

# DEAR PASTOR

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*A Plea for Honesty About  
Divorce and Remarriage*

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*Dear Pastor: A Plea for Honesty About Divorce & Remarriage*  
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# CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1. The Question	6
2. What Was Jerome Thinking?	8
3. What Had Christ Taught?	10
4. What Had the Apostles Taught?	12
5. What Had the Early Christians Taught?	15
6. But What About the Exception Clause?	20
7. More Common Objections	26
8. What About Returning to the Former Spouse?	38
9. What if the Former Marriage Had Been Adulterous?	44
10. The Most Important Thing	48
11. The Testimony of Jesus	53
12. One More Reason Revival Tarries	55
13. Brethren, What Shall We Do?	59
14. The Eulogy	66
15. The Hero	69
Appendix 1. Jerome's Original Letter About Fabiola	72
Appendix 2. Jerome's Letter Containing Fabiola's Eulogy	76

# INTRODUCTION

Roughly one million divorces are filed in the United States every year. Since a majority of U.S. citizens profess some form of Christianity, it follows that most of these divorces are filed by those who would say that they worship the God of the Bible. Ironically, it is this same God who declares in Malachi 2:16 that He *hates* divorce.

Could we rightfully conclude that God is angry with America, and especially with Christians in America, for doing so blatantly the very thing He hates so much? Could we conclude that we have been “treasuring up wrath” to ourselves because of the atrocities we’ve been committing against our spouses and children? If so, is there still time for us to repent? If there is, what exactly would that repentance look like?

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If you are a person with questions about what God says regarding divorce and remarriage, then I sincerely hope that this book can be a help to you. If you are a Christian and live in America, this subject very likely affects you in some way or another. Even if you personally have not been divorced and/or remarried, you probably have family members or fellow church members who have been.

But I am especially writing this book for you if you are a pastor. Many sincere Christians have honest questions about divorce, and even more of them about remarriage. While some of these individuals will study the Bible themselves to see what it says about this subject, most of them will not.

Instead, they will rely on the answers that you, their pastor, give them. There is therefore a great weight of responsibility resting on your shoulders, a responsibility for which one day you will give account to God.

The frightening reality is that during the last several decades there has been a complete about-face in the attitude of our society, including the Christian society, about divorce and remarriage. This can only mean that there has been a radical shift in the answers that pastors have been giving to their congregants about this subject.

The question we must ask ourselves is this: has this revolution brought us closer to or further from the will of God? Is God pleased or displeased with the changes He sees in society as a whole, and especially with the part of society that names the name of Christ? If He is displeased, how soon and how severe will the judgment be that He brings? And, finally, how much of the brunt of that judgment will be borne by the pastors who have helped lead God's people down the path we are now walking?

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This book is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the subject of marriage and divorce, complete with all the analyses of word meanings, grammatical structure, and cultural context. Other writers have dug deeply into those issues and produced studies that are far more comprehensive than this one. I pray, however, that this book will motivate people to think. I pray that it will motivate people to search the Scriptures. And most of all, I pray that it will motivate people to repent.

# 1

## THE QUESTION

About the year 394 AD, a church leader named Jerome received a letter from a fellow pastor asking for counsel. A woman named Fabiola had committed her life to Christ, he wrote, and desired to enter into communion with them as a congregation. The question he had was in regard to the marital status of this woman. Fabiola was happily married, it seemed, but not to her first husband. She had been married before, but had gotten divorced and then married again while her first husband was still living. What should he tell this woman who was applying for membership in the local body, and, more importantly, in the body of Christ?

If you are a typical Christian, you will probably be taken aback by Jerome's reply. He wrote back to the pastor and told him that this woman should separate herself from her current husband and should live in celibacy from that day forward. Only then could she be admitted to communion. Only then could she be considered to be right with God. Only then could she have the assurance of the eternal life after which she was so diligently seeking.

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Does Jerome's answer shock you? Does it seem harsh and unloving? Does it appear to you that Jerome was twisting Scripture into some horrific interpretation that would actually require a happily married couple to separate from each other?

Or was Jerome's answer the correct one, the Scriptural one, and therefore the most loving answer he could possibly have given?

If you are a church leader, how would you have answered the inquiry concerning this woman? Would you have instructed her to separate, as Jerome did? Or would you have given her your blessing to remain with her current husband, citing any one of a variety of reasons? Or would you, perhaps, have told her that "it depends," and that you would need to know more details about her particular situation before you could give her a direct answer?

Finally, how much does it matter what you would have told her? How important really is this entire question of divorce and remarriage?

If you live in the United States, you live in a country where nearly half of all marriages will end in divorce. And most of these people who do divorce will eventually get married again. And most of these marriages will occur while the former spouse is still living.

Yet, most people in this country also consider themselves to be Christians. They firmly believe themselves to be on their way to Heaven. Most people, including those in your congregation, would assert without any doubt that their names are in the Lamb's book of life.

If any of them are wrong, how are they going find out?

## 2

# WHAT WAS JEROME THINKING?

As you consider the astonishing answer that Jerome gave about this woman named Fabiola, perhaps the only question that comes to your mind is, “What in the world was he thinking? What could possibly have been his motivation for giving such an outlandish answer as the one that he gave?”

It’s a good question, a question that we really ought to consider before proceeding with this discussion. What was Jerome thinking? What were his thoughts about this woman? What were his thoughts about God and His Word? And finally, what were his thoughts about himself and his own responsibility in how he responded to this question?

Let’s begin by looking at this final question. What was Jerome’s personal responsibility in the answer that he gave about Fabiola?

Jerome, as an ardent student of the Word of God, knew that he was in a critical position as a church leader. He knew, based on Hebrews 13:17, that he had a responsibility to watch for this woman’s soul. He also knew from this same verse that he would some day give an account for the counsel he gave about her. And finally, this same verse told him that there was a distinct possibility that the day he gave account would be a day filled with grief rather than with joy.

Jerome also knew, based on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, that adulterers (and adulteresses) would not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, if this woman were in a relationship that God considered adultery, she would have her part in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8) unless she could somehow be set free from her sin and its consequences.



Finally, Jerome knew everything recorded in Scripture that Christ and the apostles had taught about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. And based on this knowledge, Jerome had determined that the only way for this woman to obtain eternal life was through the action he had prescribed: separation followed by a celibate life.

So what were these things that Christ had taught? What were the things that the apostles had taught? What were the passages of Scripture that had motivated Jerome to prescribe the extreme action that he did?

These questions, among others, we will attempt to answer in the following chapters.

### 3

## WHAT HAD CHRIST TAUGHT?

One of the fundamental truths that can be gleaned from the words of Jesus is the simple fact that God's will for His followers was going to be different, in some areas, from what it had been under the Mosaic Law. Numerous times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "It hath been said . . . but I say unto you."

In Luke 16:16 Jesus said,

"The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the Kingdom of God is preached . . ."

Two verses later, in Luke 16:18, Jesus made this statement,

"Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."

The meaning of this verse seems clear. There doesn't seem to be much need for interpretation. The notion that "if we look at the context, it will make more sense" doesn't seem to apply, since there doesn't seem to be much context. Jesus seems to be saying, without any ambiguity, that any remarriage which follows a divorce is adultery.

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In another passage, Mark 10:11-12, Jesus makes some similar statements. In this instance he was having a conversation

with the Pharisees, and then with His disciples. Listen to what He says in this passage.

“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”

So far, the message given to us by our Lord seems to be both clear and consistent. It is further established by Matthew 5:32b where He says,

“Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

There are a numerous other Scriptures pertaining to divorce and remarriage that we have not yet examined. But let’s stop here for a moment and ask ourselves an honest question. Based solely on these words of Christ we have looked at, does it appear that Jerome was mistaken in his counsel about this woman? Does it appear that he was trying to twist Scripture to make it say what he wanted it to say? Or does it appear that he had a sound Scriptural basis for the solution he had imposed?

## 4

# WHAT HAD THE APOSTLES TAUGHT?

If we were to examine Jerome's verdict in light of the things Paul wrote in his epistles, how would it stand up?

The following passages are no doubt some of the ones that Jerome took into consideration when he made his decision about Fabiola.

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39)

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. (Romans 7:2-3)

This final passage, some would say, should have no bearing at all on this discussion since it is referring only to the Old Testament law, and that simply by way of illustration. Although at first it may appear that this objection has a measure of truth to it, I would like to invite you to at least consider a slightly different way of looking at these verses.

Whenever we see the word “law” in the New Testament, we habitually assume that it is always referring to the Mosaic law. But the truth is that the word “law” is also used numerous times in reference to New Testament commands. They are called, for instance, “the law of faith”, “the law of the Spirit of life”, “the law of Christ”, “the law of liberty”, and “the royal law”. Is it possible that in Romans 7:2-3, Paul was alternating between these two definitions of “law” in order to make his point?

If this is true, then this passage basically is saying, “Just as a woman is bound under Christ’s law to her husband as long as he lives, so we are bound to the Mosaic law until we become dead to that law through the body of Christ.” This interpretation seems to make more sense since under the Mosaic law it was not strictly true that death alone could break the marriage bond, as the Romans 7 passage states.

I’m certainly not going to be dogmatic in proclaiming this interpretation to be the correct one. The other verses in Paul’s writings, most notably 1 Corinthians 7:39 (which also uses the word “law”), unquestionably draw us to the same conclusion whether or not we rely on the Romans 7 passage. Paul made it clear that He believed Christ’s commands were meant to be taken literally, no matter how painful it may be to do so.

After looking at these passages in Paul's epistles, let us ask again: was Jerome being unreasonable when he concluded that Fabiola's marriage was adultery? Or was that a very reasonable thing for him to conclude in light of these verses? Was he being unreasonable to conclude that only death can break the marriage bond? Or was that also a reasonable conclusion?

Was Jerome being unreasonable to conclude that Fabiola's marriage to her second husband, while her first husband was still living, was continual adultery against her first husband? Was he being unreasonable to conclude that the only remedy for this state of adultery, other than the death of her first husband, would be a separation from this physical relationship?

## WHAT HAD THE EARLY CHRISTIANS TAUGHT?

When Jerome gave his counsel that Fabiola needed to separate herself from her second marriage in order to be right with God, was he trying to introduce some radical new teaching? Was he trampling underfoot that which had been taught by church leaders prior to him? Or was his counsel in harmony with what the church as a whole had believed up until that point? The following quotes from *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* show us a glimpse of how this subject was viewed by certain church fathers who had lived prior to Jerome.

A person should either remain as he was born, or be content with one marriage. For a second marriage is only specious adultery. Jesus says, "For whoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery." He does not permit a man to send her away whose virginity he has brought to an end, nor to marry again. [Athenagoras, p. 554]

That erring Samaritan woman did not remain with one husband. Rather, she committed fornication by many marriages. [Irenaeus, p. 554]

But now, contrary to what was written, even some of the rulers of the church have permitted a woman to marry—even when her husband was living, doing

contrary to what was written. For it is said, “A wife is bound so long as her husband lives.” [Origen, p. 555]

A woman is an adulteress—even though she seems to be married to a man—if the former husband is still living. Likewise, also, the man who seems to marry the woman who has been put away, does not so much marry her as commit adultery with her—according to the declaration of the Savior. [Origen, p. 555]

All who have been twice married by human law, are sinners in the eye of our Master. [Justin Martyr, p. 218]

That the Scripture counsels marriage and allows no release from the union is expressly contained in the law, “You will not put away your wife, except for the cause of fornication.” And it regards as fornication the marriage of those separated while the other is alive. . . . “He who takes a woman who has been put away commits adultery.” [Clement of Alexandria, p. 218]

And I said to him, “Sir, if anyone has a wife who trusts in the Lord, and if he detects her in adultery, does the man sin if he continues to live with her?” And he said to me, “As long as he remains ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no transgression in living with her. But if the husband knows that his wife has gone astray, and if the woman does not repent, but persists in her fornication, and yet the



husband continues to live with her, he also is guilty of her crime, and a sharer in her adultery." And I said to him, "What then, sir, is the husband to do, if his wife continues in her vicious practices?" And he said, "The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he puts his wife away and marries another, he also commits adultery." [Hermas, p. 218]

The Lord holds it more pleasing that marriage should not be contracted, than that it should at all be dissolved. In short, He prohibits divorce except for the cause of fornication. [Tertullian, p. 218]

Christ prohibits divorce, saying, "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery. And whoever marries her who is put away from her husband also commits adultery." In order to forbid divorce, He makes it unlawful to marry a woman who has been put away. [Tertullian, p. 218]

Christ plainly forbids divorce; Moses unquestionably permits it. . . [Tertullian, p. 219]

The reason why He has abolished divorce, which "was not from the beginning," was in order to strengthen that thing which "was from the beginning"—the permanent joinder of two into one flesh. . . . So He permits divorce for no cause, except one. . . . So true is it that divorce "was not from the beginning," that among the Romans, it was not until after the six hundredth year from the building of the city (of Rome) that this type of "hard-heatedness"

began to be permitted. . . . To us, even if we do divorce them (i.e., adulterous spouses), marriage will not be lawful. [Tertullian, p. 219]

She must necessarily persevere in that peace with him whom she will no longer have the power to divorce. Not that she would have been marriageable—even if she had been able to divorce him. [Tertullian, p. 219]

We gladly abide by the bond of a single marriage. In the desire of procreating, we know either one wife, or none at all. [Mark Minucius Felix, p. 219]

A wife must not depart from her husband. Or, if she should depart, she must remain unmarried. [Cyprian, p. 219]

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Perhaps we could ask, “What difference does it make what these early Christians believed? Weren’t they reading the same Bible that we are reading? Couldn’t they have been in error themselves?”

The answer is yes, being human, they could have been in error. But if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that they had one big advantage that we do not have. Many of these men lived close enough to the time of the apostles that if they would have had a question about Bible doctrine, they could have sought counsel in person either from the apostles themselves or from those who had been taught by them.

So let us ask ourselves again. Was Jerome trampling on the teaching of Church leaders prior to him by the remedy he prescribed for Fabiola? Or was his decision in harmony with the teachings of the early Church fathers?

## 6

# BUT WHAT ABOUT THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE?

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” What is the significance of this phrase “except it be for fornication”?

Based largely on his interpretation of this phrase, a 16<sup>th</sup> century theologian named Erasmus propagated a theory which gave permission for the “innocent party” to remarry in the case of adultery. This theory was later rationalized by the explanation that the Old Testament penalty for adultery, committed by a married woman, was death. In the New Testament, since we do not put the offender to death as before, we may instead simply treat this woman *as though she were dead*. Thus there are two ways to effectively dissolve a marriage—death or adultery—and either one will leave the “innocent party” free to remarry. This teaching was soon expanded, however, to include actions other than adultery as grounds for divorce. Eventually it has come to the point where almost any action by either spouse can supposedly open the door for divorce, and virtually any divorce will leave both parties free to remarry.

The early church view, by contrast, was that remarriage was always wrong while the former spouse was still living. The exception clause, they believed, never gave permission for a remarriage, but only for the divorce itself. It was simply permission for a husband to separate himself from a wife who was persisting in the sin of adultery with another man,

lest he himself “be joined to a harlot” and thus become guilty with her in her sin. While the New Covenant teaches that it is generally wrong for a man to put away his wife, this phrase gives the one exception to that rule.

Through the rest of this chapter, the question we are seeking to answer is this: does the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 give permission to remarry, as Erasmus believed? Or does it only give limited permission to dissolve the first marriage, as the early Christians believed?

(There are a number of other interpretations of the exception clause, such as the betrothal view and the preteritive view, which we will not take the time to examine here. Suffice it to say that the only prominent view which allows for remarriage after divorce is the Erasmian view; all the other views agree that remarriage is adultery regardless of the reason for the divorce.)

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If we were to look at Matthew 19:9 alone and the words used in it, we could conceivably draw either one of the two conclusions mentioned above. This verse, by itself, could reasonably be used to support either the early church view or the Erasmian view. We should therefore look again at the other New Testament verses to see if they shed any light at all on this question.

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery. (Luke 16:18)

And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. (Mark 10:11-12)

These passages both make divorce with remarriage absolutely wrong, but do not mention the possibility of divorce without remarriage. Thus it appears that they would clearly conflict with the Erasmian view, yet be in perfect harmony with the early church view.

Some Christians teach that the absolute statements above were never meant to be taken as absolute. Rather, Jesus meant for the exception clause *to be understood* in these passages, even though it was not explicitly stated as it was in Matthew 19. They say that Jesus assumed that His Jewish audience would, because of their culture, automatically understand that there was an exception to the rule He was giving (and that this exception applied both to the divorce and to the remarriage.)

The problem with this logic is that the teachings of Jesus had repeatedly contradicted many of the well-established Jewish customs. He had so often and so clearly taught things contrary to what they were teaching that they knew His doctrine could never be interpreted accurately by trying to look through the eyes of their culture. Whatever this radical Teacher from Nazareth meant to say, He would have to say it Himself, and say it clearly. It was apparent to everyone that He was introducing a morality that was significantly different from anything that they had ever known.

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Let's continue our search by looking again at the words of Paul. Do these verses seem to support the Erasmian view or the early church view? Do they seem to support the idea that remarriage (with a former spouse still living) is sometimes an option, as Erasmus believed? Or that it would always be adultery, as the early Christians believed?

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. (Romans 7:2-3)

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39)

These verses seem to be totally consistent in saying that there is only one thing—death—that can set a married person free to marry someone else. To divorce and then remarry for any other reason, including for the cause of fornication, is adultery.

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In addition to Matthew 19:9, there is one more place in the New Testament where the exception clause is mentioned: it is in Matthew 5:32. Take a close look at this passage to see whether it sheds any light on the all-important question: did Jesus intend that the exception clause give permission to remarry? Or was He only giving permission (in very limited circumstances) for divorce?

But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

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Until Erasmus propagated his theory in the 1500's, the early church's rejection of remarriage after divorce remained the standard doctrine of the western church (even though there were many abuses in practice). Yet the Erasmian theory has seemingly influenced almost every non-Catholic branch of the church since that time, including, at first, the Anabaptists. Although certain groups eventually rejected this theory and returned largely to the early church position, the damage had already been done. Today's pandemic of divorce and remarriage in America can be traced almost directly to this man named Erasmus and his humanistic philosophies.

In light of the lack of Scriptural support for the Erasmian theory, coupled with the fact that this interpretation was not developed until the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D., it is truly amazing that



any serious Bible student would accept it as plausible. Yet the fact is that the vast majority of today's Protestants are still buying into this theory without questioning it, and are using its various forms to justify nearly unlimited permissiveness regarding remarriage after divorce. The numerous twists this idea has taken have basically rendered meaningless any prohibition to remarriage that Jesus may have intended to give.

Two questions that we really ought to be asking ourselves are as follows: First, what has been the true motivation for this blind acceptance of the Erasmian theory? Second, what will the end result of it be?

## 7

# MORE COMMON OBJECTIONS

Following are a number of other objections that have been raised in an effort to prove that to take a position like Jerome took would be extreme, unreasonable, or unscriptural.

1. Didn't Paul write that when a believer is deserted by an unbelieving spouse, he or she is "not under bondage"? How can you then say that he or she is not free to remarry?

The passage referred to here is 1 Corinthians 7:15. The answer is yes, Paul does clearly say that the believer is "not under bondage in such cases". The question we must ask, however, is "not under bondage to what?" What is the nature of the freedom mentioned here? It is often assumed this freedom must mean the freedom to remarry, but this verse doesn't say that at all. Instead, it spells out clearly the nature of this freedom. Here is the complete text of this verse.

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.  
A brother or a sister is not under bondage in  
such cases: but God hath called us to peace. (1  
Corinthians 7:15)

So the freedom mentioned here is just that: the freedom to allow the unbeliever to depart. The guilt that is normally attached to divorce (see the

prohibition given in 1 Corinthians 7:10) does not touch the believer who has been deserted, provided he or she has done nothing to provoke the separation.

The freedom to remarry, on the other hand, is not mentioned at all in this verse. That particular freedom can only be achieved by one event, and that event is also spelled out clearly in another verse later in this same chapter.

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but *if her husband be dead*, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39)

2. What if the remarriage has already occurred? Can't the couple just repent of their sin but then go on living together?

Those who ask this question seem to acknowledge that the *act* of remarriage is sin, but then deny that the *condition* of remarriage is also sin. In other words, the wedding was sin but the marriage is not. The cure, therefore, is to simply ask forgiveness for *getting remarried*; there is no need to then separate from that marriage as Jerome directed.

If you are one who holds this view, here is an important question you should ask yourself. If the on-going marriage is not sin, at what point did the sin stop? At what point did the sinful relationship become non-sinful?

Let me put this question another way. When a married man, on night number one, goes out with a prostitute, most of us would agree that he is committing adultery. But what about on night number two, when he divorces his wife and then goes out with the prostitute again? Or what about night number three, when he goes to a judge and marries the prostitute? What about nights number four, five, and six? At what point does this relationship stop being adultery? On which night did this relationship change from being sinful to sinless?

It seems far more reasonable to conclude, as Jerome did, that a lapse of time will never be enough to remove the adultery from this relationship. As long as the first spouse is still living, this second relationship will continue to be adulterous. This man will still be committing adultery against his first wife on nights four, five, six, and one hundred and six.

This is also consistent with Jesus' words in Mark 10:11 when He indicated that in addition to adultery being a vertical sin (against God), it is also a horizontal sin (against man). As long as the wife in the above illustration is still living, the man is still committing adultery against her, regardless of the amount of time that has passed.

3. What if the divorce and remarriage happened before conversion?

One argument that would doubtless be used against Jerome's counsel, if he were alive today, is this: "But what if this marriage, divorce, and remarriage all took place before this woman was saved? Doesn't the blood of Christ wash away her former sins? Since 'all things have become new', can't they simply ask forgiveness for past actions and then remain together as husband and wife?"

This argument sounds logical, but it is built on an assumption that is simply not true. It assumes that the thing which makes the second marriage adulterous is the sin of divorce. "Therefore," this reasoning continues, "if the sin of divorce can be washed away, then the second marriage will no longer be adulterous."

In reality, however, it is not the sin of divorce that makes the second marriage adulterous, but rather the existence of the first marriage. The first marriage is still binding as long as the other partner is still alive, according to 1 Corinthians 7:39. The first marriage is not a sin that can be simply wiped away at time of conversion, but rather a covenant which can be either honored or violated as long as both partners are still living. And the violation of a marriage covenant, through sexual relations with another person, is called adultery.

While it is true that the new birth brings momentous changes into the life of a new believer, there are certain physical conditions that do not automatically disappear. A tall person is still tall, a fat person is still fat, a debtor is still in debt, and earthly relationships still exist. And since God

recognizes even the marriages of unbelievers, a married person is still married.

4. Didn't Paul write that new believers should remain in the condition they were in at the time of conversion? Why then didn't Jerome tell Fabiola to remain in her second marriage?

Here is the passage in question.

Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. (1 Corinthians 7:24-28)

Paul is giving a general encouragement to believers (directed primarily to virgins) to remain in the marital state they were in at the time of their calling. But he simply is not giving any direction at all about what to do with an adulterous marriage. We can only assume that the bondage he mentions is a normal (non-adulterous) marriage and that the freedom he

mentions is due to the natural conditions of virginity (v. 25) or death (v. 39). To apply this passage to the unnatural condition of divorce and remarriage is to make an inference from silence, an inference that is very dangerous with a matter as important as this one.

To be consistent with the rest of Scripture we ought to treat an adulterous marriage that exists at the time of conversion just like we would treat any other sin. To repent is to turn from sin, which means that a killer will stop killing, a liar will stop lying, and a thief will give back what he has stolen. Likewise true repentance for someone in an adulterous marriage will mean turning from the adultery by getting out of the marriage, just as Jerome counseled Fabiola to do.

5. Surely a loving God would never be in favor of dividing a family, would He?

This question implies that God, being a God of love, is concerned primarily about our happiness. Yet the consistent testimony of Scripture is that God is far more concerned about our holiness than He is about our happiness. And there are times when, for the sake of holiness, He asks us to give up things that we think make us happy.

In Ezra chapter 10, for instance, we have the account of a large number of Jewish men who had taken foreign wives contrary to the law of God. After a time of prayer and fasting, Ezra instructed these men to separate themselves from these strange

women (verse 11). This was done, according to verse 14, in the hope that “the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us”. (Is it not reasonable to conclude similarly that God’s fierce wrath is right now about to fall upon America, and that it is at least partially because of the sin of divorce and remarriage? Are we willing to do whatever is in our power to divert that wrath?)

In another case, John the Baptist rebuked Herod because of his unlawful marriage. The implication in this passage is that he would have had to put her away in order to be right with God, thus again splitting up a family unit.

In spite of these two cases, however, it is still true that God’s desire generally is to protect the family unit and to see families stay together. This desire is one of the primary reasons for the stringent requirements Jesus placed on divorce and remarriage in the first place. In one of Tertullian’s quotes in Chapter 5, he implies that the very fact that remarriage is forbidden will itself become a deterrent to divorce. And this has certainly proven to be true in modern America. At one time in the recent past, remarriage was stigmatized, and divorces were extremely rare. Once remarriage became a respectable option, however, the number of divorces in this country grew exponentially.

6. But has this approach ever been successful?

For some, the biggest objection against the kind of decision that Jerome made about Fabiola is that it just



doesn't work. In the long run, they say, it doesn't work to split up a happily married couple and ask them to live separately. Eventually, they will give in to the pressure to get back together. Or one of them will get discouraged and then get remarried to someone else.

I can't deny that the situations are very rare where both spouses are permanently convinced of the need to separate. But should the rate of acceptance ever be a determining factor in discerning the will of God? Jesus said that certain classes of people (the rich) would have a very hard time entering the kingdom of God. Is it possible that He would say the same thing about those who are divorced? Is it right for us to alter the demands of the gospel in order to improve our "success rate" with any group of people?

The fact is that while Jerome's decision about Fabiola would be a very hard sell in any society, it is especially true in modern America. First of all, we as a nation are totally adverse to any hint of self-denial and sacrifice. Secondly, in this supposedly "Christian" nation, any couple who would take such a radical stand would immediately be faced with a whole boat-load of pastors telling them that they could and should get back together.

Is it possible that the success rate would improve if all pastors would become united in their call to radical repentance? Would the idea of separation become more acceptable once there have been a number of divorced and remarried couples that have taken such a stand? I don't know. Either way, our

basis for making such decisions must always be the Word of God, not the popular opinion of those affected.

7. But I know some divorced and remarried couples who live such beautiful, godly lives! Doesn't this prove that their marriages are not adulterous?

The fact is that there are many remarried couples today who profess to be Christians and are otherwise living seemingly godly lives. For some, this fact is a big hindrance to the acceptance of Christ's teachings about divorce and remarriage. They ask, "Doesn't the Bible say that we will know people by their fruits? Could they actually be producing these fruits if they are living in the sin of adultery?"

One thing we must remember as we answer this question is that we are called to examine our lives by the Word of God, not interpret the Word of God by human lives. Even though there are many people who seem to be bearing fruit that is supernatural, the real testing point ought to be whether or not they obey Christ. Jesus said there would be many people on judgment day who will be relying on their own supernatural fruit (prophesying, casting out demons, etc.) as evidence that they are right with God. But because they have been disobedient to the very commands of Christ, He is going to tell them, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

We must also remember that there are many members of cults and false religions who, to some

extent, produce fruit that looks supernatural. Often they have been set free from sins such as drugs, alcohol, and fornication, and have embraced good teachings such as family values, industry, and self-control. But these things are, in the long run, utterly vain if they are not built upon a true surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

8. I Timothy 4:3 says that it will be the false teachers who forbid people to marry. Doesn't this implicate Jerome when he counseled Fabiola to remain single?

The problem with this line of reasoning appears obvious, since this would also implicate our Lord Jesus when He forbade the remarriage of divorcees. Paul would also be implicating himself, since he had commanded a deserted spouse to "remain unmarried" in 1 Corinthians 7:11. There is a big difference between a general prohibition against marriage that applies to everyone and a specific prohibition against marriage for someone who has been previously married.

9. But I love my spouse too much to even consider the possibility of separation.

There is no doubt that a separation such as Jerome asked of Fabiola would be an extremely difficult ordeal to go through. The real question, however, is whether or not you love your spouse *enough* to go through this separation. Because if God is truly asking you to separate yourself from a sinful

relationship, then the most loving thing you could do for your spouse is to patiently endure the trial of separation. To insist on remaining in an adulterous relationship, and thus endangering the soul of your spouse (as well as your own soul), would actually be an act of hatred, not an act of true love.

10. But what if there are children from the second marriage? Won't it hurt them drastically if the marriage is split up? Shouldn't we be considerate of what this will do to them?

To this question I can only respond passionately, "Yes, let's be considerate of the children!" The horrendous permissiveness regarding divorce over the last several decades has destroyed the lives of millions of people, and tragically it has been the children who have suffered most. If all churches in America would take a stand against remarriage like Jesus taught, most divorce within the church would also fall by the wayside and put an end to this horrible carnage.

Would the children have to make some sacrifices if their parents would separate from each other for the cause of Christ? Probably. But it would be nothing compared to the horrible suffering they have already endured when their parents separated for the cause of Satan. What a powerful testimony it would be for these children to see Mommy and Daddy, who once lived for their own selfish motives, start to make difficult choices for the sake of righteousness!

The burden of this book is to urge all Christians toward a radical obedience to Jesus and a rejection of all divorce and remarriage, yet I know there will be many objections raised against this idea. Although I have attempted to answer some of these objections to the best of my ability, I also know that for many of you these answers have not been satisfactory. You still believe that one or more of these objections may have some merit. You still believe that there may be some valid exceptions for which this book does not make room.

If this is the situation with you, I would like to ask you a simple question. If you reject my proposal, what do you have to replace it with? If you make room for one of these exceptions that I have encouraged you to reject, what is your basis for doing so? If you are honest about your answer, don't you have to admit that it is based on a "maybe"? Isn't the allowance you are making based on what the Bible doesn't say, rather than on what it does say? If so, is this not a dangerous way to make such far-reaching decisions?

## WHAT ABOUT RETURNING TO THE FORMER SPOUSE?

At this point we could bring up an interesting question. Since Fabiola was not permitted to remain with her second husband, what about returning to her former one? Suppose he would have become converted and then desired to be reunited with Fabiola. Could they have done so?

Here is Jerome's answer to this question:

What I am about to say may sound novel but after all it is not new but old for it is supported by the witness of the Old Testament. If she leaves her second husband and desires to be reconciled with her first, she cannot be so now; for it is written in Deuteronomy: "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to

sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance." Wherefore, I beseech you, do your best to comfort her and to urge her to seek salvation. Diseased flesh calls for the knife and the searing-iron. The wound is to blame and not the healing art, if with a cruelty that is really kindness a physician to spare does not spare, and to be merciful is cruel.

In other words, Jerome was saying that the only right course for Fabiola at this point was to remain single. She could not be allowed to remain in her current (adulterous) marriage. Yet going back to her former husband was not an option either. And while such a verdict sounds extremely cruel and unmerciful, Jerome said, giving her this advice is actually the greatest kindness that could be done for her.

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Was Jerome's counsel correct? Was he rightly dividing the Scriptures by his response? Or should we reject his counsel since he was quoting from the Old Testament? After all, aren't we supposed to be living under the New Testament?

It is correct that we are living in the New Testament age. And it is true that there are a number of distinct differences between the requirements of God in the Old Testament and His requirements in the New Testament. Yet somehow Jerome considered these verses in Deuteronomy 24 to have at least some validity as he sought the will of God regarding this woman named Fabiola.

Paul was very emphatic in His epistles as he warned against the teachings of the Judaizers, who were trying to impose the requirements of the Old Testament laws upon New Testament believers. Many well-meaning believers

since the Judaizers have also tried to impose Mosaic laws regarding diet, the Sabbath, and circumcision on New Testament believers.

There is one important difference, however, between the issue of divorce (which Jerome was looking at) and the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary laws of the Old Testament. While Jesus had commanded his disciples virtually nothing regarding diet, the Sabbath, or circumcision, this was not the case with divorce. Rather, he had “raised the bar” on the issue of divorce, repeatedly and emphatically forbidding some of the very actions that would have been permitted under Moses’ law.

If it is true that Jerome was looking to Deuteronomy for the purpose of imposing Old Testament laws on Christian believers, then I would agree that he was in error in doing so. If, on the other hand, he was simply looking to this passage for help in correctly interpreting New Testament commands, then it appears to be a perfectly reasonable thing for him to do.

A question we should ask, therefore, is whether this prohibition in Deuteronomy 24 directly contradicts any of Jesus’ teachings in the New Testament. If it does, then we are absolutely justified in rejecting this prohibition and accepting in its place the words of Christ and the apostles. But if it fits in perfectly with what Jesus taught with no contradiction, then can we honestly say that Jerome was being unreasonable in looking to this passage for answers about what God considers to be adultery?

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Let us, then, look again at Jesus' words and see if there is any contradiction between them and the passage in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 mentions three different marriages: 1. The first marriage to the first husband, 2. The marriage to the second husband, and 3. The second marriage to the first husband. This Old Testament passage permits the first two marriages but forbids the final one.

Jesus' words are, "He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." The woman in Deuteronomy was a divorced woman (i.e. divorced from someone other than her prospective groom) prior to both the second and the third marriages above. Therefore Jesus seems to be permitting only the first marriage mentioned above, but not the second or third ones.

Many have argued against this suggestion by saying something like this. "Since Jesus doesn't permit remarriage after divorce, therefore He doesn't recognize it. Since He doesn't recognize the second marriage, therefore He doesn't recognize the second divorce. Since He doesn't recognize the second divorce, therefore this woman is not a 'divorced woman' prior to third marriage listed above." But although it may sound reasonable to formulate a theory based on this kind of analysis, wouldn't we be walking way out on a limb of logic to make real-life decisions this way?

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If it is true, as some say, that Jesus lifted the Deuteronomy 24 restriction in the New Testament, it would be the only instance where He loosened the restrictions regarding marital relations from what was commanded in the Old Testament. In all the other teachings Jesus gave regarding

marriage and divorce, we find that the standard is higher and the requirements stricter. Should we be willing to make the call that God's requirements in this one area are less stringent than before, when all the clear teachings of Christ point to the contrary?

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Another objection that is sometimes raised against the kind of advice Jerome gave goes something like this: "Isn't God's heart different in the New Testament in that He now is a God of reconciliation? Wouldn't this show that the Deuteronomy passage has been nullified since it works against reconciliation?"

I wonder if those who use this reasoning truly realize what they are saying. Are they saying that God in the Old Testament did not have a heart of reconciliation? If so, that simply is not true. God was continually calling His people in the Old Testament to repent and come back to Him. Some of the greatest examples of mercy and forgiveness are found in Old Testament stories of our gracious, compassionate God.

The question we are dealing with here is not whether God is a God of reconciliation, but what the will of God is regarding divorce and remarriage. Once we find out what His will in this area is, then we can know that everything outside His will is sin. Sin is the ultimate separator from God, so if we really care about true reconciliation, we will keep ourselves far from anything that separates from Him, including an adulterous relationship.

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If it is true that Jesus wanted to nullify the Deuteronomy 24 restriction, and send all divorced and remarried people back

to their former spouses, He would have had the perfect opportunity to demonstrate this. In His conversation with the woman at the well, He noted that she had been married to five different husbands. Yet He did not tell her she should go back and get remarried to her first husband. He did not tell her that she had only one “real” husband, and that she should go look for him. Rather, he told her, “Thou hast well said, ‘I have no husband’: . . . In that thou saidst truly.”

For this woman to continue on in a marriage relationship with *any* of her five spouses apparently would have been an act of adultery against the other four. To remain single, on the other hand, would be a clear act of repentance for her adultery against all five of them.

Obviously we can't say that Jesus' primary goal in this conversation was to give a teaching about divorce and remarriage. Yet is it not reasonable to at least take this conversation into consideration as we deal with the many people in this country who are in situations similar to that of this woman?

## WHAT IF THE FORMER MARRIAGE HAD BEEN ADULTEROUS?

Imagine this scenario. Two women, both of whom are living alone, start attending your church and eventually become converted. After their conversion, the question comes up regarding their marital status. When you find out that both of them have been married before, and that both their former husbands are still living, you explain to them that Scripture forbids their remarriage, since “He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Later you discover that one of these women, although she had been married before, had actually been married to a divorcee. The marriage she had been in previously had itself been an adulterous marriage. Does this fact change your answer regarding the possibility of remarriage?

Many Christians who are honestly trying to take Jesus’ teaching on divorce at face value would answer yes. Since this woman’s first husband had been married before, they say, their union had not actually been a marriage, but rather adultery. Therefore, since this woman had never been part of a “valid” marriage, she ought to be free to marry someone else.

This position certainly has a measure of logic about it. And if this is your position, you have probably spent some time thinking through this logic and solidifying your beliefs about this kind of situation. I’m therefore sure that convincing you to change your mind is much more than I can do in these few pages.

Yet I would like to ask you to at least consider for a few minutes some thoughts about this issue. Some of these points you have pondered already. Some of them, quite possibly, you have not. These are points which, to me, seem to point strongly to the conclusion that celibacy ought to be the only option available for those who have been in adulterous marriages and have an ex-spouse still living.

1. Adultery is not only a sin against God; it is also a sin against another person. Jesus said in Mark 10:11, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery *against her*."

The simple fact is that a twice-married person has stood beside two different people and made vows of sexual faithfulness to both of them. While it is true that he should not have done so, that fact is that he has done so. To continue in any marital relationship, therefore, would appear to be committing adultery against one of them.

Perhaps we could argue, "Since the second set of vows should never have been made, God didn't hear those vows, and therefore they can't be violated." This argument is dubious since Scripture seems to affirm that God hears even those vows that should not have been made. But whether or not this is true, this argument only takes into account the potential sin *against God* and ignores the potential sin *against man*.

The raw nature of adultery is that despite all the arguments that we could present, a remarriage has the potential to *feel* like adultery to the offended party, even when the first marriage was not valid. If

a man would, for the sake of purity, leave an adulterous marriage and then remain single, it could be seen as both understandable and honorable to the wife (and children) who are left behind. But for her to see him to get married again while she must remain single would be like a perpetual sword being plunged into her heart. Does it not seem reasonable that Jesus was thinking of this very scenario when gave the “against her” statement in Mark 10:11?

2. Jesus’ statement “He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” was given without any qualification. He did not say “He who marries a divorce woman commits adultery—unless she was divorced from an adulterous marriage.”

This blanket statement by Jesus has only one exception given in Scripture; it is where both parties in a divorce have remained single and then returned to *each other* (1 Corinthian 7:11). Other than this one exception, the clear words of Jesus state that any marriage to a divorced woman (whose former husband is still living) is adultery.

The woman in the example above is, in the clearest sense of the word, a divorced woman. We may have a good deal of logic for permitting this woman to get remarried. But when we do, we are taking it upon ourselves to make a very crucial call. We are making the call that there is an exception to the words of Jesus, “He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Dear Pastor, is that a call that you are willing to make?

3. To allow for this exception adds a murkiness to the issue at a time when clarity is needed. It makes the question of my standing with God rest on the actions of other people, people who for the most part are outside of my control.

To make this exception would force us to drastically complicate the methods of dealing with divorcees who are seeking repentance. Rather than simply asking, "Do you have a former spouse that is still living?" we would need to examine each of the former spouses to see if they had been married before. Then, if they had been, we would need to examine the marital situation of each of *their* former spouses, and so on.

I believe rather that God is calling His church to take a clear stand against the plague of divorce and remarriage that has swept our nation. He is asking us to sound a clear call for men and women to repent, and then to leave the response to that call in the hands of the hearers. Due to the high cost involved, I fear that the number of those who respond will be very small. Yet He is still calling us to preach His truth with boldness and clarity, and not alter the message or to try to find exceptions that will somehow lessen the cost of following Christ.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

If someone were to ask you what you believe is the most important subject found in Scripture, what would you tell him? If there is one thing above all others that you as a pastor ought to be teaching to your listeners, what would it be? The existence of God? The story of Creation? Salvation by faith? End-times Prophecy? The Doctrine of the Trinity?

We should never minimize the importance of any truth we find in Scripture. If you are a faithful pastor, you ought to be teaching your people the truth about all of the above subjects, especially since many of them are built upon each other.

Yet Jesus did place special emphasis on one particular theme; a theme, he said, that we ought to be teaching to all nations. As His earthly ministry was drawing to a close, He instructed His disciples to go, to teach, and to baptize. “But,” the disciples may have wondered, “what specifically are we supposed to teach these people?” Jesus gave them a very clear answer by saying “. . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20)

In other words, the subject of *obedience* was supposed to be front and center in the teaching program of the Christian church. Not obedience to just anything, but obedience specifically *to the commands Christ gave to His disciples*. This is the reason the early Christians placed such emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount; it is the largest group of Christ’s commands that we have recorded anywhere in Scripture. And since this sermon was preached to his disciples, it fits



clearly into the “whatsoever I have commanded you” found in the great commission.

The great commission was not the first time Christ had mentioned obedience. He had been placing a tremendous amount of emphasis on obedience all throughout His ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount itself, just before giving His disciples a long list of revolutionary commands, He said,

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Then, at the end of the sermon, He repeated this emphasis by saying,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded*

upon a rock. *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.* (Matthew 7:21-27)

It appears from this passage that obedience is not only associated with our salvation, but is actually one of the most important aspects of it. But is this just an isolated passage? Or does this emphasis carry through in the rest of Jesus' teachings? Consider these passages:

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. (John 8:51)

If ye love me, keep my commandments. (John 14:15)

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. (John 14:21)

If a man love me, he will keep my words: (John 14:23)

He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:24)

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:10)

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. (John 15:14)

What about the rest of the New Testament? Did the apostles put as much emphasis on obedience as Christ did?

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: (2 Thessalonians 1:8)

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing . . . (1 Timothy 6:3-4)

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:3-4)

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:2-3)

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)

Pastor, are you faithfully doing and teaching the commands of Christ? Are you instructing your listeners to obey the Sermon on the Mount, and thus build their lives on the Rock?

What about this issue of Divorce and Remarriage? Are you obeying the great commission regarding this issue?

## 11

# THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

One writer recently observed, “When we step back and look at the practice of divorce and remarriage in the Church today, it is hard to imagine that Jesus ever gave *any* prohibition against divorce and remarriage at all.”

The consequences of the drastic increase in the rate of divorce among Christians have been manifold. The pain that spouses go through as a result of a failed marriage is tremendous. Even more heartbreaking is the emotional trauma that the children must endure. But perhaps worst of all is the damage that has been done to the name of Jesus Christ.

A simple internet search on the subject of divorce produced quotes like, “Twenty-seven percent of those describing themselves as born-again Christians are currently or have previously been divorced, compared to 24 percent among other adults.” Or in reference to a recent study: “Divorce rates among conservative Christians were significantly higher than for other faith groups, and much higher than atheists and agnostics experience.”

The sad thing about this search was that it was primarily the anti-Christian websites who were publicizing this information. They were using this data to prove that Christianity really does not help people lead better lives. They were using it to disprove the proverb, “The family that prays together stays together.”

But even though it may be the non-Christians who publicize this information, we cannot say it is them that produce it. The blame for producing these sad statistics lies

squarely in the laps of Christians and those who lead them. The name of Christ is truly being blasphemed among the heathen, and only eternity will reveal how many souls will be lost because of it.

# ONE MORE REASON REVIVAL TARRIES

There has been a lot of focus lately by Christians in America on the subject of revival. We read stories about local, national, and even worldwide revivals that took place in history. We write books and preach sermons about how to bring revival. And last but not least, we are gathering together more and more to pray for revival.

Frankly, I'm excited about this renewed interest in revival. People, churches, and nations have been fundamentally changed as a result of revivals in the past, and I long for God to do it again in this our day. I long to see the relationships that would be restored, the believers that would be set aflame for Christ, and the unbelievers that would get converted as a result of a genuine outpouring of God's Spirit in this land of ours.

But at the same time, I am fearful. I am fearful that despite all the talk of revival, it may never actually come to America in the way that God desires. I am fearful that we as the American Church have slid too far down the chute of apostasy to ever be revived. I am fearful that we have rotted so completely from the inside that there is no longer the seedbed of revival that existed before other great revivals in history. I am fearful that we will not be willing to pay the necessary price in order to allow revival to come.

The purpose for revival, you see, is not ultimately for the happiness of man. The purpose for revival is the glory of God. And His glory will be accurately portrayed only by a

church which reflects, to some degree, His character, His beauty, and His holiness.

As we discussed in chapter 10, one of the primary measuring sticks God uses in examining His people is their response to the commands of Jesus. God is ultimately glorified in a church that obeys His commands and He is disgraced by a church that ignores His commands.

Recently I heard a speaker make a startling speculation regarding the commands of Christ contained in the Sermon on the Mount. "What would happen," he asked, "if a church would decide to do everything the *opposite* of what the Sermon on the Mount teaches? What if they would look at every major command in this Sermon and then deliberately disobey it?" He then observed that the result would look frighteningly similar to the church that we now see in North America. It almost appears that we have studied Jesus' words regarding swearing of oaths, loving our enemies, laying up treasures, and divorce and remarriage, and then deliberately chosen to do the opposite.

The fear that I have is that the cost to correct this sad state of affairs is far more than what most believers will ever be willing to pay. To "turn from their wicked way" in regard to these commands alone would totally disrupt the lives of the vast majority of American Christians. And since Americans as a whole are adverse to the idea of having their lives disrupted, my fear is that true revival will never come.

But what if I am wrong? What if large numbers of believers would turn back to a literal, wholehearted obedience to the commands of Christ? What if they would start loving their enemies rather than killing them (whether it be in self-defense or in war)? What if they would stop laying up treasures on earth and begin instead to lay up



treasures in Heaven? What if they would separate themselves from the millions of adulterous marriages in existence right now?

Then I would gladly eat my words and praise God for His mercy. I would praise Him for the true revival that He has poured out on His people. I would praise Him for a church that truly reflects His image, and for the great harvest of souls that would no doubt result from such a witness.

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Here is one final thought about revival, directly from the Word of God. Please consider these words from the book of Malachi, and see if God appears to be making a connection between His delay in sending revival and a wrong view of divorce. Could this be a prophecy about the modern American Church?

And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his

garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? (Malachi 2:13-17)

## 13

# BRETHREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO?

At various times in Scripture we read of groups of people who found themselves in the terrifying position of being under the fierce wrath of an almighty God. In most of these cases the people hardened their hearts and were judged accordingly, as in the case of Sodom, the pre-flood world, and the Jews in Jeremiah's day. Other times, though, they chose to humble themselves and were spared judgment, as in the case of King Manasseh, the city of Ninevah, and the Jews at Pentecost.

This last group, the Jews who "were pricked in their heart" when they heard Peter's sermon at Pentecost, asked the very pertinent question, "men and brethren, what shall we do?" This question should be asked only by those who fully recognize that they are under the wrath of God and are willing to do absolutely anything to escape.

When we take an honest look at the issue of divorce and remarriage, it ought to make us tremble as we think of the fierce wrath of God that must be hanging over this nation even now. It ought to make us desperate and willing to do whatever it takes to obtain His forgiveness. It ought to make us cry out like the guilt-ridden Jews at Pentecost, "What shall we do?"

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To those who are desperate enough and courageous enough to ask "what shall we do?" in regards to divorce and

remarriage, I would like to offer some proposals. When I first considered the thought of actually writing down the things I am sharing with you here, I admit it struck some fear to my heart. I feared the reaction and the rejection that I knew would follow.

My second thought, however, was far more realistic: "How silly of me to fear the opinion of puny mortals, who, like me, will face the justice and wrath of a holy God." I therefore make these proposals with no fear except the fear that they may not be enough to turn away God's wrath. I make them in the spirit of the king of Ninevah, who after proclaiming a fast of repentance, asked, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:9)

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I propose first that all Christian pastors should refuse to perform marriages where a divorced person is involved. That is, if either party has been married before to someone who is still living, we should kindly, lovingly, and firmly refuse to take part in the marriage ceremony.

Secondly, I propose that we ask all members of our flock who have been married more than once, with more than one spouse or ex-spouse still living, to live in celibacy from this day forward. Make a commitment that, to the best of your ability, you will serve communion only to those who are willing to purge themselves from all known sin, including the sin of adultery.

If you are a pastor, there is no doubt that making commitments such as these will cost you dearly. Many of your members will likely leave your church immediately to find a new one. Or perhaps even more likely, they will ask

you to leave the church so that they can hire a new pastor. Is such a price too high? Listen to what Jesus says:

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

Again He says:

And I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (Luke 12:4-5)

You will be tempted to focus on what it will cost you if you teach and preach these things. Ask God for the grace to resist these temptations, however, and instead ask yourself what it will cost you if you don't.

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If you are yourself in a divorced and remarried situation, these commitments will also cost you very dearly. But Jesus says again

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. . . And every one that hath forsaken . . . or wife . . . for my name's sake,

shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. (Matthew 19:12, 29)

This phrase “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” is not saying “you can take it or leave it, either way you’ll be right with God.” Rather, Jesus is using language similar to the numerous times that He said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” He is urging people from all over the world to receive and obey His hard sayings about divorce and remarriage, knowing full well the sad truth stated in the following passage.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. (Luke 13:23-24)

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In the face of wide-spread tolerance of divorce and remarriage among evangelical Christians, there are still a few courageous leaders, writers, and teachers who are attempting to take some sort of a stand against it. Among these, however, there is a glaring lack of consensus about what to do once the remarriage has already taken place.

Some have rightly concluded, as Jerome did, that it would be wrong to remain in the second (adulterous) marriage. They would, however, allow and even encourage a person to try to bring reconciliation to the first “original” marriage.

Others state just as strongly that returning to the former spouse is no longer an option. Therefore, they say, remarried

people should be allowed to simply confess their sin but then remain in that second marriage.

In this book I have suggested strongly that we should not be making any of these allowances. My reasons for doing so, in summary, are as follows:

1. **Jesus' dealing with the woman at the well.** He did not tell her to remain with her current husband. Nor did he tell her to return to her first husband. His verdict, rather, was "thou hast no husband".
2. **Jesus' "eunuch" saying.** Along with Paul's counsel to "remain unmarried", this indicates the Biblical approval of singlehood rather than being involved in multiple marriages.
3. **Jesus' "against her" saying.** Since adultery is a sin against another human, to continue on in *any* marriage when there is an ex-spouse still living, looks like, smells like, and probably feels like adultery against that person.
4. **The lack of a better solution.** None of the allowances that are commonly made are supported directly by Scripture, but rather by inferences and logic. And although many of you are still not convinced that this book's position is air-tight, the burden of proof ought to be on those who make these allowances, not on those who reject them.
5. **The desperate need for clarity.** The situation is perilous and the hour is late. We as God's people

need to sound out a clear warning and a clear call to repentance, and that very quickly. To make exceptions for one situation or another will only muddy the water and raise questions about some of the other possible exceptions.

6. **The coming wrath.** If we really believe that our nation's sins have ascended to God in Heaven, we ought to be trembling from the image of His impending wrath, not apologetic about the idea of radical repentance. Our decisions should not be based on what is popular, convenient, or acceptable, but on what kind of actions might turn God's anger and incur His favor. If God has granted to any of us the wonderful privilege of radical repentance, let us think soberly about the millions of lost souls for whom repentance is no longer an option. Let us then seize this repentance gratefully, thank Him continually, and cling to it forever.

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If God in His mercy should grant to a large number of divorced and remarried people the grace to heed this call to radical repentance, the ramifications would truly be staggering. Not only would the persecution be intense from those who oppose this decision, but there would also be many practical questions to answer regarding children, living arrangements, and personal purity. I do not have the space, the wisdom, or the time to try to prescribe a practical resolution for every sticky situation that would result. My primary counsel for someone who is in such a situation would be to surround themselves with a group of Christians



who are spiritual, supportive, and caring, and allow themselves to be guided through the perilous battleground that lies ahead.

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I fully recognize that most pastors will flatly refuse to accept most of the things I've proposed above. I also recognize that even in cases where church leaders do accept them, most of the people in their congregations will reject them. This is simply because most of us in North American churches do not realize the true situation that we are in. We think we are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" and don't realize that we actually are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked". Jesus is about to spit us out of His mouth into the eternal fires of Hell, and most of us either don't believe it or don't care.

My prayer, however, is that there will be a few who do believe it, and that they will care enough to do something about it. If that is your heart, pastor, then may God be with you.

## 14

# THE EULOGY

Years had passed since Jerome received the letter about Fabiola. She had responded beautifully to his first letter, repenting thoroughly from her sin, breaking off her adulterous marriage, and living in celibacy from that day forward.<sup>1</sup> Her life had become a life of beautiful devotion to God, a life of prayer, fasting, and service to the poor.

Then Jerome received the news that Fabiola had died. Her earthly life had been brought to an end and she had passed triumphantly into the presence of the Lord. Jerome was asked to write a eulogy for her, and he gladly accepted.

In this eulogy (the full text of which is found in Appendix 2) Jerome mentions that the faults of Fabiola's first husband were "so terrible . . . that not even a prostitute or a common slave could have put up with them." He then tells about how Fabiola had mistakenly thought herself free to marry after her divorce from her first husband. Then how, upon realizing her error, she had repented from her sin and sought earnestly the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ.

He goes on to speak of the beautiful life she had lived after her repentance. He states:

"To-day you give me as my theme Fabiola, the praise of the Christians, the marvel of the gentiles, the sorrow of the poor, and the consolation of the monks. Whatever point in her character I choose to treat of

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently Fabiola's second husband died soon after Jerome's first letter was written, so the exact chronology of events is not totally clear.

first, pales into insignificance compared with those which follow after. Shall I praise her fasts? Her alms are greater still. Shall I commend her lowliness? The glow of her faith is yet brighter. Shall I mention her studied plainness in dress, her voluntary choice of plebeian costume and the garb of a slave that she might put to shame silken robes? To change one's disposition is a greater achievement than to change one's dress."

Here is part of what Jerome wrote regarding her divorce, remarriage, and repentance.

And because at the very outset there is a rock in the path and she is overwhelmed by a storm of censure, for having forsaken her first husband and having taken a second, I will not praise her for her conversion till I have first cleared her of this charge.

So terrible then were the faults imputed to her former husband that not even a prostitute or a common slave could have put up with them. If I were to recount them, I should undo the heroism of the wife who chose to bear the blame of a separation rather than to blacken the character and expose the stains of him who was one body with her. I will only urge this one plea which is sufficient to exonerate a chaste matron and a Christian woman. The Lord has given commandment that a wife must not be put away "except it be for fornication, and that, if put away, she must remain unmarried." (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:11)

Now a commandment which is given to men logically applies to women also. For it cannot be that, while an adulterous wife is to be put away, an incontinent husband is to be retained. The apostle says: "he which is joined to an harlot is one body." (1 Corinthians 6:16) Therefore she also who is joined to a whoremonger and unchaste person is made one body with him. . . .

Fabiola therefore was fully persuaded in her own mind: she thought she had acted legitimately in putting away her husband, and that when she had done so she was free to marry again. She did not know that the rigour of the gospel takes away from women all pretexts for re-marriage so long as their former husbands are alive; and not knowing this, though she contrived to evade other assaults of the devil, she at this point unwittingly exposed herself to a wound from him.

But why do I linger over old and forgotten matters, seeking to excuse a fault for which Fabiola has herself confessed her penitence? Who would believe that, after the death of her second husband at a time when most widows, having shaken off the yoke of servitude, grow careless and allow themselves more liberty than ever, frequenting the baths, flitting through the streets, shewing their harlot faces everywhere; that at this time Fabiola came to herself? Yet it was then that she put on sackcloth to make public confession of her error.

## 15

# THE HERO

The Olympic wrestler gazed thoughtfully at the gold medal hanging on the wall above his desk. The sight of that medal brought back a lot of memories, some of them pleasant and some of them painful.

He had just returned from his victory tour around his native country. He was the first person from his country ever to have won any Olympic medal, let alone a gold medal. Without any question he was the nation's favorite son, and the applause of his fellow countrymen had been very sweet indeed. He could still hear the cries of "well done" which had echoed down the streets of every city and village he had visited.

Yet the victory had not come without a price.

He remembered the day of the championship match, when his coach had discovered that he was several pounds too heavy to be allowed to wrestle in his weight class. He had been given immediate orders to cut out all food and drink in an effort to lose the necessary pounds to qualify for the match.

It had been, quite honestly, the most miserable day of his life. All that day he had exercised strenuously to sweat off extra moisture. All that day he had gone without food while his teammates had dined on the best-looking meals he had ever laid his eyes on.

But the worst trial had been the thirst. He had pled with his coach for just one swallow of water to quench his burning tongue, but all through the long afternoon he had been denied even this one small pleasure. The coach knew

that even one extra ounce of body weight could mean the difference between winning the match and disqualification.

His coach had continually reminded him that the suffering would last “only for one day.” And now, looking back, he had to admit that his coach had been right. Although it had seemed like a very long day, it was still only one day.

And now, as he sat gazing at the medal and recalling the praise of his countrymen, there was only one thought that he could bring himself to think: it had been worth every minute of it.

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We can only speculate about the details of the reception Fabiola received as she passed from this life and into the presence of her Lord. We can, however, be sure of one thing: the rewards of the next life have been and will be far in excess of anything we could ever imagine.

Perhaps there is still, as with Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, a memory of the trials of her earthly life. She may well remember the suffering, the solitude, and the poverty. She may well remember the years of walking a lonely road while most of her friends, Christians and non-Christians alike, enjoyed the blessings of family life. She may well remember the fierce internal battle she faced as she wrestled with the words of Jesus and what it was that He was calling her to do.

Although the years had seemed long and burdensome, she had found strength in the peace that comes from sins forgiven and a life of holiness before God. She had continually reminded herself of the brevity of her life and the length of eternity. And she had read often the words of

Paul in Romans 8:18, where he stated that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

And now, looking back, she had to acknowledge that these words were true. Although the years had at times seemed long and the loneliness had at times seemed overwhelming, now that she had passed into eternity the period of hardship looked very short indeed. And beyond a shadow of a doubt, the struggle had been worth every minute of it.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

# APPENDIX 1

## JEROME'S ORIGINAL LETTER

### ABOUT FABIOLA

(Letter 55, to Amandus, about 394 A.D.)

3. I find joined to your letter of inquiries a short paper containing the following words: "ask him, (that is me,) whether a woman who has left her husband on the ground that he is an adulterer and sodomite and has found herself compelled to take another may in the lifetime of him whom she first left be in communion with the church without doing penance for her fault."

As I read the case put I recall the verse "they make excuses for their sins." We are all human and all indulgent to our own faults; and what our own will leads us to do we attribute to a necessity of nature. It is as though a young man were to say, "I am over-borne by my body, the glow of nature kindles my passions, the structure of my frame and its reproductive organs call for sexual intercourse." Or again a murderer might say, "I was in want, I stood in need of food, I had nothing to cover me. If I shed the blood of another, it was to save myself from dying of cold and hunger."

Tell the sister, therefore, who thus enquires of me concerning her condition, not my sentence but that of the apostle. "Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband, so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress."



And in another place: "the wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." The apostle has thus cut away every plea and has clearly declared that, if a woman marries again while her husband is living, she is an adulteress.

You must not speak to me of the violence of a ravisher, a mother's pleading, a father's bidding, the influence of relatives, the insolence and the intrigues of servants, household losses. A husband may be an adulterer or a sodomite, he may be stained with every crime and may have been left by his wife because of his sins; yet he is still her husband and, so long as he lives, she may not marry another.

The apostle does not promulgate this decree on his own authority but on that of Christ who speaks in him. For he has followed the words of Christ in the gospel: "whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery." Mark what he says: "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." Whether she has put away her husband or her husband her, the man who marries her is still an adulterer. Wherefore the apostles seeing how heavy the yoke of marriage was thus made said to Him: "if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry," and the Lord replied, "he that is able to receive it, let him receive it." And immediately by the instance of the three eunuchs he shows the blessedness of virginity which is bound by no carnal tie.

4. I have not been able quite to determine what it is that she means by the words "has found herself compelled" to marry again. What is this compulsion of which she speaks? Was she overborne by a crowd and ravished against her will? If so, why has she not, thus victimized, subsequently put away her

ravisher? Let her read the books of Moses and she will find that if violence is offered to a betrothed virgin in a city and she does not cry out, she is punished as an adulteress: but if she is forced in the field, she is innocent of sin and her ravisher alone is amenable to the laws.

Therefore if your sister, who, as she says, has been forced into a second union, wishes to receive the body of Christ and not to be accounted an adulteress, let her do penance; so far at least as from the time she begins to repent to have no farther intercourse with that second husband who ought to be called not a husband but an adulterer. If this seems hard to her and if she cannot leave one whom she has once loved and will not prefer the Lord to sensual pleasure, let her hear the declaration of the apostle: "ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils," and in another place: "what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?"

What I am about to say may sound novel but after all it is not new but old for it is supported by the witness of the Old Testament. If she leaves her second husband and desires to be reconciled with her first, she cannot be so now; for it is written in Deuteronomy:

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die which took her to be his wife; her

former husband, which sent her away may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

Wherefore, I beseech you, do your best to comfort her and to urge her to seek salvation. Diseased flesh calls for the knife and the searing-iron. The wound is to blame and not the healing art, if with a cruelty that is really kindness a physician to spare does not spare, and to be merciful is cruel.

## APPENDIX 2

# JEROME'S LETTER CONTAINING THE EULOGY OF FABIOLA

(Letter 77, to Oceanus, about 399 A.D.)

The eulogy of Fabiola whose restless life had come to an end in 399 A.D. Jerome tells the story of her sin and of her penitence (for which see Letter LV.), of the hospital established by her at Portus, of her visit to Bethlehem, and of her earnestness in the study of scripture. He relates how he wrote for her his account of the vestments of the high priest (Letter LXIV.) and how at the time of her death he was at her request engaged upon a commentary on the forty-two halting-places of the Israelites in the wilderness (Letter LXXIX.). This last he now sends along with this letter to Oceanus. Jerome also bestows praise upon Pammachius as the companion of all Fabiola's labours. The date of the letter is 399 A.D.

1. Several years since I consoled the venerated Paula, whilst her affliction was still recent for the falling asleep of Blæsilla. Four summers ago I wrote for the bishop Heliodorus the epitaph of Nepotian, and expended what ability I possessed in giving expression to my grief at his loss. Only two years have elapsed since I sent a brief letter to my dear Pammachius on the sudden flitting of his Paulina. I blushed to say more to one so learned or to give him back his own thoughts: lest I should seem less the consoler of a friend than the officious instructor of one already perfect. But now, Oceanus my son, the duty that you lay upon me is one that I gladly accept and would even seek unasked. For when new

virtues have to be dealt with, an old subject itself becomes new. In previous cases I have had to soften and restrain a mother's affection, an uncle's grief, and a husband's yearning; according to the different requirements of each I have had to apply from scripture different remedies.

2. To-day you give me as my theme *Fabiola*, the praise of the Christians, the marvel of the gentiles, the sorrow of the poor, and the consolation of the monks. Whatever point in her character I choose to treat of first, pales into insignificance compared with those which follow after. Shall I praise her fasts? Her alms are greater still. Shall I commend her lowliness? The glow of her faith is yet brighter. Shall I mention her studied plainness in dress, her voluntary choice of plebeian costume and the garb of a slave that she might put to shame silken robes? To change one's disposition is a greater achievement than to change one's dress. It is harder for us to part with arrogance than with gold and gems. For, even though we throw away these, we plume ourselves sometimes on a meanness that is really ostentatious, and we make a bid with a saleable poverty for the popular applause. But a virtue that seeks concealment and is cherished in the inner consciousness appeals to no judgment but that of God. Thus the eulogies which I have to bestow upon *Fabiola* will be altogether new: I must neglect the order of the rhetoricians and begin all I have to say only from the cradle of her conversion and of her penitence. Another writer, mindful of the school, would perhaps bring forward *Quintus Maximus*, "the man who by delaying rescued Rome," and the whole *Fabian* family; he would describe their struggles and battles and would exult that *Fabiola* had come to us through a line so noble, shewing that qualities not apparent in the branch still existed in the root. But as I am a lover of the inn at *Bethlehem* and of the Lord's stable in which the virgin travailed with

and gave birth to an infant God, I shall deduce the lineage of Christ's handmaid not from a stock famous in history but from the lowliness of the church.

3. And because at the very outset there is a rock in the path and she is overwhelmed by a storm of censure, for having forsaken her first husband and having taken a second, I will not praise her for her conversion till I have first cleared her of this charge. So terrible then were the faults imputed to her former husband that not even a prostitute or a common slave could have put up with them. If I were to recount them, I should undo the heroism of the wife who chose to bear the blame of a separation rather than to blacken the character and expose the stains of him who was one body with her. I will only urge this one plea which is sufficient to exonerate a chaste matron and a Christian woman. The Lord has given commandment that a wife must not be put away "except it be for fornication, and that, if put away, she must remain unmarried." Now a commandment which is given to men logically applies to women also. For it cannot be that, while an adulterous wife is to be put away, an incontinent husband is to be retained. The apostle says: "he which is joined to an harlot is one body." Therefore she also who is joined to a whoremonger and unchaste person is made one body with him. The laws of Cæsar are different, it is true, from the laws of Christ: Papinianus commands one thing; our own Paul another. Earthly laws give a free rein to the unchastity of men, merely condemning seduction and adultery; lust is allowed to range unrestrained among brothels and slave girls, as if the guilt were constituted by the rank of the person assailed and not by the purpose of the assailant. But with us Christians what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men, and as both serve the same God both are bound by the same obligations. Fabiola then has put away—they are

quite right—a husband that was a sinner, guilty of this and that crime, sins—I have almost mentioned their names—with which the whole neighbourhood resounded but which the wife alone refused to disclose. If however it is made a charge against her that after repudiating her husband she did not continue unmarried, I readily admit this to have been a fault, but at the same time declare that it may have been a case of necessity. “It is better,” the apostle tells us, “to marry than to burn.” She was quite a young woman, she was not able to continue in widowhood. In the words of the apostle she saw another law in her members warring against the law of her mind; she felt herself dragged in chains as a captive towards the indulgences of wedlock. Therefore she thought it better openly to confess her weakness and to accept the semblance of an unhappy marriage than, with the name of a monogamist, to ply the trade of a courtesan. The same apostle wills that the younger widows should marry, bear children, and give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. And he at once goes on to explain his wish: “for some are already turned aside after Satan.” Fabiola therefore was fully persuaded in her own mind: she thought she had acted legitimately in putting away her husband, and that when she had done so she was free to marry again. She did not know that the rigour of the gospel takes away from women all pretexts for re-marriage so long as their former husbands are alive; and not knowing this, though she contrived to evade other assaults of the devil, she at this point unwittingly exposed herself to a wound from him.

4. But why do I linger over old and forgotten matters, seeking to excuse a fault for which Fabiola has herself confessed her penitence? Who would believe that, after the death of her second husband at a time when most widows, having shaken off the yoke of servitude, grow careless and allow themselves

more liberty than ever, frequenting the baths, flitting through the streets, shewing their harlot faces everywhere; that at this time Fabiola came to herself? Yet it was then that she put on sackcloth to make public confession of her error. It was then that in the presence of all Rome (in the basilica which formerly belonged to that Lateranus who perished by the sword of Cæsar) she stood in the ranks of the penitents and exposed before bishop, presbyters, and people—all of whom wept when they saw her weep—her dishevelled hair, pale features, soiled hands and unwashed neck. What sins would such a penance fail to purge away? What ingrained stains would such tears be unable to wash out? By a threefold confession Peter blotted out his threefold denial. If Aaron committed sacrilege by fashioning molten gold into the head of a calf, his brother's prayers made amends for his transgressions. If holy David, meekest of men, committed the double sin of murder and adultery, he atoned for it by a fast of seven days. He lay upon the earth, he rolled in the ashes, he forgot his royal power, he sought for light in the darkness. And then, turning his eyes to that God whom he had so deeply offended, he cried with a lamentable voice: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," and "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit." He who by his virtues teaches me how to stand and not to fall, by his penitence teaches me how, if I fall, I may rise again. Among the kings do we read of any so wicked as Ahab, of whom the scripture says: "there was none like unto Ahab which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord"? For shedding Naboth's blood Elijah rebuked him, and the prophet denounced God's wrath against him: "Hast thou killed and also taken possession? . . . behold I will bring evil upon thee and will take away thy posterity" and so on. Yet when Ahab heard these words "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth



upon his flesh, and fasted...in sackcloth, and went softly." Then came the word of God to Elijah the Tishbite saying: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days." O happy penitence which has drawn down upon itself the eyes of God, and which has by confessing its error changed the sentence of God's anger! The same conduct is in the Chronicles attributed to Manasseh, and in the book of the prophet Jonah to Nineveh, and in the gospel to the publican. The first of these not only was allowed to obtain forgiveness but also recovered his kingdom, the second broke the force of God's impending wrath, while the third, smiting his breast with his hands, "would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven." Yet for all that the publican with his humble confession of his faults went back justified far more than the Pharisee with his arrogant boasting of his virtues. This is not however the place to preach penitence, neither am I writing against Montanus and Novatus. Else would I say of it that it is "a sacrifice...well pleasing to God," I would cite the words of the psalmist: "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," and those of Ezekiel "I prefer the repentance of a sinner rather than his death," those of Baruch, "Arise, arise, O Jerusalem," and many other proclamations made by the trumpets of the prophets.

5. But this one thing I will say, for it is at once useful to my readers and pertinent to my present theme. As Fabiola was not ashamed of the Lord on earth, so He shall not be ashamed of her in heaven. She laid bare her wound to the gaze of all, and Rome beheld with tears the disfiguring scar which marred her beauty. She uncovered her limbs, bared her head, and closed her mouth. She no longer entered the church of God but, like Miriam the sister of Moses, she sat apart without the camp, till the priest who had cast her out should

himself call her back. She came down like the daughter of Babylon from the throne of her daintiness, she took the millstones and ground meal, she passed barefooted through rivers of tears. She sat upon the coals of fire, and these became her aid. That face by which she had once pleased her second husband she now smote with blows; she hated jewels, shunned ornaments and could not bear to look upon fine linen. In fact she bewailed the sin she had committed as bitterly as if it had been adultery, and went to the expense of many remedies in her eagerness to cure her one wound.

6. Having found myself aground in the shallows of Fabiola's sin, I have dwelt thus long upon her penitence in order that I might open up a larger and quite unimpeded space for the description of her praises. Restored to communion before the eyes of the whole church, what did she do? In the day of prosperity she was not forgetful of affliction; and, having once suffered shipwreck she was unwilling again to face the risks of the sea. Instead therefore of re-embarking on her old life, she broke and sold all that she could lay hands on of her property (it was large and suitable to her rank), and turning it into money she laid out this for the benefit of the poor. She was the first person to found a hospital, into which she might gather sufferers out of the streets, and where she might nurse the unfortunate victims of sickness and want. Need I now recount the various ailments of human beings? Need I speak of noses slit, eyes put out, feet half burnt, hands covered with sores? Or of limbs dropsical and atrophied? Or of diseased flesh alive with worms? Often did she carry on her own shoulders persons infected with jaundice or with filth. Often too did she wash away the matter discharged from wounds which others, even though men, could not bear to look at. She gave food to her patients with her own hand, and moistened the scarce breathing lips of the dying with sips of liquid. I

know of many wealthy and devout persons who, unable to overcome their natural repugnance to such sights, perform this work of mercy by the agency of others, giving money instead of personal aid. I do not blame them and am far from construing their weakness of resolution into a want of faith. While however I pardon such squeamishness, I extol to the skies the enthusiastic zeal of a mind that is above it. A great faith makes little of such trifles. But I know how terrible was the retribution which fell upon the proud mind of the rich man clothed in purple for not having helped Lazarus. The poor wretch whom we despise, whom we cannot so much as look at, and the very sight of whom turns our stomachs, is human like ourselves, is made of the same clay as we are, is formed out of the same elements. All that he suffers we too may suffer. Let us then regard his wounds as though they were our own, and then all our insensibility to another's suffering will give way before our pity for ourselves. Not with a hundred tongues or throat of bronze could I exhaust the forms of fell disease which Fabiola so wonderfully alleviated in the suffering poor that many of the healthy fell to envying the sick. However she showed the same liberality towards the clergy and monks and virgins. Was there a monastery which was not supported by Fabiola's wealth? Was there a naked or bedridden person who was not clothed with garments supplied by her? Were there ever any in want to whom she failed to give a quick and unhesitating supply? Even Rome was not wide enough for her pity. Either in her own person or else through the agency of reverend and trustworthy men she went from island to island and carried her bounty not only round the Etruscan Sea, but throughout the district of the Volscians, as it stands along those secluded and winding shores where communities of monks are to be found.

7. Suddenly she made up her mind, against the advice of all her friends, to take ship and to come to Jerusalem. Here she was welcomed by a large concourse of people and for a short time took advantage of my hospitality. Indeed, when I call to mind our meeting, I seem to see her here now instead of in the past. Blessed Jesus, what zeal, what earnestness she bestowed upon the sacred volumes! In her eagerness to satisfy what was a veritable craving she would run through Prophets, Gospels, and Psalms: she would suggest questions and treasure up the answers in the desk of her own bosom. And yet this eagerness to hear did not bring with it any feeling of satiety: increasing her knowledge she also increased her sorrow, and by casting oil upon the flame she did but supply fuel for a still more burning zeal. One day we had before us the book of *Numbers* written by Moses, and she modestly questioned me as to the meaning of the great mass of names there to be found. Why was it, she inquired, that single tribes were differently associated in this passage and in that, how came it that the soothsayer Balaam in prophesying of the future mysteries of Christ spoke more plainly of Him than almost any other prophet? I replied as best I could and tried to satisfy her enquiries. Then unrolling the book still farther she came to the passage in which is given the list of all the halting-places by which the people after leaving Egypt made its way to the waters of Jordan. And when she asked me the meaning and reason of each of these, I spoke doubtfully about some, dealt with others in a tone of assurance, and in several instances simply confessed my ignorance. Hereupon she began to press me harder still, expostulating with me as though it were a thing unallowable that I should be ignorant of what I did not know, yet at the same time affirming her own unworthiness to understand mysteries so deep. In a word I was ashamed to refuse her request and allowed her to extort from me a promise that I

would devote a special work to this subject for her use. Till the present time I have had to defer the fulfillment of my promise: as I now perceive, by the Will of God in order that it should be consecrated to her memory. As in a previous work I clothed her with the priestly vestments, so in the pages of the present she may rejoice that she has passed through the wilderness of this world and has come at last to the land of promise.

8. But let me continue the task which I have begun. Whilst I was in search of a suitable dwelling for so great a lady, whose only conception of the solitary life included a place of resort like Mary's inn; suddenly messengers flew this way and that and the whole East was terror-struck. For news came that the hordes of the Huns had poured forth all the way from Mæotis (they had their haunts between the icy and the rude Massagetæ where the gates of Alexander keep back the wild peoples behind the Caucasus); and that, speeding hither and thither on their nimble-footed horses, they were filling all the world with panic and bloodshed. The Roman army was absent at the time, being detained in Italy on account of the civil wars. Of these Huns Herodotus tells us that under Darius King of the Medes they held the East in bondage for twenty years and that from the Egyptians and Ethiopians they exacted a yearly tribute. May Jesus avert from the Roman world the farther assaults of these wild beasts! Everywhere their approach was unexpected, they outstripped rumour in speed, and, when they came, they spared neither religion nor rank nor age, even for wailing infants they had no pity. Children were forced to die before it could be said that they had begun to live; and little ones not realizing their miserable fate might be seen smiling in the hands and at the weapons of their enemies. It was generally agreed that the goal of the invaders was Jerusalem and that it was their excessive desire

for gold which made them hasten to this particular city. Its walls uncared for in time of peace were accordingly put in repair. Antioch was in a state of siege. Tyre, desirous of cutting itself off from the land, sought once more its ancient island. We too were compelled to man our ships and to lie off the shore as a precaution against the arrival of our foes. No matter how hard the winds might blow, we could not but dread the barbarians more than shipwreck. It was not, however, so much for our own safety that we were anxious as for the chastity of the virgins who were with us. Just at that time also there was dissension among us, and our intestine struggles threw into the shade our battle with the barbarians. I myself clung to my long-settled abode in the East and gave way to my deep-seated love for the holy places. Fabiola, used as she was to moving from city to city and having no other property but what her baggage contained, returned to her native land; to live in poverty where she had once been rich, to lodge in the house of another, she who in old days had lodged many guests in her own, and—not unduly to prolong my account—to bestow upon the poor before the eyes of Rome the proceeds of that property which Rome knew her to have sold.

9. This only do I lament that in her the holy places lost a necklace of the loveliest. Rome recovered what it had previously parted with, and the wanton and slanderous tongues of the heathen were confuted by the testimony of their own eyes. Others may commend her pity, her humility, her faith: I will rather praise her ardour of soul. The letter in which as a young man I once urged Heliodorus to the life of a hermit she knew by heart, and whenever she looked upon the walls of Rome she complained that she was in a prison. Forgetful of her sex, unmindful of her frailty, and only desiring to be alone she was in fact there where her soul

lingered. The counsels of her friends could not hold her back; so eager was she to burst from the city as from a place of bondage. Nor did she leave the distribution of her alms to others; she distributed them herself. Her wish was that, after equitably dispensing her money to the poor, she might herself find support from others for the sake of Christ. In such haste was she and so impatient of delay that you would fancy her on the eve of her departure. As she was always ready, death could not find her unprepared.

10. As I pen her praises, my dear Pammachius seems suddenly to rise before me. His wife Paulina sleeps that he may keep vigil; she has gone before her husband that he remaining behind may be Christ's servant. Although he was his wife's heir, others—I mean the poor—are now in possession of his inheritance. He and Fabiola contended for the privilege of setting up a tent like that of Abraham at Portus. The contest which arose between them was for the supremacy in shewing kindness. Each conquered and each was overcome. Both admitted themselves to be at once victors and vanquished for what each had desired to effect alone both accomplished together. They united their resources and combined their plans that harmony might forward what rivalry must have brought to nought. No sooner was the scheme broached than it was carried out. A house was purchased to serve as a shelter, and a crowd flocked into it. "There was no more travail in Jacob nor distress in Israel." The seas carried voyagers to find a welcome here on landing. Travelers left Rome in haste to take advantage of the mild coast before setting sail. What Publius once did in the island of Malta for one apostle and—not to leave room for gainsaying—for a single ship's crew, Fabiola and Pammachius have done over and over again for large numbers; and not only have they supplied the wants of the

destitute, but so universal has been their munificence that they have provided additional means for those who have something already. The whole world knows that a home for strangers has been established at Portus; and Britain has learned in the summer what Egypt and Parthia knew in the spring.

11. In the death of this noble lady we have seen a fulfillment of the apostle's words:—"All things work together for good to them that fear God." Having a presentiment of what would happen, she had written to several monks to come and release her from the burthen under which she laboured; for she wished to make to herself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that they might receive her into everlasting habitations. They came to her and she made them her friends; she fell asleep in the way that she had wished, and having at last laid aside her burthen she soared more lightly up to heaven. How great a marvel Fabiola had been to Rome while she lived came out in the behaviour of the people now that she was dead. Hardly had she breathed her last breath, hardly had she given back her soul to Christ whose it was when "flying rumour heralding the woe" gathered the entire city to attend her obsequies. Psalms were chaunted and the gilded ceilings of the temples were shaken with uplifted shouts of Alleluia. The choirs of young and old extolled her deeds and sang the praises of her holy soul.

Her triumph was more glorious far than those won by Furius over the Gauls, by Papirius over the Samnites, by Scipio over Numantia, by Pompey over Pontus. They had conquered physical force, she had mastered spiritual iniquities. I seem to hear even now the squadrons which led the van of the procession, and the sound of the feet of the multitude which thronged in thousands to attend her funeral. The streets, porches, and roofs from which a view could be



obtained were inadequate to accommodate the spectators. On that day Rome saw all her peoples gathered together in one, and each person present flattered himself that he had some part in the glory of her penitence. No wonder indeed that men should thus exult in the salvation of one at whose conversion there was joy among the angels in heaven.

12. I give you this, Fabiola, the best gift of my aged powers, to be as it were a funeral offering. Oftentimes have I praised virgins and widows and married women who have kept their garments always white and who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Happy indeed is she in her encomium who throughout her life has been stained by no defilement. But let envy depart and censoriousness be silent. If the father of the house is good why should our eye be evil? The soul which fell among thieves has been carried home upon the shoulders of Christ. In our father's house are many mansions. Where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded. To whom more is forgiven the same loveth more.