

The Great Diversion

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

The devil’s hatred toward God, and consequently, His people, has taken the form through the centuries of Christian history of at least six major means of spiritual warfare. These forms are not always alone or purely distinct from one another. There are always elements of all mixed with each of them. Nor have they appeared strictly consecutively, one giving way to a succeeding form. But it does seem that in the course of the years, one of these “devices” has stood at the forefront during each particular epoch. The one in which we live is no exception. It is usually far easier to stand here and look back and put our fingers on the trap our fathers fell into, than to perceive the snare around our own ankles.

Persecution was the most prominent means of the enemy’s overt attack upon Christians for the first three centuries. This type of warfare was made possible by sacralism, the idea that all the citizens of a political entity must subscribe the state’s approved religion. Persecution came first, therefore, from Judaism and then from Rome. It is a witness to the power and sovereignty of God in all things, that it pleased God to save the first great persecutor of the church and transform him into its mightiest apostle. The Jewish persecution ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but the Roman persecution had already begun in great violence and cruelty under Nero in 64 AD. This exceptional physical violence against the church continued with only brief periods of respite until Galerius rescinded anti-Christian edicts in 311. So far as Satan’s purpose was concerned, persecution was a failure. Rather than suppress and destroy the church, it only purified it by purging hypocrites and false professors. Vast numbers, upon threat of loss of station, possession and life, were ready to worship the image of the emperor, of false gods, and to execrate Christ.

Jewish and Roman persecutions were not the last nor the worst of such. The papal crusades against the Albigenses and Waldenses, the Parisian massacre of the Hugenots, the Spanish Inquisition and others, have all made their shameful blot in history. The historian Gibbon asserts that the number of Christians murdered in a single province in the Spanish Inquisition outnumbered all the martyrs under the rule of Rome. We may add to that the suffering of Anabaptists at the hands of many still revered Protestant Reformers. Continuing on until today, we know of intense persecution of Christians who live in nations either hostile to any kind of reverence of God, or to all religion except the one prescribed by the state. So the blood of the martyrs still continues to water the gospel.

But before the end of Roman persecution, Satan was already scheming to bring to the forefront another tactic to counteract the purification of the church effected by persecution. He was about to employ the Great *Dilution*. When Constantine became sole ruler of Rome in 323, he totally reversed the official policy of the state from hostility to Christianity, to favor and protection. This not only brought hordes of false professors into the “Church” in order to curry the political and economic advantage within the state’s power to give, but now, subsequent “Crusades” herded multitudes into Christendom by power of the sword. Christian doctrines and practices were combined with pagan teachings, rituals and culture, creating a religion that had something for everyone. True Christianity went underground, and the light of the established church was all but extinguished.

The Great *Dilution* could not have succeeded, had it not been for another immediate ancillary ploy, the Great *Delusion*. How could this monstrous hybrid, the mixture of pagan superstitions, rituals, doctrines of demons, perversions of scripture, ignorance and darkness, and hellish pretensions of men, pass itself off as the Christian Church? Some rationale can be given in the fact that men would *like* to believe in such a convenient salvation, one that allows a person all the pleasures, sins and indulgences of this world and heaven, too, for a carnal price . . . one well within the sinner’s power to pay and the Church’s power to bestow. That surely is the motivation of men to buy the Great Dilution, but it does not have sufficient power to cause its widespread acceptance. Only the “strong delusion” sent by God to those who “loved not the truth”, “that they should believe a lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-23), would suffice to solidly seat the Great Whore on her throne. Needless to say, this Great Dilution is still going on, to the extent that there is no distinction between the established Church and the world about her. It is, as then, facilitated by the Great Delusion, the fanciful lie that you can have the world and heaven, too. All will fall prey to it who do not love the truth.

The stage for the Great *Disillusion* began to be set in the historical period known as the “Enlightenment”, from the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries. This was a time of rapid scientific advancement set off by the discoveries of the brilliant Isaac Newton. Initially, rather than overthrow Biblical faith, these true scientific discoveries *seemed* to enforce it. I say, “seemed”, because science or empirical evidence has nothing to do with Biblical faith. “*They that come to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). This mentality (the idea that men can rationally, without divine revelation, know God and truth) in reality, prepared the way for the utter overthrow of Biblical faith. Having transferred faith from the word of God to human reason, scholarship, and intellectual powers, men were ready for Darwin’s Origin of the Species (1859) and the lectures of infidel Robert G. Ingersoll. Unlike Newton’s discoveries, these were raw, unproven theories. But carnal minds, intoxicated with confidence in their own intellectual inquiry, refused to make this distinction. Hence, when Darwinian biology flew in the face of Biblical revelation, something had to be thrown out. These same carnal hearts, long hating Biblical restraint on their rebellion, were quite happy to be relieved of their unwanted “illusions” of God, sin, depravity, righteousness and judgment to come. Before the Great Dilution, these skeptics and infidels would have had to renounce Christianity and get out of the church. But a watered-down Establishment groping in doubt, darkness and confusion already, was not a hostile fraternity. Higher Criticism and liberal theology

handily stripped God of creation, Christ of His deity, the Spirit of His miracles, the Bible of its authority, and the church of her glory. The Great Disillusion was complete.

But one more bothersome trait of man continued to cause trouble. Regardless of how much he may revere and tout creature worship, rationalism and naturalism, man is not quite comfortable or secure with no higher authority to appeal to than the gray matter between his own ears. He hankers for the supernatural, the extra-rational, that which transcends the realm which he can explain and control. He simply cannot live in a spiritual vacuum. For those who want nothing to do with the true God of the Bible, but yet “seek a sign”, there is a devil who works with “power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Enter the Great *Deception*. The beginning of the 20th century ushered in modern Pentecostalism in all its sectarian splits and schisms. But it was 50 years later that Neo-Pentecostalism (the Charismatic movement) began to roll across the country on the wheels of the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship, and TV evangelist Oral Roberts and his kind. This Great Deception passes off spurious supernatural signs and wonders as legitimate first-century Christian miracles. Because the movement is bare of any doctrinal garments whatever, it has quickly penetrated every established denomination in the country, so that now all of the Mother Harlot’s daughters are saturated with the practices and philosophies of this cult. An evil generation’s supernatural itch is scratched, and the apostasy of the established church is complete.

The devil, by means of the Great Harlot, has succeeded in leavening now the whole lump (Matthew 13:33), but he is frustrated by the remnant that escaped in the third century and survived under whatever derisive epithet the established Church of each generation chose to put on those who refused to dance to her music. These God-loving, Bible-believing, gospel-preaching churches who have not been corrupted by any of the above, and who still walk with Christ in white, are the targets of the devil’s most vehement hatred. They are the constant targets of the news media and the entertainment industry, who caricature them as raving maniacs, idiotic ignoramuses, and useless leeches, reaping the bounties of our society while contributing nothing to its welfare and economy.

It is the last of these that has proved an effective bait. A vast majority of evangelical Christianity has arisen to this lure and swallowed it, hook, line and sinker. A. W. Tozer wrote, “*The world is constantly lashing the church because she has no solution for the problems of society, and the religious leaders who do not know the score wince under the lash.*” “*The muddled churchman assumes that the church of God has been left on earth to minister good hope and cheer to the world in such quantities that it can ignore God, reject Christ, glorify fallen human flesh and pursue its selfish ends in peace. The world wants the church to add a dainty spiritual touch to its carnal schemes, and be there to help it to its feet and put it to bed when it comes home drunk with fleshy pleasures.*” That was thirty-five years ago. Much has happened in these last two decades. The church has now bought the Great *Diversion* and is channeling nearly all her energies and resources and time into the impossible and futile task of cleaning up and saving Sodom.

We will ignore the more gross and obvious aspects of this Sodom-Saving Diversion . . . those which the Harlot has long been busy at, such as feeding the world’s hungry nations while leaving them in their destructive idolatry, changing governments by political and economic pressure, activism for world disarmament, abolition of moral laws and punishment. These were too obvious for an abandonment of the church’s mission for Bible-believing churches to accept. For them, the devil had to come up with more subtle forms. We will consider a few.

Americanism. Working from the faulted premise that this nation was founded by Evangelical Christians and upon Christian principles, many are waving a flag in one hand and a Bible in the other. While patriotism is certainly to be admired, and any Christian ought to be loyal to his government (at least up to the point where his Christian conscience may be violated), that fact alone will set many Christians against one another. The idea that we may bring redemption to men more fully and easily in a strong Nationalistic climate is absurd. A preacher may raise some cheers, amens, and sympathy by his fervent and animated exhortations on “our country”, but he is wasting his breach and his preaching time by supplanting the word of God with a devilish diversion.

Closely akin to Americanism, and nearly always accompanying it, is the touting of political Conservatism with the anti-Communist, anti-socialism, pro-capitalism, crusading for a strong economy. If we are to save Christianity by saving our country, we must surely save our country by arousing the people to battle arms against socialistic rot and economic decay. As a citizen of the United States of America with a social conscience, my sympathies are squarely within the conservative camp on practically every issue. But as a citizen of heaven, I know that these issues do not make *one whit* of difference, so far as the promotion of the kingdom of God is concerned. We have already noted that a government hostile to Christianity is utterly impotent to suppress it, and will only purify it by persecution. Nothing in Christian History indicates that the true church prospered more in spirituality and power in times when the civil government was friendly and the economy prosperous. If anything, it is the other way around. But one hears today of all sorts of economic schemes promoted as legitimate Christian activities.

The fact of the matter may be that God’s wise administrative judgment for this nation is economic and political collapse. That might be the way He intends to bless the labours of the church, and the church might just find herself working against the good purpose of God to keep this rotting ship afloat. We who love our God more than our gold, and our slavery to Christ more than our political rights, might let the devil take this Diversion ploy to someone more ignorant of the truth.

Then there is the Reconstructionist version. Theonomists believe that human government ought to be forced to come under the principles of divine order as laid down in the Old Covenant. They think that it is the obligation of the church to “make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of Christ”; and that we can usher in a golden age of righteousness and salvation by imposing Bible law on human government by the power of the sword. Some of the finest minds of the Christian church are now devoting all their energies to preaching and writing and lobbying toward these ends. But they are beating a dead horse. Tozer again:

“In the first place, the church has received no such commission from her Lord, and in the second place, the world has never shown much disposition to listen to the church when she speaks in her true prophetic voice. The attitude of the world toward the true child of God is precisely the same as that of the citizens of Vanity Fair toward Christian and his companion. Therefore they took

them and beat them , and besmeared them with dirt, and put them into the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all men.’ Christian’s duty was not to provide leadership for Vanity Fair, but to keep clean from its pollution and get out of it as fast as possible. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Moralism is a very subtle and effective variety of the Great Diversion. Preachers and churches by the thousands, have abandoned the gospel of Jesus Christ, or reduced it to a footnote, in favor of crusading against all the moral evils of society. The sermon time is given over to cataloging all the lurid and horrid sins running rampant in the country, ranting and railing against the perpetrators of all these, and in general making us all feel good that we are not of such. Churches and denominations are exhorted to spend energies and resources to lobby and crusade against crime, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, political corruption, environmental pollution and such like. This particular aspect of the Great Diversion is addressed more fully in the January 1, 1980 *Gatepost* under “Christian Government”.

But perhaps the most subtle (and therefore most successful) employment of the Great Diversion is the “Save the Home” ploy. Churches spend hundreds of millions of “Family Life Centers” or “Christian Life Centers”, which are nothing but enormous play-houses constructed under the noble goal of keeping the family together by providing a place they can play together and not be corrupted by immorality in the world. The same can be said, to a great extent, of Christian Schools built, administered and maintained by evangelical churches. Ironically, multitudes of churches have been destroyed by these well-meant ventures, either by the impossible financial burdens imposed by them or the carnal clashes and fights incubated by their administration. Long before this happens, the church is compelled to abandon the gospel to keep up the Diversion, which, of course, is the devil’s purpose in the Diversion.

Every year scores of new book titles are published, addressing problems in the home and alleging scriptural cures . . . all these clamoring for the believer’s dollar, his time and his mind. Denominations publish regular periodical magazines on the home, crammed with psychological advice and spiced up with fictitious novels about attaining ideal home and marriage relationships.

The last twenty years have seen a proliferation of Marriage – Family – Child-rearing – Home Seminars, unparalleled in human history. All of these are aimed at church families and purport to use scripturally based cures. It is a multi-million dollar industry. And when a family gets into trouble, the mentality now is not to seek the Lord and the word of God, but to seek the Seminar.

Churches employ full-time counselors, equipped with the most modern of psycho-spiritual training and techniques. They have special services to renew marriage vows. They sponsor special retreats for couples whose marriages are in trouble.

Evangelists and Bible teachers hold weeks of meetings in churches, designed to save the home, or to teach “Christian principles” of home, authority and order. Pastors devote long sermon series in a frantic effort to stave off the moral and spiritual ruin evidenced in the homes to which they minister. One particularly popular “Reformed Baptist” (what a contradiction in terms!) pastor with an enormous tape ministry, recently sent out a flyer advertising no less than thirty-four sermons on “Christian Child Rearing” alone. One wonders what happened to the gospel while he was squandering all this preaching time on something scarcely mentioned in the New Testament.

The horrible tragedy of all this is twofold. The heartbreaking ruin of marriages and homes is real. The problem really exists; and its proportions are awesome. But two decades of this sort of crusading has not helped. If any changes are to be observed, they are for the worse. The conditions existing today are at least fourfold, perhaps tenfold, worse than they were twenty years ago. Abandoning a central emphasis on the gospel, and rushing about to treat a *symptom* of spiritual decline, we have laid aside the only sound cure for the problems surfacing in the home. The Great Diversion has worked.

The “home-problem” is not a home-problem, but a sin-problem. And sin problems can only be dealt with in Spirit-empowered gospel ministry. A popular “Christian Psychology” author recently prefaced one of his books with the report that he had just traveled across the country and visited with four of our contemporary ministerial “giants” who had all recently divorced their wives and remarried while continuing their “ministry” uninterrupted. His conclusion was “the home is in trouble”. That is not the signal I get from such a report. What kind of “giants” do we have that do such things? What kind of churches do we have that tolerate such sin? What kind of ignorant spiritual perception do we have that makes this sort of conclusion? How blind must we be, to follow the leadership of such blind guides? The Great Diversion has indeed been successful.

It will be of great profit to us, if we are to be delivered from the scourge of this diversion, to take an honest and careful look at its powerful and effective inducements. The less honorable ones will be considered first.

First, the evangelical church has listened to the hoots and jeers of the world, its accusations that the church’s message and activities are not solving the world’s social problems. It has given credence to this slander, and, desirous of the world’s approval, has moved to ride itself of these railings and gain its accolades instead. There is no reproach of the Cross in patriotism, in reviving the economy and promoting private enterprise, in combating crime and immorality, or in working toward preserving marriages and home order. The church can thus escape the contempt and censure heaped upon it and take its place beside the schools and hospitals as a practical aid to unregenerate society.

Secondly, these activities are readily comprehended and measured by the carnal mind. Remove the mysteries of God, sin, redemption and the gospel, then the world need not feel itself excluded from the “light” of the church; and the church finds a plane upon which it can fellowship with, not only the world, but every false religion and cult alike. For all these carnal objectives are shared by every member of the human race. We can yoke up with the temple of idols and work side by side to get these jobs done.

Thirdly, it is an immensely profitable activity. Multitudes will dig deep and give generously to support these humanitarian activities. The television preacher especially finds preaching moralism lucrative. White-washed hypocrites, widow-robbing money grubbers, who would not give one dime to a preacher who applied the gospel to the corrupt inner issues of his depraved heart, will lavish funds on the smart TV preacher who castigates the Catholics, homosexuals, drug pushers and abortionists. Even the government will sometimes give grants to churches and church-related organizations for social work for the preservation of home and marriage.

Fourthly, these objectives provide an almost irresistible fat target. Because of a seeming dearth of success in the spiritual realms, preachers begin to doubt the validity and usefulness of their ministry. The gospel is, for the most part, ignored. True conversions are scarce. We see precious little fruit of our labors these days. Combine that frustration of “looking at the things that are not seen” with the highly visible targets of declining love of country, creeping socialism with its inherent irresponsibility and perverted values, increased lawlessness, rebellion and disorder on every side, declining economy and increased joblessness, declining standard of living, loss of moral values, and the literal falling apart of homes and families everywhere, and you have a powerful incentive for the hound to leave the trail of the unseen deer and take out after the fat, clumsy rabbit that jumps up in front of him.

But none of the above or all of them combined will not be effective to deter a true gospel church from its course unless it can find, at least, what it perceives to be justification for its actions in the Scriptures. Our activities must not arise out of personal convictions, preferences or philosophy of life. If we have no Biblical mandate, then we have no viable justification for our ministry.

Militant Americanism or patriotism as an integral part of Christian ministry cannot be supported in the Bible. Only the most gross misrepresentation of Old Covenant Israel wrongly applied to our present nation could serve as an excuse. Indeed, we are told that we are strangers and sojourners here on this earth, not mindful of this country, looking for one to come (Hebrews 11:13-16). Far from being an aid to evangelism, this sort of mindset is a stumbling block, especially to people of different nationalities. Our commission is not to our own country alone, but to all nations. The nearest thing we have in the New Covenant to preservation of country, is prayer for our political leaders and law keepers (2 Timothy 2:1-2), and that in order that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”.

Theonomists erroneously justify their reconstructionism by confounding church and state, the temporal and the eternal, the material and the spiritual, the seen with the unseen. The church militant, to them, is the church at war with the sword of man, not the sword of the spirit. They would have us wrestle against flesh and blood, not wicked spirits in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). They are imminently right when they say that principles of law, justice, order and economy laid down in the Old Covenant, if applied in present human government, would solve most of our social problems. But they are wrong in asserting that the Christian church has a mandate to demand their implementation. There is not one New Covenant passage that even hints at such a thing. Men are to be saved through divine regeneration under the preaching of the gospel *out from* a godless society. Even the Old Covenant teaches this. The Hebrew children were not told to convert Egypt, but were called out of her.

When it comes to moralism, we are compelled to give close scrutiny to a far larger body of scripture than in the sidetracks mentioned above. Righteousness is a big word in the Bible, appearing over 450 times, no less frequent in the New Covenant than in the Old. The God of the Bible is a righteous God, and Christ’s kingdom a sceptre of righteousness. The redeemed are called saints, holy and without blemish before Him in love. It is utterly impossible to preach the gospel of Christ to the unconverted or to edify the saints without frequent references to what may properly be called moral, ethical, just or right. The difference is the ways in which the moralist employs ethical preaching, his purposes and objectives, and those of the true Christian minister. The lines which define the right and lawful use of God’s moral law are not always readily and clearly discerned, but they are there. And it is vital that we do discern them.

The moralist insists on conformity to God’s law for either one of two objectives. The first, as a means of meriting and obtaining salvation. The second, as a means of transforming and cleaning up society. No one who understands salvation by grace could be guilty of the first. But a host of churches and preachers in the camp of the gospel of grace have been diverted from the true gospel to vain attempts to clean up Sodom. That is the particular brand of moralism I am addressing in this paper. It has no New Covenant support whatever. This world is destined to sink lower and lower into moral ruin until it is destroyed by fire and replaced with a “new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”, for which we look (2 Peter 3:13). That is not a cynical or pessimistic view. That is according to divine revelation.

The true Christian minister preaches the moral law of God as the absolute minimum standard of righteousness upon which man can be accepted before God. He preaches it to sinners, not that they may presume to earn salvation by law-keeping, but that they may learn the utter impossibility of doing so, and so be shut up to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. He further teaches the abundant body of moral and righteous instructions recorded in the New Covenant to Christians, not in order that they may obtain right standing before God (for they have that in Christ, apart from any right deeds of their own), but that they may walk worthy of their calling, to adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ, to teach them what manner of righteous and holy persons they are. The saints happily and joyfully hear such teaching, for they do hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The number and degree in which evangelicals have been misled and diverted by wrong scripture applications to all of the above combined, will not begin to compare with the completeness in which they have swallowed the Save-the-Home humbug. Preachers who would not for a second heed the foolishness of reforming a drunkard before he could be saved, have nevertheless bought the idea that the strength and stability of the home must be recovered before we can have strong churches and effective evangelism. This teaching has become so bold that it is often implied, if not outright declared, that God cannot or will not work, except in the context of proper scriptural home order. If we are not careful, we shall find that we have let ourselves, through the back door, squarely into the middle of the Mormon temple. They teach that redemption and eternal life is obtained, not on the merits of the blood of Christ, but through marriage, children and proper home order. And don’t think that they are not fattening themselves on the souls of people misguided by the current Christian Save-the-Home hornswoggle.

Let me introduce our thoughts to a scriptural examination of this subject with some outrageous statements: Marriage and the home is utterly and completely of carnal, temporal character. There is absolutely nothing about either that is essentially spiritual in nature, and nothing eternal. Millions of sound, orderly homes never name the name of Christ, maintain a “good” marriage, raise “good, law-abiding, productive” children who all die and go to hell. The man and his wife are said to be “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), not “one spirit”, otherwise it would be impossible for believer and unbeliever to stay married. Sad to say, many of these “mixed

marriages” survive better than many who are both professors of Christ. Marital love is basically self-love, carnal. “*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself*” (Ephesians 5:28). Indeed, the love of married Christians can rise to spiritual love, but that is not basic to marriage.

Marriage is listed with those worldly, carnal pursuits with which men shall unwittingly be engaged until the coming of the Lord (Matthew 24:38), put in the same category with eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building (Luke 17:26-30). It is declared by our Lord to those befuddled Sadducees to be confined to this present sojourn on earth and has *no* carry-over into eternal life whatever (Matthew 22:23-32).

Some insist that the preservation of proper marriage and orderly home life is absolutely essential, because it is a type of Christ and the Church, and therefore, essential to the integrity of divine revelation. These dear brethren doubtlessly do not realize that when they make such assertions they are saying precisely what the Roman Church says in calling marriage one of the divine sacraments. They have elevated this carnal thing to the same level as Baptism and the Lord’s supper. It is quite true that the apostle Paul used marriage as an analogy to teach the relationship of Christ and the church. The reason he did so is given in Romans 6:19: “*I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh*”. He is forced to use imperfect carnal analogy to illustrate spiritual truths because of our inability to grasp forthright spiritual realities. The analogy employed in Romans 6:19 is that of slavery. Must we also make a sacrament of slavery to preserve the integrity of divine revelation? Must the American Proclamation of Emancipation be nullified in order to preserve the gospel? Nonsense, you say. I agree. The analogy of marriage used in Romans 7:1-4 and in Ephesians 5:22-32 is no more periled or nullified by the breakdown in family and home life. The seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians reveals the degree of importance to the gospel Paul placed on marriage. He judged that a person could better give himself to the ministry without it, and implies that it ought to be engaged only to avoid fornication. He also warned that marriage would inevitably lead to “trouble in the flesh”.

We who have been seduced by the “crisis in the home” may be shocked to take not that, according to the word of God, it is sometimes God’s will and determination to destroy a home. “*If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people*” (Deuteronomy 14:6-9). Under the New Covenant, we do not kill our enemies, but the category of “enemies” remains when worship of the one true God is subverted. Family loyalties may not be permitted to imperil loyalty to the one true God.

An unbiased examination of the Scriptures will reveal that, contrary to current popular teaching, God *does not* put a premium on the preservation of a particular marriage. He hates “putting away” because it is treachery of one marriage partner against the other, and if children are involved, they become victims of this selfish abandon. But there is no evidence that He hates this any more than any other sin. “*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). There is not the slightest suggestion that the church ought to engage in a series of counseling and compromises, teachings and overtures in order to “save the marriage”. Certainly, no suggestion of a Gothard “hedge of thorn” to bring the erring partner back.

The admonitions having to do with husbands and wives, parents and children, found in Ephesians five and six, in Titus two and in 1 Peter three, are simply portions of a wide range of moral instructions given to “*followers of God, as dear children*” who should “*walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us*” (Ephesians 5:1-2). These are grouped with those behavioral exhortations that arise from “*the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*” (Titus 2:11-12). These appeals are addressed to “*dearly beloved . . . as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (1 Peter 2:11), not to the “Christian Home”, a term not found in the Bible. These exhortation include injunctions against lying, stealing, excess anger, foolish jesting, covetousness, drunkenness. They include exhortations of slaves to be obedient to masters, of all to be subject to state authority, modest dress and quiet behaviour for women, enduring persecution and rejection for righteousness’ sake, and a host of other things that have nothing to do with marriage or the home. To pull a few verses out of those contexts and claim that these passages were designed to save the home is to grossly misrepresent and misuse the word of God.

The very terms “Christian Marriage”, or “Christian Home” are misnomers. We have home, some, or all, of the members of which may be Christian. Only regenerated believers are Christian. And the only institution that is Christian is the church.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, whose marriage and home is often quoted as an ideal, was instructed by God to *heed his wife’s demand* and throw his own son out of the family (Genesis 21:9-14). If we say that this case was different because Ishmael was born to a maidservant, then we will also have to write off four of the sons of Jacob and reduce the tribes to eight instead of twelve.

Some have attempted to make a case for home order restoration under the New Covenant from Malachi 4:6: “*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*”. But this interpretation cannot stand in the light of its reference in Luke 1:17. John the Baptist was to go before Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the contemporary children of Israel to the devout disposition of their spiritual fathers, and the “wisdom of the just”, to prepare them for the appearance of their Messiah.

But how does our Saviour speak to this matter? He did not promise peace and order in the home, but disorder, division and hostilities *in the family* (Luke 12:51-53), and that expressly because of Him. He does not hesitate to interpose Himself between a man and his wife (Luke 14:26), children and their parents, brothers and sisters. How are we going to handle that in our “Focus On the Family” or Save the Home crusade?

In our mad scramble to smooth out the problems in the home, keep warring couples together, patch up things between siblings and siblings with parents, we might just find ourselves in direct opposition to the purpose of God. The first thing God told faithful Abram was to “get away from your family”. The first sin came when a man preferred his wife to the word of God, the first murder when a man was enraged over his brother’s relationship with God. Jesus’ warnings of the cost to family life in choosing Him were not empty threats. Christian history testifies that among those most mightily used of God are found they who had the greatest loss in family for the sake of the gospel.

A word of caution must be spoken here. There are now, as there always have been and always will be, those who are looking for an excuse to get out of an unwanted marriage, to break loose from parental authority, to neglect father and husband responsibilities. Such are miserable rebels and spiritual outlaws, as these often seize on such truths as these and justify their actions as the “will of God”. Not so! What we sacrifice for obedience to Christ is our dearest and most cherished treasure. He never offers Himself as a way out of unwanted ties and responsibilities.

We must not depreciate the value of a good marriage and a good strong home. They are greatly to be desired and absolutely essential for order in this present life, especially its mundane pursuits. But we must not try to make something spiritual out of it when it is carnal through and through. Indeed, it is the most priceless of all this present world’s treasures. That is why the Lord brought it forth as a possible cost of following Him. I am most grateful to God for my good wife of 42 years, for our five children and eleven grandchildren, our parents, brothers and sisters. But when I come to Christ, I come to Him alone, bringing these as well as others whom I love and care for before our God’s throne of grace in prayer.

We must not depreciate the awful ravages and pain of broken homes and alienated loved ones. Such sorrow as that suffered by the loss of a mate or a child is by far the most awful grief that can be suffered by mortal man. That is why we will not hesitate to give our life for one of them. Death in their place is to be preferred to life without them. The social and psychological consequences that follow a broken marriage, especially when there are children, are so severe that if couples could only anticipate them, most would never divorce.

Nor must we fail to teach the Biblical guidelines and precepts for marriage, home and parental responsibilities. This should always be incorporated in a sound wholesome gospel ministry *to the saints*, as we are exhorted in the scriptures. That is straight down the narrow path, not a diversion. The lie that we have swallowed is that the gospel is inadequate to address the issues, and we must have a tailor-made curriculum for dealing with them.

The crisis in marriage and home is no more than any other moral or social crisis that plagues our society. The all have one common cause: spiritual rebellion. I have likely had at least my share of counseling people with family problems. I cannot recall one couple in 32 years that were having marital problems because they did not know what God said about the home. Their problems appeared because one or both of them did not give a hoot what God said about the home, or anything else, for that matter. Many were quite willing to heed what “God said about the home” if it would fix the marriage, but did not care much about serving Him, except to “keep the home together”. That kind of resolution to the home problem is a fraud, and is nothing less than wickedness.

When a person gets his heart right with God, his relationship with his family will be right. And any family loss suffered after that will be in accordance with the will of God. That is something we can live with in this present life, and face the eternal issues to come.

- C. M.