

The Mystery is Great

By Hendrik Joubert

In answering the question: ***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?*** (Matthew 19:3) the Lord points out that, under the Law of Moses, the hardness of man's heart was the reason marriage did not remain as God originally designed it. (Matthew 19:8) What the Lord says next amounts to a full restoration of marriage to what it was ***from the beginning***. What he said remains difficult for many to accept – because of the hardness of hearts.

Marriage served to teach a number of spiritual lessons, both in the Old and the New Testaments. The relationship between husband and wife is the closest union man may enter into in this life. Under the Old Covenant faithfulness on behalf of the wife, was emphasized as extremely important. In **Numbers 5:11ff** we learn of the test for jealousy a wife may have been subjected to. If guilty the woman became a curse among her people. There were no consequences (in this life) for the man (because he is unknown to the people) and there is no evidence of a similar test for men. Women had to be careful to remain faithful.

The unfaithfulness of the wife is often used to illustrate the unfaithfulness of Israel. In **Numbers 15:39** disobedience to God is declared to be ***playing the harlot***. Man is guilty of breaking the covenant governing the relationship with God. It was difficult to convince Israel of their infidelity. In **Judges 2:17** Israel is said to have ***played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them***. God is the husband who demands loyalty as they demanded loyalty from their wives, and Israel ran after other husbands. In **Judges 8:33** ***...the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god***. In order to teach a lesson Hosea is instructed by God to: ***"Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD."*** (Hosea 1:2)

In our day it is very easy to criticize Israel for their unfaithfulness without noticing our own. In **Ephesians 5** we find instructions concerning the relationship between a husband and a wife. The husband is to love the wife ***as he loves himself***, and the wife is to be subject to the husband in ***everything***, as the church is subject to Christ. Both these are often considered extreme statements causing many to want to subject it to personal interpretation. (**2 Peter 1:20**) The husband who does not love to that extent, but also the ***liberated*** wife wants the subjection to be limited. Many Christians want the same limited responsibility in their relationship with Christ.

We will sneer at Israel while the church (the body of Christ) is degraded as it is indiscriminately divided among men, in spite of the clear instructions we find concerning the sinfulness of this practice. (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9**) The fact that Christ is ***the Savior of the body*** (**Ephesians 5:23**), bought with His blood (**Acts 20:28**).

In verse 32 of this chapter Paul makes a profound statement concerning what the Lord was revealing through him: ***This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*** (**Ephesians 5:32**) Again marriage is used to illustrate the closeness of the relationship between Christ and the church, His bride. He indeed gave himself for ***her***. It is our duty to be subject to Christ in everything. ***Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*** (**Colossians 3:17**)