

February 4, 1969

PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
(Sixty-eighth in a series)

DIVORCE AND SIN

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A proper understanding of the Biblical conception of marriage and the home on the one hand, and of sin on the other hand, will convince some that sin is involved in every divorce.

The Bible clearly reveals that God's original purpose and his ultimate ideal for the home was and is the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife for life.

On the other hand, a word for sin in the Old Testament and a comparable one in the New Testament that are both particularly significant for our purpose mean "to miss the mark." Any time an individual or a God-ordained institution misses the mark that God has set, it is sin.

Since God's mark or purpose for the home was and is the lifetime union of husband and wife, divorce on any grounds involves sin. In addition, there are sins of various kinds that may contribute to the sin of divorce.

Pastors and other marriage counsellors know when a divorce has occurred or is threatened that, with rare exceptions, both husband and wife must share in the responsibility for the divorce. There is seldom if ever a completely innocent party in a conflict that leads to divorce. Most of the responsibility may be on one side or the other, but both have sinned and come short of the purposes of God--they have "missed the mark."

Either husband or wife may sin simply by not being willing to make adjustments, by being unwilling to work as hard as he or she should to make the marriage succeed. In other words, the husband and wife should be reminded that there are sins of omission as well as commission.

Also, one or both partners may sin by refusing to acknowledge his or her responsibility for the failure of their marriage. It is a sin to shift to others the responsibility that properly belongs to us.

Closely akin to the preceding is the fact that repentance and forgiveness are essential in any mutually satisfying human relations. There is no relation where these are more important than in the home. Insofar as a lack of either or both of these has been a factor in the divorce, sin is involved.

It is possible that so much emphasis has been given to adultery as a factor in divorce that some couples may think of it as the only sin that is involved in a divorce. Let us repeat that divorce itself is a sin and that sins of varying degrees of seriousness may be contributing factors to the sin of divorce.

One other word needs to be said about sin and divorce. The sin of divorce and the sins that contribute to divorce are not unpardonable sins. This sin and these sins, like other sins, can be forgiven. God can and wants to forgive every sin, including the sin of divorce. The latter is true regardless of the reason for the divorce.

If men and women who have been divorced are to have the Father's forgiveness they must seek it. One factor in seeking God's forgiveness is genuine repentance for sins that have been factors in the divorce and repentance for the divorce itself. The forgiveness that is available from God if one will genuinely repent must be appropriated.

Entirely too many Christian men and women seemingly do not believe that God has forgiven them when the basic problem is that they have not forgiven themselves. And there is no forgiveness of self without a prior acknowledgment of guilt..



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New York Baptists Set Stage for New Convention

GREENWICH, Conn. (BP)--The Executive Board of the Baptist Fellowship of New York, meeting here with leaders from Southern Baptist Convention board and agencies, set the stage for becoming the 31st Baptist state convention affiliated with the SBC next fall.

The board made plans for a constituting convention on Sept. 26, 1969, in Syracuse, N. Y., and for beginning of state convention operations on Jan. 1, 1970.

Several future meetings of the Executive Board and its administrative committee were planned for the next several months in Syracuse, and Endicott, N. Y., and Scotch Plains, N. J.

Decisions on state convention organization structure and other matters will be determined at the later meetings and recommended to the constituting convention in September.

One of the main issues of discussion at the meeting here was the structuring of various departments of work, reported Curtis T. Porter, recording secretary of the state Baptist fellowship and pastor of the Amherst Baptist Church in Tonawanda, N. Y.

After an opening general session, the board and SBC leaders divided into three study groups dealing with each area of work in which the convention will engage. The three groups were: (1) business services, (2) church program services, and (3) missions, stewardship, evangelism and Brotherhood.

Whether the Woman's Missionary Union and the Brotherhood organizations would function as different departments, or be structured as a part of the missions department, was of major concern, said Porter, pastor of Amherst Baptist Church, Tonawanda, N. Y.

The Baptist Fellowship of New York is now functioning as an organization of 56 churches and 32 chapels with about 10,000 members. The churches are located from Lake Erie to Connecticut and the Jersey Shore area.

Executive Board chairman Roger Knapton of Endicott, N. Y., said he felt sure the fellowship was "on schedule in our preparation" for having 70 churches and 10,000 members by September to meet criteria to qualify as a state convention in the SBC.

Almost immediately after the board meeting, the fellowship of churches began to make their contributions to world missions through the Cooperative Program by sending the funds direct to the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville for distribution, rather than going through a state convention.

The churches in the New York Fellowship are now a part of either the Baptist Convention of Maryland, or the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio. Both Ohio and Maryland state conventions have "sponsored" the missions work in the area previously.

As their first direct contribution to world missions through the Cooperative Program, the treasurer of the New York Baptist Fellowship, Leroy Stewart of Potsdam, N. Y., sent a check for \$1,881 to the SBC Executive Committee for distribution to world mission causes.

During the board meeting here, the executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee, Porter W. Routh of Nashville, urged the New York area Baptists to have a world vision and concern.

Speaking on the need for effective organization as the group becomes a state convention, Routh added: "You can have all the organization in the world, and unless you have motivation to go with it, organization is to no avail."

He urged the New York Baptist leaders to organize their convention and plan their efforts out of a motivation of "concern for people as persons."

Carlton Named Preaching Professor at Southeastern

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--John W. Carlton of Louisville, Ky., has been elected to the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here as professor of preaching, effective Aug. 1, 1969.

Carlton has accepted also a part-time relationship with the Divinity School of Duke University as adjunct professor of preaching.

Since 1962, he has been a member of the faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville. Previously he was associate professor of preaching at the Divinity School of Duke University.

He has held two pastorates in Virginia and has served as a guest lecturer to the United States chaplains in several states and in Europe and the Middle East.

A native of Texas, Carlton holds a bachelor of arts degree from Baylor University, studied at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and earned the doctor of philosophy degree at Duke University. He has done post-doctoral study at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

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SBC Mission Gifts Increase In January, But Not Enough

(2-4-69)

NASHVILLE (BP)--Contributions to world missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget increased 9.96 percent during the month of January, but it wasn't enough to make up for a 16 percent loss in December of 1968, SBC officials here said.

Cooperative Program missions gifts for the month of January totalled a little less than \$2½ million, one of the biggest single months of missions support in the denomination's history.

The \$2,498,574 channeled to world missions through the Cooperative Program in January of 1969 was an increase of \$226,322 over similar gifts in January of 1968, or an increase of 9.96 percent, the SBC Executive Committee here reported.

But the big increase in January was not enough to offset a 16 percent decrease in Cooperative Program contributions during the month of December, which caused the denomination to fall short of its budget at the end of the year by \$722,530.

When Cooperative Program gifts for December of 1968 and January of 1969 are combined, the total of \$4,427,415 is still about 3 percent less than the approximate \$4,568,000 given during December of 1967 and January of 1968, said John H. Williams, financial planning secretary of the SBC Executive Committee.

Designated gifts to specific SBC missions causes during January of 1969 increased 4.37 percent compared to January of 1968. Designations for the first month of 1969 were \$3,461,514, compared to \$3,316,681 in 1968.

The combined designated and Cooperative Program contributions made a total of \$5,960,088 available to Southern Baptist causes during the first month of the year, an increase of 9.37 percent or \$371,155 over total contributions for the same 1968 period.

The total missions gifts reflect only amounts given to support national SBC causes, and do not include contributions to local and state Baptist mission efforts.

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