his raw flesh ulcerated, its pits and holes filled by corrupting excretions, irradiating a vile stench; finally prostrating himself upon the ground, and an unearthly sound gurgling up through his throat, his palate having been eaten away, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2).

There can be no doubt that faith was present in this man, for the Lord’s healing is a testimony to this fact. But nonetheless, a grave doubt in this man’s mind was expressed through his desperate request, “**if thou wilt**, thou canst make me clean”. The law could not save him, but faith in God and His mercy manifested through His son could heal him.

This is the problem we share with the leper, individually and ecclesially. It is not the lack of faith in God’s ability to heal, to forgive, but the belief that He is willing to do so and **we to manifest God’s character in doing likewise**. The leper’s iniquity over the course of many years of reflection, bore so heavily upon his mind that he no doubt felt that though “God’s arm is not so shortened that it cannot save”, it may not extend as far as himself. He was, in his sight and in all men’s sight, and in the sight of the law, unredeemable. His terminal disease symbolised his iniquity, as Isaiah so poignantly records, “Ah sinful nation a people laden with iniquity... From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores: they have not closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isaiah 1:4–6).

Mark’s parallel record tells us something of our Lord’s character that reflected his Father’s, towards corruptible fallen man symbolised by the leper. Though he was bowed down by the guilt of his iniquity, dead in trespasses and sins, desperate for healing, the offscouring of all men, yet he was embraced by the son of God. “Jesus, moved with **compassion**, put forth his hand and touched him, and said unto him, I will; (I am willing) be thou clean” (Mark 1:40).

No man espousing the law would have come near this man, let alone touch him. The Jews had no compassion for this “sinner”. The judgements of God had overtaken him, doomed to wander in **isolation** till the day he crumbled back into dust. **They thought that they were law keepers; they did not go near people like this who deserved their plight. Why, to be moved to compassion towards such an one, would have been tantamount to apostasy!**

Now this attitude, my dear brethren and sisters, is the very attitude many manifest towards those who have divorced and remarried within the ecclesia. All manner of scripture is quoted or rather misquoted, just as the Pharisees misquoted the law to justify their practices of divorce and remarriage. We can misquote the law of Christ to shut up our bowels of mercy towards those who have sinned, and in the process become, not manifestations of our Father’s will, but enemies to the cross of Christ. This was the writer’s attitude for many years; I was zealously moved against such, more so than many of my brethren. But through the grace of God, through His providential hand and great mercies, I saw my utter folly. **In the Lord Jesus Christ there was a perfect ‘making plain’ of justice and mercy. So too, in**

**our ecclesial discussions on these cases, there must be this ‘making plain’ and evident setting forth of these principles, whereby God’s truth can be exalted and proclaimed and the repentant sinner be touched by the outstretched hand of the ecclesia.**

All the Lord’s miracles must be understood as reflecting God’s power to save men’s lives, not in the transient sense of which the miracle had but a passing benefit, but symbolising eternal salvation, intimately connected with the kingdom of God which the Lord’s anointed went from city to city preaching (Luke 4:43). The miracles preached the setting free of the captives from the law of sin and death. They therefore had a mental and moral liberation and a prophetic physical deliverance in the kingdom age.

The means of this healing was God’s Holy Spirit. The word the Lord spoke was “spirit and truth”. In the majority of the Lord’s healings, a prerequisite was always encouraged to be evidently manifested, and this is illustrated in the Lord’s often repeated words, “according to your **faith** be it unto you”. This healing work, symbolic of God’s saving power mentally, morally and physically, was not to be the sole providence of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Yahweh’s will, this was also the basis on which he sent forth his disciples during his ministry to preach the gospel. Yet on one notable occasion, his disciples were unable to heal a **severe case** of a man’s lunatic son (Matthew 17). This inability to heal brought forth the Lord’s response, “**this kind can only go out through prayer and fasting**”.

Although the Lord’s disciples today do not have the power to heal physical diseases, God’s saving work nevertheless continues through His spirit word manifested in those who are indeed His children. If we are to be the channel through which God saves men’s lives today, then it is a great truth that not only does faith need to be present in the one healed mentally and morally, but also pre-eminently in the healer. “Prayer and fasting” remains the key, the pouring out of our soul unto God, that we may understand and then do His will.

The Lord Jesus “went about... Preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing **all manner** of sickness and **all manner** of disease... They brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments and those possessed of devils and those who were lunatic and those that had the palsy; and he healed them” (Matthew 4:23–24).

The Lord said on another occasion, “**All manner of sin** and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31). This must be the subject of our faith even as it was in all those who came to Jesus to be healed. The sin of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than “porneia” can also be forgiven. The apostle John being an eyewitness to the Lord’s work and his teachings wrote, “If we **confess** our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleans us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:9; 2:1–2).

Under the Law, if a leper touched another man he was ceremonially “unclean”. But when this leper came into contact with Christ who was the end and fulfilment of the law, the clean (mentally and morally) cleansed the unclean. Matthew records that upon touching this leper and the simultaneous words, “I am willing be thou clean”, **immediately** his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:3). So it is with sin that is forgiven. The Lord dramatically illustrates this on another occasion when he healed the palsied man.

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## THE LORD'S PREACHING OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

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We see the connection between certain diseases and sin, dramatically portrayed in the young man crippled and twisted by palsy. He was carried upon a stretcher by four friends and lowered through the roof tiles into the presence of the Lord, because of the crowd which filled the house where he was abiding (Mark 2:1-12). In all probability, this terrible affliction was a result of a dissolute life. This young man's outwardly crippled frame portrayed his deformed and twisted soul raked with the guilt of his iniquity. His heart was evidently filled with remorse and shame and the Lord knowing his heart, went right to the issue and mentally and morally healed this young man because of his humble faith; "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee". **Yet this man would never have received this forgiveness if it were not for the determined resolve of his four friends.** Their attitude was not that he had had his chance and was now unredeemable. **The principle is this, that through the power of prayer and in faith brethren and sisters should resolutely work together to save sinners from the errors of their ways, in accordance with God's will as set forth by the Lord Jesus Christ.**

"Sinners" need help, but certain principles must be understood so that the forgiveness of God can be received. These principles are revealed to us in case after case of the Lord's healing. A Christ-like attitude towards brethren and sisters stricken with sin is absolutely paramount, not only for their healing, but for ours also, because any of us can find ourselves the victim of our transgressions.

The Lord **always** responded to determined faith. Always! Before the Lord forgave this man his sins, Mark records that the Lord beheld "their faith". His friends, despite their knowledge of the young man's past, were absolutely convinced the Lord Jesus Christ would heal. Is this our attitude of mind when we set our hearts to help those who are victims of their own transgression? These friends would have gone to this young man and pleaded with him and encouraged him. Wouldn't they all have made his sincere hope a matter of prayer?

On this occasion there were also present, the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5:21) who reasoned in their hearts about this man who forgave sins. **So there were those who were actually convinced the Lord could heal, i.e. forgive sins, and those who believed he could not.** This is the issue in regard to how the ecclesia deals with **all cases of sin and repentance**, including divorce and remarriage for reasons other than the exception. The question is, will Christ forgive sin upon sincere confession and repentance? And if so, are we, Christ's ecclesia, at liberty to require as the conditions of fellowship a second divorce or separation, the breaking up of another family, an attempted retracing of one's steps? **Surely the record of Yahweh's mind upon such a course of action, plainly stated in Deuteronomy 24:4 should be heeded!**

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## MERCY AND TRUTH MUST MEET TOGETHER

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The proverbs record, "by **mercy and truth** iniquity is purged: and by the fear of Yahweh depart from evil" (Proverbs 16:6).

To the mind of man, it is an irreconcilable paradox that iniquity could be purged by the bringing together of these two mutually exclusive principles, mercy and truth. But in God's purpose of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, the psalmist tells us "his salvation is nigh them that fear him... **Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other**" (Psalm 85:9-10). Unless

both mercy and truth meet together when the ecclesia deals with cases of sin and repentance then the power of God's healing will not be present.

We know that forgiveness and our forgiving others is conditional on our confessing and forsaking our sins (Psalm 130:3-4; 1 John 1:17; 1 John 2:1; 1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; Matthew 6:15; 2 Corinthians 2:10; Matthew 18:33). Why should God forgive us for Christ's sake? We believe that God does, but why is this forgiveness in the end extended to some and not to others?

**"Not everyone** that saith unto me, Lord Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **does the will of my Father** which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The measure of our Lord's intercession on our behalf is the measure of our doing the **will** of our heavenly Father. To do His will is to be found doing the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To what measure we do his work, then to that measure Christ abides in us (John 15:7); to that extent the Lord Jesus Christ can bear our sicknesses (i.e. iniquities, Matthew 8:17) and be sympathetic with our desperate pleas for help. But **unmercifulness and our refusal to "seek that which is lost"** (Matthew 18:12) or our **unwillingness to fellowship God's will of desiring not to see one of his little ones perish, will at last exclude us from abiding with Christ for ever more.**

A brother or sister, who has earnestly sought righteousness, stringently keeping themselves from sin, may deplore the sins of the offender, especially when their sin is one of weakness and ungodliness. It is not by accident that the Lord places beside this indispensable beatitude of "righteousness" (Matthew 5:6) which characterises God's children, the beatitude of "the merciful", who shall "attain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). This attribute, gives the children of God, a beauty and nobility which shall be perpetuated in the kingdom age as the characteristics of the king/priests who reign with Christ.

This glorious attribute finds its outworking in the saints' lives now in their attitude to those who are sick because of sin, even as their Lord gave them an example. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converts a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). The apostle Peter adds, "above all things have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

So the sins of the offender are covered over by the Lord Jesus Christ, Yahweh's appointed propitiation or mercy seat, which under the Mosaic pattern covered the ark in which lay God's truth, written in stone. Their sins are purged and cleansed, but associated with this saving work, like the palsied man's friends, are those who as "workers together with God" in the fulfilling of his will, receive the forgiveness of their sins also. This rests upon the divine principle... "With what judgement you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

"Then shall **the righteous** answer him, saying Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? Or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? Or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of **the least** of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

Now Yahweh wants us as his children, to truly appreciate these principles, and to do that, he tests us in many ways through relationships and ecclesial problems. The only way we can resolve these is by beholding he who was "the Word made flesh", "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of

grace and truth” (John 1:14). To behold this glory is to behold his grace and truth which is our salvation; it is a marrying together of grace (mercy, undeserved lovingkindness) and truth (the revelation of what God is, the “true light” John 1:9). **This marrying together of grace and truth vindicates Yahweh’s righteousness, and upon the acknowledgement of this and the forsaking of sin, grace is extended.** Therefore divorce and remarriage cases for reasons other than the exception, as with marriages contracted outside of the truth, must not be dealt with in such a way that grace and mercy overlook or minimise transgression! As we stated in the introduction on page 3; **Yahweh must be seen to be just in all He commands and in all His ways. The recognition of God’s righteousness is the basis and first condition of divine mercy and forgiveness.** In this process however, under the stress of ecclesial or personal problems we must not forget the most fundamental of all gospel truths—**Christ came and died to save sinners.** It is the attitude of mind of brethren and sisters who have sinned and yet now seek mercy, which must be evaluated by the ecclesia, to the best of their capacity. In the end it is our inability to fully appreciate the circumstances offenders have endured, and an awareness of our own failings and weaknesses that should prompt us to err on the side of mercy, for we are very much in need of mercy ourselves. As the apostle James states, “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgement without mercy, that has showed no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgement” (James 2:12–13). If the law of “grace and truth” has been the measure of our lives, in which mercy has rejoiced (gloried or boasted) against judgement, in our dealings with our fellow man, then that will be the measure of our judgement when we stand before our Lord.

**The hard though transforming path to take is the individual and the ecclesia striving to make plain God’s principles of mercy and truth, for it involves so much determination, patience, love and humility.** The individual and ecclesia may also be easily misunderstood while faithfully striving to follow this correct path, even as their Lord was misunderstood. He was condemned for doing so and he had the power to physically prove his divinely bestowed prerogative in perfectly making plain God’s principles of mercy and truth to forgive sins, as in the case of the palsied man. Matthew records the multitudes upon seeing this miracle, “marvelled and glorified God, which had given such power unto men” (Matthew 9:8).

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## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

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This power of healing or forgiveness given unto men is not without its pressing responsibilities. This is sternly impressed upon the leper who met Jesus after having just taught his disciples the principles of the new covenant. Mark tells us that immediately the leprosy had departed the Lord straightly (a stern command) charged him to immediately go and show himself to the priest saying nothing to any man (Mark 1:42–44). He who had just beheld and was the recipient of **the grace of God**, is commanded to go back to the priest who was the representative of the law, which Paul says, “was added because of **transgressions**” (Galatians 3: 19). This man had in all probability, contracted leprosy because he ignored the law’s statutes regarding personal cleanliness. By way of figure he had not adhered to God’s truth, but now that he was healed (i.e. forgiven) he had to go back to the principles of God’s truth which Paul describes as “holy, just and good”.

This lesson was reinforced through the law’s statutes which had to be executed by the priest on the leper’s behalf. A part of that ritual was the priest’s taking of the blood of the trespass offering and putting it upon the tip of the right ear, thumb and great toe of him who was to be ceremonially cleansed.

The cleansed leper, motivated by thankfulness and desiring to understand Yahweh's means of purification and its corresponding responsibility, should have been impressed with the stern lesson that he had to **dedicate** himself to God's service in his actions of **listening** to God's truth, **working** God's will and **walking** in those paths of righteousness.

There was also in this ritual, a great lesson for the priest who kept God's law, and indeed for the whole ecclesia; for the only other men treated in this fashion were the high priest and his sons whose right ear, thumb and great toe were similarly touched by the blood of "the ram of ordination" (Leviticus 8:22-24). It spoke of a very special relationship with God. We, who have been separated unto God by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, are "a royal priesthood" which at one time "had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Are we, as a "royal priesthood", prepared to accept the application of the blood, symbolising the principles of the atonement, to the lepers of the ecclesia of today; to their ear, thumb and great toe?

The forgiveness of sin, symbolised by the healing of the leper is the only possible scriptural position for the leper to be allowed readmission to the ecclesia of God. The lesson is thus powerfully taught by the Lord; **re-fellowship can only be attained by sincere repentance, shown by a full recognition of the evils that put him into this position to start with; confession of the sin and belief that "the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"**.

The Lord's words of warning, as we have seen, did not stop with the healed leper; they extended to those who were supposed to keep the law; for in showing himself to the priest, "the gift" which Moses commanded had to be offered, was "for a testimony unto them" (Matthew 8:4). The priest, in all his law-keeping and holiness, had to be prepared to do all these things for one who had so recently been excluded as unclean. Again we are pressed by God's word; are we prepared to put into practice as God's ecclesia, as an holy people and a kingdom of priests, the principles of the atonement and "the law of liberty" to our own brethren and sisters?

For "whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me", says our Redeemer. This little child, Christ says in the opening verses of Matthew 18, is like the disciple who has "turned" or being converted from the thinking and the ways of the flesh to that **humble disposition of sincerely desiring to draw near to Christ**; to be in his bosom, to hear his gracious words and follow him. The Lord warns, "but whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hung about his neck and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). **Truly it is essential that we be exceedingly zealous in our prosecution and eradication of offences. However, the Lord shows us primarily where this burning zeal should be directed. "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot cause thee to stumble, cut them off... And if thine eye causes thee to stumble, pluck it out..." (Matthew 18:8-9)**

Concerning his little ones, some of whom may have strayed, may have been disfellowshipped and now are wandering lost in the wilderness, Christ says, "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. **For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.** How think you? If any man has an hundred sheep, and one of them is gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and go unto the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? And if so be that he finds it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is **not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish**" (Matthew 18:10-14).

Cases of sin and repentance, especially those involving divorce and remarriage for reasons other than the exception, will test the ecclesia's resolve, humility and understanding of these great principles. The tragedy of the leper's case of Matthew chapter 8 was that he did not do what his Lord commanded him. Instead of going privately to the priest for "a testimony unto them", he published the matter abroad, so much so that the Lord was compelled to occupy the "desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter", the very place of perpetual wandering from which the leper had so recently been released (Mark 1:45). The Lord in bearing this man's iniquity, was now "without in desert places". Though sinners may be cleansed, we cannot abrogate our responsibility by turning our back on our Lord's stern warning; nor should we forget that we are amongst those who from "every quarter" have come to him to a place where "the lost" wander. If we are truly to identify with Christ's work then here in this desolate place in each of our hearts the truth "For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost," ( Luke 19:10) should find its joyful transforming manifestation.

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### WHAT GOD CONSIDERS AS TRUE REPENTANCE—DAVID THE DIVINELY APPOINTED EXAMPLE

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There may be some among us who believe that the Lord's words with regard to the exception of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is a "merciful provision". It is not! It simply tells us where in the one case a man's  **motive** for putting away his wife is not adulterous.<sup>4</sup> A **merciful provision** is when Yahweh, though holy, holy, holy, forgives sin without setting aside His principles of righteousness. An illustration of this is God's work in Christ, and how God forgave David's great transgression. God's definitive answer as to what constitutes true scriptural repentance is revealed in Psalms 32 and 51—Psalms of David.

When David was confronted by Nathan in relation to his grievous sin with Bathsheba, he did not try to minimize his transgression. He did not try to use Scripture to justify it or deny it, but he **confessed his sin**; he **acknowledged his transgression** (Psalm 51:3). In the process he confessed his total inability to save himself and the Law's inability to purge his sin. This is the first critical point. It is said that confession of wrong doing is not sufficient evidence of repentance in all cases of sin, and that is true. **Mere confession for the sake of it is not sufficient in regard to any sin. But it is equally true that certain sacrifices the ecclesia may ask the sinner to make are just as insufficient for sin to be purged!** For this is the basis of re-fellowship—the **forgiveness of sin**, is it not? (Read Psalm 51:1-4; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11) David knew God did not want him to go out and buy the biggest bullock he could find and sacrifice it so that he might **earn** forgiveness. "For you desire not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering" (Psalm 51:16). If David had said, "I will separate from Bathsheba", as evidence of his repentance and remorse, would this have altered what had happened and purged his sins? The death of Uriah, for all **external** appearances legitimised David's marriage with Bathsheba **but it did not remove the sin**; nor would a resolve to end his relationship with Bathsheba be an indication

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<sup>4</sup> As explained on pg. 11 paragraph 4 where the circumstances of 'porneia' exists, we ask the question "Does this give the innocent spouse the right to divorce and remarry? The Lord answers this in Matthew 19:9. Where no other commands of Christ is violated (i.e. suing at law) divorce from an unrepentant adulterous spouse **is not a sin against either Christ's teachings or against the spirit of them. However, Christ does not in his words encourage, let alone command it.**" Also on pg. 12 paragraph 2 "The reason the Master is not as clear and decisive about the injured partner as he is about the guilty, is because **the sons and daughters of God would not interpret Matthew 5 in isolation from all their Master's other teachings in chapters 5-7; principles by which 'we judge (or discern) ourselves truly, that we might not be judged' (1 Corinthians 11:31).**"

of **David's inner repentance**, though in all probability many of his contemporaries did not see it that way.

This point does not go undealt with in this most important record. "The servants of his house" did not understand David's actions when the child Bathsheba bore to David died, and David arose from the earth where he had lain prostrate. The record tells us he washed and anointed himself, changing his clothes and went in before Yahweh and worshipped. "**What is this thing that you have done?**" David's answer provides much insight for "the servants of the Beloved's household" of today. Some may feel that evidence of true scriptural repentance consists of certain impractical attempts at retracement **when the time for these has passed**. Retracements because of changed circumstances are not to the glory of Yahweh, nor are these external so-called evidences of repentance actually stipulated in Yahweh's word. What is however required are those **mental and moral offerings**, the sincerity of which Yahweh alone will be the ultimate judge of. "**Why should I fast?**" said David "**can I bring him back again**". The death of the child, David knew, ended the purpose of his supplications. **Remarriage after divorce Yahweh says (Deuteronomy 24:4) prevents any possibility of retracement**. What ought to happen then in the practicalities of living with the consequences of the choices we have made is likewise illustrated in the divine record of David's life.

David did not appeal in his prayer of Psalm 51 to the Law's schedule of sacrifices for his sin to be purged, but to that portion of God's law that revealed **Yahweh's character**, a character that he knew he had to strive to emulate so as to again be one with Yahweh. "Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin** and that will by no means clear the guilty..." (Exodus 34:6-7). Note well the three things Yahweh mercifully and graciously forgives, which David takes up in Psalm 51:2-3 and Psalm 32:1-2: **Iniquity**—"deliberate transgression and perversity, the act of hiding and even justifying wrongdoing, which has become a dark aspect of our way of living". Note well this definition, for some brethren and sisters may feel that they cannot break bread with those who have divorced and remarried for reasons other than the exception because they did it **deliberately**, though they have confessed their sin in the matter. **This was the judgement without mercy of Ahithophel**, Bathsheba's grandfather! **Transgression**—rebellion and trespass. **Sin**—offences (sometimes habitual). David found divine inspiration to express his thankfulness in this passage in Exodus which significantly reveals God's character in association with man's desperate need.

"I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me". **Acknowledgement** of sin, transgression, even iniquity is **the beginning** of this process of true scriptural repentance; but in the rending of soul and mind, in the agonising acknowledgement that we are guilty of such atrocities, it is from God alone we seek forgiveness. It is not from man in all his unmercifulness that we seek forgiveness, but from Yahweh, and if from Him alone, then it is against Him alone we have truly sinned and broken covenant, failing that unity of "the glory of the only begotten of the Father" to which we have been called (John 1:14; 17:22-23).

David knew what it was to fall into the hand of man in comparison to falling into the hands of God who judges righteously. David resoundingly in an exclamation of heartfelt gratitude acknowledges this truth in Psalm 32 when he receives the forgiveness of his sins, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom Yahweh counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile (deceit)". It is a blessed thing indeed that the spirit through David did **not** say, "Blessed is the man whom his **neighbour** does not impute iniquity". Man, who can only judge by the hearing of the ear and by the seeing of the eye, is unable to discern the intents of the heart; even

man who is so quick to remind his neighbour of his shortcomings, though he himself is compassed about with iniquity.

David's words acknowledge **God's conditions for forgiveness**, not man's. That which God requires is designed to cultivate the new man of the spirit to spring forth and bear much fruit from the "dry ground" of sin. But the precondition that allows God's way to have its perfect work is gratefully acknowledged by David, "in whose spirit (mind or disposition) there is no **guile**". **Where guile is practised, iniquity is imputed and any outward form of repentance is but a cloak of hypocrisy to God. Guile is treachery, deceit, the concealment or perversion of the truth, so as to deceive and mislead, to delude, to cause to fall and betray.**

The extreme form of guile is that of self-delusion and self-righteousness where someone, blinded by self-justification, sees their evil circumstances as the fault of others. This self-deception is illustrated in the Lord's parable of the Pharisee and the publican, (briefly considered on page 6) who went up into the temple to **worship**. The Pharisee prayed "with himself" (i.e. his prayer did not ascend to heaven but was for self). "God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, **adulterers**, or even as this tax collector, I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:10-11).

Here is a man who justified himself and quoted Scripture in the process. He did not need God's covering for sin; he kept all God's commandments or at least thought he did! The tax collector however stood "far off" and would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner (this is rendered "the sinner" in the Greek) Luke 18:13.

Here was a man who knew his need for God's mercy or his propitiation, he who is Yahweh's mercy seat. The feeling of this man's overwhelming weakness compelled him to the confession that he was **the sinner** above all sinners. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

If for whatever motive, or by whatever means we conceal iniquity and in effect say that we have no sin, then "we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us". If however, "we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

David in his ungodly deceit perhaps reasoned that he could hide his adultery if he could legitimise the deceit. "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead she is loosed from the law of her husband" (Romans 7). Yet the true state of our heart's guile is when we practice deceit with God. We know we cannot hide anything from God (Psalm 32:3-4), but the depravity of our hearts so blinds us, God's presence becomes an abstract and distant concept, even his promises once so nigh to our daily living, are made remote.

The divine testimony of David's life notes several prominent sins he committed, and yet in only one case is a distinction made. "David did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and turned not aside from anything he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). It is essential to understand the reason for this record; **David did not immediately confess and repent** before Yahweh of this grievous transgression. Instead he concealed the matter hoping time would heal his smitten conscience. **True repentance is a forsaking of the practice of guile.** Again it must be stressed; sin, transgression and iniquity are imputed when we attempt **to justify our wrongdoing by deceit**. When we refuse to face the truth about our failing and resolve **not** to forsake,

but to justify even legitimise sin, this is the moment God imputes iniquity. While one remains in this **state of mind** of practising guile, sin cannot be removed.

But note well and consider by God's grace the antithesis, "I **acknowledged** my sin unto thee and my iniquity have **I not hid, I said, I will confess** my transgressions unto thee Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah."—pause and calmly think of that! (Psalm 32:5). Note: **scriptural repentance is based on sincere confession, not works. It is upon this fact that Paul builds his doctrine of justification by the righteousness of faith Romans 4: 4–8. Failure to see this blinds us to the New Testament doctrine of how the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin!**

**Notice that the forgiveness is total and immediate**, never to be brought up by God again. "The Lord put away" (2 Samuel 12:13) David's iniquity, though many in Israel would never forget. It is man who made this into a perpetual reproach, but God considered it in the light of David's humility, resolve and confession, as water spilt on the ground, never to return. This is the memorial Psalm 32. **Brethren and sisters we ought to consider it carefully in its personal and ecclesial implications.**

The psalmist wants us to fellowship his experience in the bitterness of his despair, because like him we fail, not just on certain notable occasions, but unlike David, repeatedly and foolishly. We despair and wonder what God could ever see in us worth perpetuating. Yet with the psalmist we can ascend like eagles, soaring the incalculable heights of heavenly grace, the ecstasy of the verdict of the guiltless; which David as the representative of all "God's beloved" (the bride of Christ) shall receive and will exclaim, "Oh the blessedness of transgression forgiven and sin covered..."

God did not even wait for the confession to pass David's lips but in the very moment he **resolved to confess**; "I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave..." Instantly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, like the prodigal son when he resolved to confess his sins and go to his father and say, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee," in that very moment, though as yet so far off from his **father's house**, God grants forgiveness. The record graciously adds that the father, who lovingly awaited his son's return, searching the horizon for that lost sheep, rejoiced with exceeding joy and went out to meet him who has **resolved to return**.

Now if we compare this, the divine example, with that of man's judgment in the elder son who brought railing accusation against his brother before the father, what would man's judgement have been of David sin? Certain death for David and Bathsheba without a doubt, even as God through Nathan in his parable, compelled David to confess (2 Samuel 12). God alone could put away David's iniquity. We should never lose sight of this point, both personally and ecclesially, in dealing with cases of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than the exception. It is "God that hates putting away" (Malachi 3). He who puts away his spouse (innocent of porneia) has sinned against God, and his transgression against spouse and the ecclesia is a symptom of his breaking covenant with Yahweh.

As we have seen, the forgiveness of sin is the only possible scriptural position for re-fellowship, and this can only be attained by sincere repentance shown by a full recognition of the evil and confession of sin. In the case of one who has put away an innocent spouse and remarried, such recognition and confession of sin must then be followed by a determination to "sin no more". In the context of Matthew 5:27–32 and Matthew 19, this would mean the determined resolve, patterned after the Lord's example of prayer and the use of scripture to forsake evil desire that leads to covetousness, divorce and remarriage.

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## IS ADULTERY A CONTINUAL STATE AFTER REMARRIAGE?

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The well-meaning interjector may reason however that such a person is “living in a state of adultery” because the second marriage after divorce is not recognised by God as a marriage, that the first union remains binding, and therefore until further “sacrifice” of separation and the consequent breakup of family occurs, forgiveness cannot be obtained: and that this condition remains until reconciliation or the death of the first spouse has occurred. Only then can marriage to a second spouse be allowed! In response to this theory we submit the following points as a sample of some of the obvious objections.

(a) If this reasoning is correct then the conditional clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 need explanation that covers the many contradictions that a whole range of theories have suggested over many years. Such theories ignore what brethren Thomas and Roberts believed was **the simplest and most obvious interpretation**. These theories set aside the principles of Bible interpretation which marked the rediscovery of the truth from Papal and Protestant blasphemy. These principles of Bible interpretation are consistently used on other first principles, but sadly appear to be set aside when it comes to the subject of divorce and remarriage! Bro. Roberts points out “It ought not to be a matter of difficulty to determine how the Scriptures are to be interpreted. It ought to be easy to maintain that, with certain qualifications, **the Bible means what it says**”<sup>5</sup>. These theories are often made a test of fellowship to the point where bro. Roberts would not today be fellowshipped by other Christadelphian groups! We cannot but wonder how different the ecclesial world would be today if all brethren and sisters on all the issues that have divided the household of God and none more than the divorce and remarriage question, had instead stood fast with brethren Thomas and Roberts in their understanding of Scripture; their spiritual maturity made plain the demands of God’s holiness and truth while dealing with the realities of life where sin has marred the divine ideal.

(b) Nowhere in Scripture does the term, “living in adultery” apply to a second marriage after divorce.

(c) If the above explanation is correct then those who have divorced and remarried before coming to knowledge of the truth, ought to separate before they are baptised to manifest “true repentance”. Members of the Dawn fellowship, in trying to circumnavigate this consequence to the above theory, state that it is a **false** deduction to claim that as “sin is the transgression of God’s law and seeing that the people in the world are sinners, such people, although in darkness, transgress the precepts of God’s law”<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, this type of reasoning is adopted when the subject of divorce and remarriage is raised but abandoned when other pre-baptismal sins are discussed! The same author states, “We have no authority for saying that a faithless Jew or Gentile sins in ignorance against the precepts of Christ’s law, for they are outside that law”. This theory, charged by some Central brethren as “Andrewism”, makes baptism the point of responsibility, greatly weakening their witness. It goes without saying that bro. Roberts roundly dismissed such a theory. In response to the question, “Have we any actual sins of our own to be forgiven at our baptism? Or is the effect simply to free us from the law of sin and death that we inherit from Adam”. Answered, “How could any doubt exist on the point? Why should it be necessary to put such a question? Presumably because someone suggested that as the Gentiles are without God, and not under law to Christ, they cannot commit sin, which is the transgression of the law. **This is a mistaken application of truth.** Though the Gentiles are not accountable, because helplessly

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<sup>5</sup> Christendom Astray by R. Roberts: Lecture 1: The Bible—What it is and How to Interpret it

<sup>6</sup> “Christ’s teaching on divorce and remarriage” by GM Clements, published by The Dawn Book Supply

what they are, they are nonetheless **transgressors**, who must be forgiven before they can obtain favour. Leviticus 20:23 shows that nations not under law are odious, because of their wickedness”<sup>7</sup>.

(d) Nowhere in the New Testament is there a case of the Lord requiring a second divorce and separation as proof of repentance.

(e) Let us not forget the spiritual guidance of Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Verse 4 illustrates how Yahweh deals with the practical realities of the divorce and remarriage question. The divine commandment in verse 4 was designed to make an Israelite reflect deeply upon his actions against his wife; once divorced and **remarried**, if she was then loosed by her second husband or even if the second husband died, the first husband **could never take her to himself again**. This command should have discouraged the practice; yet because of the “hardness of their hearts” Israel ignored God’s warning. This was the practice the Lord condemns in Matthew 19 where the Pharisees divorced and remarried multiple times. **Nevertheless, Deuteronomy 24:4 proves that this second marriage is binding by God, though an obvious departure from the divine standard.**

(f) The Lord Jesus differentiated between the woman of Samaria’s five husbands and the man she was then living with. In doing so, the Lord Jesus did not in any way condone her immorality yet noted her previous marriages as marriages.

In Matthew 19:9 the Lord speaks of a second marriage following divorce and of a marriage to a divorced person as “committing adultery” because **the motive** of the man who divorces his wife, innocent of porneia, that he may marry another, is no different in the Lord’s estimation from a man desiring to satisfy his lusts with one other than his wife.

The penetrating motive revealing teachings of the Master of **Matthew 5 again becomes the key to correctly interpreting the Lord’s terminology in Matthew 19:9**. Matthew 5 shows us that the Lord judges hidden motive as if it were literal action taken to its contemplated fulfilment. In Matthew 19:9 the Lord is judging the **motive** of the man who puts away his wife, whom he knows is **innocent** of unfaithfulness, so that he may marry another, as outright adultery which to the Jewish mind under the Law meant the death penalty. Likewise, the one marrying the divorced wife is said to commit adultery because his heart with its most intimate desires is improperly directed to one whose love, faithfulness and affections are covenanted to another.

Though the sin committed in the second marriage does not strictly conform to the normal definition of adultery, the motive and the unlawful desires and affections aroused by it are comparable to an **act** of adultery. We emphasise the word **act**, because adultery is not a condition or a state. It may be a series of acts but it is not a “state”. **The Lord says that the sin of remarriage in Matthew 19:9 is compared to an act of adultery. Again we emphasise the key in understanding this is Matthew 5:28–32 where the Lord shows that this adultery begins with deceitful lusts and covetously ends in divorce and remarriage.**

It is also interesting to note, that with reference to the Greek of Matthew 5:32 and the Lord’s words “causeth her to **commit adultery**” is in the “aorist infinitive tense and passive voice”<sup>8</sup>. This refers to simple action and **not** linear or continuous action while the “passive voice” represents the subject (the wife wrongfully put away) receiving the action of the verb. The second occurrence of the phrase “commits adultery” at the end of verse 32 is the same verb in the Greek that is used in Mark 10:11–12;

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<sup>7</sup> The Christadelphian 1873 pp 232

<sup>8</sup> “A Parsing Guide to the Greek New Testament” by Nathan E. Han

Matthew 19:9 and Luke 16:18 and is in the “present indicative”. This tense represents action in progress now as opposed to action in the past or the future. As we would expect the spirit consistently selects the language that best reflects the teaching of Christ set forth in Matthew 5:28–32 i.e. the **adultery was progressive from its inception in the mind, to its physical manifestation in remarriage** and the language and grammar used illustrate this point. We cannot overemphasise the importance of a correct understanding of Christ’s principles taught in Matthew 5 on this matter. It not only sets forth the grave sin of allowing deceitful lust to harbour in our hearts to the point of leading us to divorce and remarriage but it also (verses 21–48) reveals what ought to be **the spirit of the wronged party by the appreciation of the grace of God**—to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He sent.

“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. **For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example**, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was **deceit** found in his mouth. When he was **reviled**, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he **did not threaten**, but continued entrusting himself to him who **judges justly**. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:20–24).

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## RETRACING ONE’S STEPS

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If reconciliation is at all possible, even at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, without breaching more commands in the process, then this should be attempted, especially since reconciliation and peace is the essence of God’s work through Christ. **These earnest, untiring attempts, which may continue for years unknown to the ecclesia, should be the daily subject of prayer made powerful by self-denial, love and the Christ-like desire to glorify the Father, and the salvation of the erring spouse; all of which should be undertaken patiently and without the glare of ecclesial scrutiny. It is the reflection on these often too few and feeble attempts that leave problems unresolved, things unsaid, feelings cruelly ignored, legitimate needs and desires unrealised, let alone ever attempted to be understood which all too often implicates the “innocent spouse” in what at last becomes an ecclesial problem too late to fix**—a problem which places unnecessary stress on more marriages and the unity of the body of Christ! But if remarriage has taken place, where is the scriptural evidence authorising the ecclesia to require a brother or sister to rescind another solemn lifelong binding vow? **Is this not an encouragement in the very practice which the Lord Jesus Christ condemns in Matthew chapters 5 and 19?** Shall such a brother or sister be required to continue in this sin of vow breaking, separation and divorce (1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 5) that God’s grace may abound? The apostle Paul answers, **“By no means”**.

Bro. Dowling in recounting discussions he had with Bro. Roberts on this very subject states, “I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the late Bro. Roberts for instructions received from him on the matter now being discussed. We were in correspondence for several years and he was a visitor in my home... It was my good fortune to attend a meeting in company with Bro. Roberts where this crotchet (the teaching that one had to divorce or separate from a second marriage as evidence of bringing forth “fruits meet for repentance”) was discussed and he roundly denounced it in unmeasured terms... The tendency of such teaching is to ‘corrupt the Word of God’, ‘giving the adversary the advantage over us’,

‘causing the way of the truth to be evil spoken of’, (2 Corinthians 2:11, 17; 2 Peter 2:2). The above is submitted with becoming humility, love and respect”<sup>9</sup>

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## CONSISTENT JUDGEMENT

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A further example of how our judgment ought to be consistent is the way ecclesias deal with marriage outside the truth. We do not require separation before re-fellowship. We do however call for repentance and recognition of the law of Christ. If the erring brother or sister confesses their error and manifests the fruit of the spirit in a life in harmony with the law of Christ and directing their family to follow a godly example, the ecclesia accepts them. When the situation is compared to divorce and remarriage cases, we see both are contrary to the law the Lord. Yet the one, upon confession of sin and expressed desire for acceptance, is re-fellowshipped and may remain in a **“state of being unequally yoked” for the rest of their lives**. But with the other, the sacrifice of separation from spouse and possibly children is called for as “evidence” of true repentance!

Bro. Dowling, who knew Bro. Roberts personally, was well acquainted with his well-balanced judgement, and upon comparing how ecclesias deal with these two types of cases states, “The future interests of all parties are equally involved. The hope of the conversion of the unbeliever in the one case (with respect to marriage outside the truth) is more than equalised by the hope of saving a soul or souls from death (with respect to divorce and remarriage). In both cases, it is an effort to convert ‘a sinner from the error of his way’ (James 5:20). Only when they refused to acknowledge or confess their sin, are we justified in refusing to receive them. There is, in all such cases, the opportunity of seeking forgiveness with the divine assurance that ‘he that seeketh findeth” (Matthew 7:8).

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## WHAT ARE THE SACRIFICES THAT CHARACTERISE TRUE REPENTANCE?

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David answers this question in Psalm 51:17. “The sacrifices of God are **a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise**”.

“A broken spirit”, in the original Hebrew is in the passive sense—to allow oneself to be willingly broken, non-resistance, a principle which has its full impact in the complete surrender of our will to the word of God. In a personal sense, God’s will must become ours where rebellion and iniquity once reigned because of sin. This principle of non-resistance must also be extended to our surrender to God’s appointed wise chastening, which are often the consequences of rebellion, so that we might be purified and refined from that evil which lays at the root of all our sinfulness, and be the recipients of God’s mercy. “Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercy is a great: and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Samuel 24:14).

“A broken and contrite heart” submits, mentally and physically, and is bruised, wounded, or suffers, according to the will of God. The Hebrew root of the word “bruised” is in fact used to describe the sacrifice of our Lord; “yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him”; “he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5, 10). So in a very real sense, this **“broken spirit and contrite heart” (the scriptural definition of**

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<sup>9</sup> “The Clapham Change” pages 19–20, July 31st 1940.

**repentance**) is inextricably linked with the exceedingly painful death of the flesh by crucifixion (Galatians 5:24).

It identifies us with the thief who was crucified with Christ (John 20:20), who came to see in the dying of his Lord the principles of life, and at last allowed his will also to be broken and put his faith in a crucified man saying, “remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:40–42). This man feared God. He recognised the just reward for sin of which he confessed, and saw the righteousness of God declared in His only begotten son. He, having faith in the forgiveness of the son of man, was forgiven instantaneously and completely. Though he lingered upon the cross, well after his Lord had died, his Lord’s heart had become his in all contriteness. When the Romans came with a wooden mallet to break his legs to end his suffering, his death with his Lord’s memorialised that Christ came to save sinners, and vividly exemplified the means by which this could be accomplished.

“I am crucified with Christ”, says Paul, “nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.

If we seek forgiveness as David did for murder and adultery, sins which all Israel came to know, (like the thief crucified for his sins for all to see) then with broken spirit and contrite heart, we too will have to linger upon the cross while the flesh is put to death. Yet in this excruciating process of dying, we live and become more alive, for Christ in his sacrificial love becomes the all-pervading force in our life.

By Christ’s sufferings or his stripes, we are healed (1Peter 2:21–24). This is the fruit which every repentant son and daughter of God shall reap—when the bones which in crucifixion are finally broken and the ordeal ends in the death of the man of the flesh, when those very bones which have been broken shall rejoice (Psalm 51:8), for they have been healed. It is not the man of the flesh which is the product of this healing, but the man of the spirit; that which had been cultivated as a result of repentance or “the broken spirit, the broken and contrite heart”.

These are the sacrifices that God requires from those who have committed sin including those who have sinned by divorcing a spouse who is innocent of porneia, and have remarried. **If these scriptural conditions are manifested, do we dare suggest that God will not forgive?** Scripture clearly states that such a one when this repentance is manifested is forgiven and mercy is extended. The iniquity is blotted out through faith in the sin covering efficacy of the blood of Christ.

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## SEEKING THE LOST SHEEP—BRO. GROWCOTT’S LAMENT

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There can be no doubt God will accept the sincerely repentant sinner. The entire divine witness of the combined Gospels testifies to this glorious fact. If God is willing not only to pardon but extend mercy, receiving the repentant sinner back, then why not the ecclesia? **The forgiveness of sin removes the barrier to fellowship.** Why will the ecclesia in certain cases forgive sin where that sin has been confessed and acknowledged and in certain cases of divorce and remarriage refuse? The apostle Paul as the Lord Jesus’ priest to the Gentiles (Romans 15:16) representing Christ, said to the ecclesia, “To whom **ye forgive anything**, I also forgive, lest Satan should get an advantage of us” (2 Corinthians 2:10–11). Therefore sins should be forgiven not only by the individual but also by the ecclesia. “Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me but in some measure – not to put it too severely – to all of you. For such a one, this **punishment by the majority is enough**, so you should **rather turn to forgive and**

**comfort him**, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (2 Corinthians 2:5–7, ESV). It is contrary to the principles of God manifestation for the ecclesia to exercise the right, in the words of Paul, to inflict “this punishment by the majority” while erecting unscriptural barriers that prevents the ecclesia’s ability to “turn to forgive and comfort”.

Bro. Thomas has reminded us that “the manifestation of the Yahweh name is only initiated not completed in the person of Jesus Christ”. If Yahweh’s character is to be amplified in the characters of true believers, then **the time has come** for us to “behold the glory of the only begotten of the Father” and **see where is the good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10)**. Is he amongst the ninety and nine righteous persons “**who need no repentance**”, safe in their peaceful ecclesial enclosure? Or is he out in the wilderness **seeking** the lost sheep (Luke 15:1–7)? If we are supposed to amplify Yahweh’s character which was made plain in Christ, then should we not follow his example and **seek his** lost sheep?

Woe to us, if we have time and time again been delivered from our folly by the good Shepherd, if we should at the last be found safe amongst the ninety and nine, the ecclesial barriers locked against “the lost sheep” while the good Shepherd is not found in our midst because he’s scouring the wilderness looking for that which the ecclesia in their righteousness has judged as “lost”! Whether that sheep is ultimately “lost” or “found” will be for the good Shepherd to declare; but what we ought to have no doubt of, is that the “**glory**” the Father gave to the Son, he has given to us—a glory “full of **grace and truth**”, that by **this means** we might be one, even as the Father and the Son are one, **Christ in us**, as the Father is in the Son, that we may become perfectly one (John 17:22–23; 1:14). If this unity is to be realized we must remember that the Father sent His Son to “**save sinners**”. Therefore the Son seeks “the lost sheep” and when he at last is commanded by the Father to return, he will recognise us as truly in him, **if we are found** doing what the Father asked us to behold in the Son (1 John 1–3).

Bro. Growcott, under the heading “**Seeking the Lost Sheep**” wrote in July 1971,

“If we approached even approximately close to the fulfilment of the divine requirements for the Bride of Christ, we would need have no fear from the danger and example of re-admitted and repentant sinners, however weak in the faith they might be.

We have shut our eyes to reality, to human needs. This is why we have dried up spiritually. When the original living fire and internal first-love strength of a community starts to dry up, it has to raise harsh barriers to keep the world from being sucked into its vacuum.

Sadly, I find very many Christadelphians more ready to condemn and expel than to take the trouble in compassion to disturb their own comfortable little lives and to actually put aside their own interests and pleasures and get out and really try to help the weak, and share their burdens and problems and sorrows. This has been a great source of shame, embarrassment, and distress to me.

**We have been remiss in the past in keeping the clear simple Scriptural teachings of our pioneer brethren on this subject clearly before the Brotherhood...” (Bro. Growcott)**

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## THE HOLY, RIGHT AND WILLING SPIRIT—THE MIND OF THE REPENTANT SINNER (PSALM 51:10–13)

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David, who had so pre-eminently been in Yahweh's presence mentally and morally throughout his life, had by transgression, interrupted that holy fellowship he had enjoyed with Yahweh. The "spirit" here in verse 11 is that right spirit of verse 10; a steadfast, constant spirit of faith which must be in the repentant sinner, so that he through Christ, can enter boldly into God's presence (Hebrews 10:19–23). This spirit must be a holy (i.e. set apart) spirit, for no other spirit (mind or disposition) will be acceptable in His sight. True repentance therefore, is a manifestation of a holy mind, truly set apart to do God's will, in contrast to before, when we had gone our own way (Isaiah 55:7). The creation of such a mind will empower us with assured confidence to believe God will, "restore the joy of his salvation and uphold us with his free spirit (or as better translated 'a willing spirit')"; a spirit (mind or disposition) that wants to serve God with all the heart and soul, in holy dedication, that brings forth "the fruits of the spirit", that is not only seen by God, but manifested to the ecclesia and all men.

The greatest of the fruits of this "willing spirit", this mind of true repentance, is the overwhelming desire to help those who have similarly gone astray, that they might also learn God's "ways" and "be converted" (verse 13). This is David's public declaration of Psalm 51. Oh what a repentant heart! His sins, transgressions, iniquity, confession and hope should be memorialised, "to the chief musician" for all Israel to sing!

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## "BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL: FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY"—THE FINAL LESSON OF PSALM 51

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There is both a grave responsibility and a great blessing associated with the correct appreciation in our personal and ecclesial life, of the principles of grace and truth. But when does a man learn the importance of these principles in his life? Is it not when that man is in the greatest need of it himself? There are two "thens" in Psalm 51 that gloriously illustrate this point which can be further elaborated upon in a brief consideration of David's life.

"**Then** will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners will return to you". David is pleading, Lord show grace unto me, show me mercy beyond the Law and **then** I will manifest these saving principles in my life towards others that they may learn of thee and thy ways.

The final "then" of Psalm 51 appears in verse 19. It is associated with Yahweh's building of the fallen walls of Jerusalem, a glorious allusion to the kingdom age. "**Then** will you delight in right sacrifices..."—sacrifices that no longer point forward, but point back as memorials to God's saving work through our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the principles remain the same; mercy and truth perpetuated for ever and ever.

The lesson for each and every one of us in our personal and ecclesial dealings with all cases of sin, including those who have divorced and remarried (for reasons other than porneia) and seek forgiveness is that we cannot possibly be associated with this second "then" of the kingdom age, if we are not participants of the first "then"; that is, having ourselves obtained mercy through God's grace, learnt to extend it to others, guided by Christ's example and teachings.

Why was David the recipient of God's mercy and forgiveness and yet so many of his contemporaries were not? Shimei and Joab met their just fate, the latter while he took hold of the horns of the altar, the symbol of God's power of mercy and forgiveness! Why? Joab never manifested mercy to anyone during his lifetime. Joab's life and death memorialises the principle, "he shall have judgement without mercy that has showed no mercy". The sweet Psalmist of Israel died with the sure mercies of God's grace ringing in his ears. His life memorialised the truth of "mercy rejoicing against judgement" (James 2:13). David's words and actions reflected God's judgement upon him. His life teems with examples of how God's mercy and truth found considered reciprocity in his own dealings with man.

Saul obtained mercy at David's hands on several occasions, leaving him to God's judgement. This and many other examples laid up for David in heaven a treasure of mercies such that when David himself so desperately needed to be the recipient of God's forgiveness, Yahweh, who cannot be unjust, immediately blotted out David's sin upon confession. Yahweh's mercy had to be accompanied with that necessary chastisement, which greatly refines the fruits of the broken and contrite heart. The incident with Bathsheba, David's repentance and the revelation in his life of God's mercy, became the defining elements of David's life.

Before the incident with Bathsheba David could say, "The Lord rewarded me according to **my righteousness**: according to the **cleanliness of my hands** hath he recompensed me" (Psalm 18:20). But after his great sin he said, "I will make mention of **thy righteousness, even thine only**" (Psalm 71:16).

This David, his own hand now greatly weakened because of his failings, a man smitten and acquainted with grief and the knowledge of his own weakness, tolerated the hardness and unmercifulness of Joab, the bitterness and cursing of Shimei, the treachery of Absalom, and the despicable behaviour of Amnon. David bore the consequence of his sin, which was heralded by the death of the child Bathsheba bore to him as a result of their adulterous union; a death which became a harbinger of what would be repeated again and again—the violation of Tamar, the death of Amnon, the public disgracing by Absalom of David's concubines, the death of Absalom and Adonijah—which bore testimony to the truth that "the sword shall never depart...". Thus David's sin haunted him. His terrible regret and remorse particularly for those caught up in the consequences of his sin, feelings which the Joabs of this life cannot perceive, testified to David's contrition.

There are always consequences that go hand in hand with our iniquity. We may also find that "the sword does not depart" for the remainder of our lives. Let us not add to the grief and burden of those who have transgressed and yet have repented with godly sorrow of their iniquity. Very often it is not a question of Yahweh having to punish us for our sins, but rather we are punished by the choices that we have made. Regrettably there are many Shimeis and Joabs who continually remember the failures of others, and unmercifully curse and belittle. They cause sorrow through their utter inept appreciation of their own accursed state. They cause to stumble, those who have already been ravished by sin, sadly often self-inflicted because of weakness, an experience we all share to varying degrees.

The wonder of the life of David, though he failed a great test, was that he faithfully submitted to God's chastening and became a man more fully transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, more so, ironically, than he was before his sin. This is something which we all should deeply consider, for a restored, forgiven, chastened man, has the potential of greater love and service than an illegitimate son untouched by God's hand.

David and Bathsheba had another son and it is recorded that God loved him. Yahweh sent a message by that very same prophet, Nathan, to inform them of this, and the child was called Jedidiah (beloved of Yahweh) and Solomon (peace). Why should God not only choose, but love this son above David's other offspring?

We wonder if it had been left to man's judgement, whether we would have picked the son of a union founded upon sin, a union, legitimised only by murder, to be the one through whom the promised seed would descend? Indeed would man's jurisprudence have allowed David to remain married to Bathsheba at all?

Both David and Bathsheba learnt the need for true repentance and the need for divine mercy and forgiveness. We do not truly realise to what extent we need to learn these lessons, until we enter the trials of David and Bathsheba. This is the key and mystery to the whole matter; the means by which Yahweh brings good and blessedness out of the midst of perversion, iniquity, sin, torment, sorrow and pain; even as David goes and comforts his grieving wife (2 Samuel 12:24) and as a direct consequence a son of promise is conceived; a son who is a symbol to David and Bathsheba (and all those who have suffered the consequences of their sins) of God's utter forgiveness and restoration to fellowship. They together represent the bride of Christ who comes to know their true need of salvation and as a consequence of receiving God's grace, reciprocate His mercy and truth to their fellow man.

Let us therefore heed the words of David's greater Son to "go, and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Your brother in Christ Jesus the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth, on behalf of the Brisbane Berean Christadelphian ecclesia.