

Marriage

*A Biblical Study of Marriage, Divorce,
& Remarriage*



JOHN AZIZA

First printing 2011
Latest revision 2017

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Contact Info

Please contact me, John Aziza at (907) 232-5604

Or by email at jazziza88@gmail.com

web: hisperfectbride.com

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DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this book to the only ONE worth my life's service and dedication, Jesus Christ, the "author and finisher" of my faith (Heb 12:2). Without Jesus, we are nothing and can do nothing.

As part of this work, I wish to acknowledge my loving wife, God's precious gift to me, for her many prayers, enduring patience, and continued encouragement. If it wasn't for her wise council during the course of my study and writing, I don't know how far this work would have progressed.

I would also like to respectfully acknowledge my dear parents, who are largely responsible for this writing. Their Christian upbringing inspired me to become a diligent "Berean" of the Scriptures and to make "crooked places straight" (Luke 3:5).

And finally, a special thanks to all my dear friends and circle of fellowship for the positive reinforcement and doctrinal dialogue that have led me to pen this book and complete my research of this issue.

INTRODUCTION

There was a time in our not so distant history when every Protestant denomination in America clung solidly to the belief in the permanence of marriage. Sadly, this would not remain so for long. Before we could react, the tide of humanist philosophy reshaped the landscape of Western society and turned it almost completely secular. In less than a generation our biblical values and godly heritage deteriorated to an indistinguishable state.

Yet is it merely coincidence that after the Church relaxed its absolute standard on marriage the American divorce rate hit a pandemic rise? Perhaps not. It was as though the Church, in a single decisive action, opened the flood gates of moral decay by deciding to be a little less rigid on its outlook of marriage. Had we held to our beliefs without compromise perhaps the downward spiral of immorality may not have been so accelerated and perhaps we may have even managed to stave it off with our counteracting influence. Now statistics prove that over half of all marriages end in divorce and the worst of these figures actually belong to Christian couples or ministers within the Church.

The Church, by following societal trends, has unwittingly contributed to one of the worst moral failures in society. Little did we realize how our actions would come to impact the secular world. And little did we gauge the unimaginable heartache that our children and grandchildren would come to suffer as a direct consequence of our broken marriages. But this shouldn't really surprise us, since Jesus Himself had said that we, meaning Christians, are the salt of the earth (Mat 5:13). The Church has more power to influence the world than what we give Her credit for. If only we would believe it and dare to make a difference.

Is it fair, though, that our children should suffer while we twist the words of Christ? Could we in good conscience continue to provide couples with non-existent loopholes by which they may terminate their marriages and absolve their covenant commitments? I don't believe so. In fact, I believe what we've done is terribly wrong.

I have personally witnessed what happens when a pastor, who may be genuinely ignorant of the truth, provides "biblical" grounds by which a husband or wife may divorce and remarry. Since it doesn't take long for vulnerabilities in marriages to arise, when they do, such grounds for divorce are quickly and easily exploited. The result is that marriages simply don't last and promises and vows have become increasingly open-ended.

After studying this issue for a number of years now, I'm of the firm conviction that marriage is for life and that the Scriptures teach a covenant obligation toward it, not one of contract. But allow me to quote a fellow minister of the Word who has arrived at the same conviction as I, so you may understand what motivates me to proclaim this position openly and to write about it despite the negative lash-back:

“Anyone who has dared stand against the tide of popular theology knows whereof we speak. After years of research and Bible study concerning marriage and divorce, I am persuaded that this teaching is scripturally sound and socially electrifying. There has been a price to pay, and nails and thorns to feel. But because I have preached it, I have seen the fruit of this message in the lives of those with seeming irreconcilable circumstances being reconciled. I have seen young people who, hearing it for the first time, are suddenly realizing the awesome seriousness of stepping into a lifetime commitment—marriage. The price tag of obedience has been worth it a thousand times over because, *to obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Samuel 15:22). --Joseph A. Webb”

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to counteract the negative influence of Christian preachers and teachers who are following the status quo of their respective denominations and contributing to the mass deterioration of marriage. It is my desire to faithfully study the Scriptures in regards to marriage in order to demonstrate why it is so holy and sacred, and why Christ made it clear that once a couple is wed they are irreversibly made “one flesh” for life. I pray that as we study this issue we may lay down our prior biases and preconceived ideas in order to take a “second look” at what the Bible really teaches. May God bless you as you endeavor to do this whilst reading the following pages.

In Christ,
John A.

Chapter 1

MARRIAGE

What is marriage? The Bible defines it as the moment in which an unmarried man and woman are joined together in a lifelong bond (Gen 2:24, Mat 19:5, Eph 5:31). But while marriage is truly this simple, it is also deeply profound and complex. Moreover, the Scriptures freely disclose many important truths about its function, design, and ultimate purpose.

GOD SANCTIONED & LEGAL

According to the Bible, the following guidelines both define and legitimize the institution of marriage:

1. Marriage is a mutual agreement occurring between a man and woman and may also involve their parental parties:

*Thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.... And they called Rebekah, and said to unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, **I will go...** and she became his wife; and he loved her (Gen. 24:4; 58; 67).*

2. Marriage is established and confirmed in the presence of two or three witnesses:

*And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, **Ye are witnesses this day**, that....Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife... (Ruth 4:9-10).*

*...In the mouth of **two or three witnesses** shall every word be established (2 Cor. 13:1).*

*...that in the mouth of **two or three witnesses** every word may be established (Mat. 18:16).*

*...**at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses**, shall the matter be established (Deu. 19:15).*

3. Marriage should include the proper social and civil steps which legitimize it in one's culture (Ruth 3:12; 13; 4:1-11; Rom. 13:1). For instance, in Western society this may involve vows, witnesses, and proper legal procedure.

4. Marriage should occur between two individuals of legal adult age.

Marriages involving minors or "child brides" are not scriptural or morally right:

*But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, **if she pass the flower of her youth**, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry (1 Cor. 7:36).*

5. Marriage should never include multiple spouses:

*...the **two** shall be one flesh...* (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5).

*A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well (1 Tim. 3:2; 12).*

*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 (Mal. 2:14-15).*

6. Marriage cannot include close kin (Lev. 18:6-18).

7. Marriage should only occur between Believers (1 Cor. 7:39).

8. Marriage should include a wedding celebration (Mat. 22:2; Jn. 2:1-2).

9. Marriage was often preceded by betrothal (Deu. 22:23; Mat. 1:18).

10. Marriage must be recognized as a covenant, not a contract:

*... yet is she thy companion, and **the wife of thy covenant** (Mal. 2:14).*

BIBLICAL REASONS FOR MARRIAGE

God ordained marriage for procreation (Gen. 1:27-28; Psalm 128:3).

Marriage gives the couple the right to experience sexual union (1 Cor. 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4).

God arranged marriage to satisfy the most basic human emotional needs (Gen. 24:67; Eph. 5:25; 33).

God arranged marriage to serve as a strong support system, an economic base, and a center for biblical upbringing (Ecc. 4:9-12; Pro. 31:27-28; Eph. 6:4).

God established marriage to be a picture of Christ's relationship with His Church (Eph. 5:22-25; 32).

COVENANT OR CONTRACT?

*... yet is she thy companion, and **the wife of thy covenant**. And did not he make one?* (Mal. 2:14)

Is marriage covenant or contract? Although marriage is often treated as contract in our modern society, it is not so biblically. This fact is clearly evidenced in Malachi 2:14, as quoted above.

When searching the Scriptures, we discover much covenant symbolism and terminology. In fact, the word for "covenant" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew *breit*, which means to cut or separate. This explains why in Jeremiah 34:18 we find an example of covenant making which involved passing through the slain parts of an animal. This severe looking ceremony well represented its graphic meaning—to break the agreement would result in death!

Essentially, a covenant was the strongest, most binding pact one could make. The Apostle Paul reminded the Galatians of this truth when writing to them the following, *Brothers, as a man I say it: **a covenant, even though it is man's, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls it, or adds to it*** (Gal 3:15). Here, Paul expresses two crucial qualities pertaining to covenant. First, **no one is able to annul (dissolve, break, or undue) it**. Second, it is impossible to revise or change a covenant once it has been ratified or recognized as valid. Covenants are permanent! But contracts, on the other hand, are often temporary and conditional. They are negotiable and can be broken depending on either party's performance.

But to further establish the covenant quality of marriage, we must go back to the beginning of time, back to the first marriage ever consummated. We find it in Genesis 2:21-23. It is

here that God performs a radical surgery. Adam is operated on and one of his ribs removed in order to fashion his helpmate and wife, Eve. Clearly, Adam would have been cut open in order to experience this surgical procedure. Hence, it says that God **closed up the flesh in its place** (Gen 2:21b). So this would certainly indicate some type of incision. Yet is it a mistake that God cut Adam open to extract one of his ribs? Remember also the Hebrew meaning of the word covenant—“to cut or separate”. Nevertheless, in the next verse of the same chapter, God states that, “**For this cause...**”, or “because of this” (verse 24), referring to the operation He had just performed, man was to “leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife” thus becoming one with her. This “rib-extraction” was the sign of the marriage covenant. It brought husband and wife together into a single unit, making them “one flesh” (Mark 10:8).

So then it's no mistake that when Eve was presented to Adam by God, Adam made this profound statement: ...*This is **now** bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man* (Gen 2:23). Adam's statement is clear proof of how binding the one-flesh covenant really is. A wise Sunday school teacher used the following example to illustrate this point with his class. Taking two pieces of clay, one blue and one yellow, he proceeded to squash them together until both became a solid green mass. He then urged any willing participants to come forward and separate the blue from the yellow. When none volunteered, it was hardly a surprise. What a vivid reminder of Christ's words in Matthew 19:6, *Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together **let not man put asunder*** (divide).

Yet even with all of this compelling evidence, there are those who still try to undermine the insoluble nature of marriage. In fact, some would go so far as to use 1 Corinthians 6:16 to explain away the cementing nature of the one-flesh covenant in order to make us believe that “two shall become one” is not an exclusive statement. But before I proceed to counter this argument, let's see what 1 Corinthians 6:16 really says:

*What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot **is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh*** (I Cor 6:16).

To be clear, Paul is not in any way suggesting that sex equals marriage. And neither is he suggesting that by committing adultery with prostitutes we are effectively marrying them. I'm fairly certain that those who attempt to twist this verse out of context would agree with me here. However, what they attempt to prove by using this verse is that becoming “one flesh” with a marriage partner is not exclusive to marriage only and therefore a couple's covenant relationship is not as permanent as it may seem. But let's stop and consider this for a moment. If we follow this chain of reason to it's logical conclusion, we are left with no

choice but to apply Paul's words literally. In other words, marriage by immorality is truly possible. By using their interpretation of this verse, there is simply no other way to explain it. So let's be sensible. What exactly did Paul really mean here? To make matters simple, I believe Paul was using this analogy to merely demonstrate the fact that sex was intended to exist solely within marriage. As a result, any misuse of its designated function is an assault upon the "one flesh" covenant hallowed by God at creation and reinforced by Christ in the Gospels. Essentially, we become guilty of perverting God's design for sex when we use it the wrong way.

THE STRONGEST COVENANT OF ALL TIME

Throughout the Old Testament, God adopts the role of a husband when relating to the nation of Israel (Hos. 2:16; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:1; 31:32). Essentially, God entered into a marriage covenant with Israel that would last until the establishment of the New Testament. But why is that? Why did God choose marriage to symbolize His commitment toward Israel? Couldn't He have chosen some other covenant type? Perhaps it's simply because God recognized the binding nature of marriage and chose *it* as the ultimate expression of His faithfulness and love.

It is interesting that even the Apostle Paul recognized marriage as a great spiritual mystery, which symbolized Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:28-33). Evidently, Paul too was discerning of the deeper implications of marriage and therefore identified it as the strongest covenant of all time.

THE REAL DEFINITION OF CLEAVE

Does the word "cleave" used in Genesis 2 and echoed later in Matthew 19 refer to sexual union within marriage? Many Christians believe so. In fact, some would go so far as to equate sex with marriage. Meaning that marriage cannot be fully consummated without sex. Such thinking, however, is deeply flawed. It simply cannot be proven scripturally and distorts the real meaning of the word cleave. Allow me to demonstrate this fact by looking at the original text where cleave appears:

*And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:22-24).*

The word "therefore" in verse 24 simply means because of this. So **because of what**, then, was man supposed to "leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife"? The predicate

pointing to the subject in these verses is really not hard to catch. Sex is not described here at all. What is described, rather, is the operation God had just preformed on Adam when extracting one of his ribs to form Eve. Long before Adam experienced sexual intercourse with Eve, he awoke to make a profound statement when beholding Eve for the very first time, "this is **NOW** bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Therefore the cleaving that happens here is clearly on account of Adam's rib operation, *nothing else*. This is what constituted the "one flesh" covenant and it would forever memorialize marriage as a divine ceremony in which God brings together two individuals into a single unit. Yet it must be realized that this does not happen physically, but rather a married couple is bonded together spiritually. In other words, they are one flesh in God's sight, from His celestial perspective. Man must merely assent to this truth and believe it.

So in light of this new information, allow me to paraphrase Genesis 2:24 as follows to see if it makes better sense: "**Because of Adam's rib extraction (symbolizing the marriage covenant), man shall now leave father and mother and cleave (unite himself) with his wife and together they shall be one flesh**". Of course, the benefit of this joining together *is* sex. But sex is merely a by-product of the marriage covenant, not its sole definition.

What many fail to realize is that cleave NEVER carried any sexual connotation, at least not biblically. Also, there are two distinct ways in which the Scriptures repeatedly use it as found in the Strong's concordance:

(1) *baqa`* "to split," or "to rend." As when Abraham "clave the wood for the burnt-offering" (Genesis 22:3), and the Israelites "clave the wood of the cart" (1 Samuel 6:14). The Psalmist speaks of Yahweh cleaving fountain and flood (Psalms 74:15), and the plowman cleaving the earth (Psalms 141:7). For other examples see Judges 15:19; Ecclesiastes 10:9; Psalms 78:15; Habakkuk 3:9.

(2) **dabhaq; kollao, "to adhere to," or "to join one's self to."** This meaning is the reverse of the preceding one given. We are told that men should cleave to God, "... But cleave unto the LORD your God, as you have done unto this day" (Jos 23:8). Accordingly, a man should also cleave unto his wife (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5). The Psalmist speaks of his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth (Psalms 137:6). It is said that Ruth clave unto her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:14), and that certain men clave unto Paul (Acts 17:34; compare Acts 4:23; 11:23 margin). "Cleave" is also used in this sense to describe one's adherence to principles. Paul admonished the Romans to cleave to that which is good (Romans 12:9). **Thus reason would tell us that the most appropriate match to the cleaving mentioned in Genesis 2:24 and Mathew 19:5 is located in Genesis 34:3, where**

Shechem loved Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and “his SOUL clave unto her”. This is the exact type of cleaving that a husband is to experience with his wife.

Now in contrast to the word cleave and its former definition, the Bible does employ the phrase, “knew her”, to strictly denote sexual intercourse between a man and woman. Notice:

*And he **knew her** again no more. And he knew her again no more* (Genesis 38:26).

*but **knew her** not until she had given birth to a son* (Matthew 1:25).

*And they **knew her** and abused her all night until the morning* (Judges 19:25).

*The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king **knew her** not* (1 Kings 1:4).

So if sex does not consummate marriage, what does? As mentioned in a previous section, nuptial vows are the physical evidence that legitimize marriage in the eyes of men. Marriage vows exchanged in the presence of witnesses fully **consummate** the marriage: “....Every matter must be **established** by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (1 Cor. 13:1). **Sex, therefore, does not consummate the marriage, but the making of vows in the presence of witnesses does.**

Finally, to be sure we understand that only vows consummate marriage, let me pose the following question: What if a groom-to-be were to suffer a traumatic car accident prior to his wedding day rendering him sexually impotent, but his future bride still agrees to marry him; because they will never experience sexual intercourse does their marriage remain indefinitely unconsummated? No. Obviously, with or without intercourse, their marriage will be fully consummated and recognizable even by the state.

FORCED MARRIAGES

It is a sad reality that most marriages within the non-Western world are arranged by family members, and some of them are even forced upon brides, leaving them no say in the matter. This custom is widely practiced throughout the Middle East and Asia. But does God recognize such marriages as valid? This question is important to analyze and may present itself for examination in countries where such practice is commonplace. Christians around the world may need wisdom when encountering this issue. So what can we learn about forced marriages from God's Word?

The way to solve this question is to determine whether marriage vows were incorporated within the wedding ceremony and whether the bride and groom exchanged their vows in the

presence of witnesses. If so, then the marriage is truly valid, otherwise, not. But some might object to this criteria citing the fact that the bride or groom may have been under severe duress when exchanging vows. Yes, I understand the logic and would love to agree with it, yet we see too many examples from the Old Testament in which God honored forced marriages such as those performed between the Israelites and their captive foreign women (Deu. 21:10-14). And then there is also the story of how the tribe of Benjamin, to avoid extermination, was instructed to kidnap young women from the vineyards of Shiloh and to take them as wives (Judg. 21:21). Clearly, none of these women had any say in who they would marry, yet I'm certain they were expected to remain faithful to their husbands.

Furthermore, the Bible indicates that vow making is never to be taken lightly. Notice these verses:

Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Israel, saying, "This is what the Lord has commanded. If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth (Num. 30:1-2).

*But any vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, anything by which she has bound herself, **shall stand against her** (Num. 30:9).*

It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay (Ecc. 5:5).

Obviously, vow making is a serious matter in God's sight, and marriage vows even more so, since they represent the highest order of any vow. So while it's unfortunate that forced marriages occur, we must not discount their validity when vow making is present even though the participants were unwilling to participate, but still complied. On the other hand, had the groom or bride fled the wedding scene prior to the exchanging of vows or bypassed this requirement completely at some other level, this standard would not be applicable.

THE BIBLICAL CUSTOM OF BETROTHAL

In the next few chapters we will look extensively at both divorce and remarriage. But before we do, it is imperative to understand the biblical climate of Christ's day and the process by which marriage was finally consummated. Perhaps the confusion stemming from the issue is owed to the lack of familiarity with the history and culture of the Jewish people. This, in turn, is the main cause for misunderstanding Christ's words in His dialogue with the Pharisees on divorce and remarriage.

So how is betrothal relevant to our study and why does it matter? You see, during Christ's time and even much earlier, marriage was a multi-step process which involved a particular

set of rules. For instance, a marriage that transpired in first century Israel was almost always preceded by betrothal or engagement. A couple was typically engaged before they were married. But betrothal did not commence without negotiation. Typically, most marriages were negotiated solely by the parents. It was also the custom of some men to offer their daughters in marriage in order to settle a debt or make a payment for property or goods. And on many occasions marriages were even used to form strategic coalitions between neighboring clans. Whatever the case, the value placed on such marriages was commonly known as the bride price. If an agreement was reached concerning the bride price then the marriage was officially underway.

Jewish law required such negotiations be carried out in the presence of at least two or more witnesses before they were considered legal and official (Deut. 22:29). Witnesses watched as the bride price for a virgin was settled on by the respective parties involved. And once the contract terms were confirmed and made effective, the wedding celebration would be scheduled and preparations made. At this point, the couple was legally betrothed and it was just as binding as if they had already married. We find biblical evidence for this in both Ruth 4:2 and Matthew 1:18-19, which document the marriages of Boaz and Ruth and Joseph and Mary.

As seen in the example of Joseph and Mary, only a proven case of infidelity by either bride or groom could absolve the couple's pseudo marriage. In fact, so strong was the betrothal contract, that if any sexual misconduct (e.g. fornication) was discovered prior to marriage, it could potentially result in the same legal action prescribed by the Law for cases of adultery *within* marriage. Matthew 1 is clear on this point:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother **Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together**, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to **put her away privily**. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, **fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife**: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost (Mat. 1:18-20).*

In the above verses, we see that Joseph and Mary were considered just as good as married even prior to their actual marriage. For this reason their betrothal could only be terminated by divorce. This fact is extremely significant to solving the meaning of the exception clause located in both Matthew 5 and 19. And it will also provide us with a clear reference point as we progressively dissect some of the language used in the primary passages under review.

Chapter 2

DIVORCE

A LAW FOR DIVORCE (DEUTERONOMY 24)

*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 (Deu. 24:1-2).*

According to many Evangelicals, Deuteronomy 24:1-2 provides grounds for divorce in the case of adultery. But we may soon discover that such is not the case. In fact, Deuteronomy 24 does not even address the issue of adultery at all. Instead, what we find is a concession granted by Moses to Israel because of their **selfishness and hardness of heart** (cf. Mathew 19:8). This concession also functioned to protect wives from abandonment and neglect. **Furthermore, the instruction in the above passages cannot possibly refer to adultery simply because such an offense was punishable by death, not divorce.** Here's proof:

*The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, **the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.** If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then **both of them shall die**—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel (Lev. 20:10).*

*If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and **a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death** with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you (Deu. 22:22-24).*

As seen in the preceding verses, both Leviticus and Deuteronomy are explicit about the punishment appropriate for **a confirmed** case of adultery. Adultery equaled death for either party involved—man or woman. Even so, some may use Numbers 5:27 to argue that not all adultery was punished by death, in which case the unfaithful spouse could remarry, or so they claim. Yet we can easily demonstrate how even this is impossible. Numbers 5

prescribes a certain method by which the wife suspected of adultery was to be tried. She was to be brought before the priest and given a potent drink, referred to as the "cursed water". Two outcomes were possible for the suspect wife once she partook of the cursed water. If she had been indeed faithful, her physical condition would remain unaltered, but if not, she would become internally diseased with a "swollen belly and rotten thigh". The second outcome confirmed her guilty status. Therefore logic demands that such symptoms spelled an eventual and agonizing death. The cursed water decisively sealed her fate. That is why we maintain that **all confirmed** cases of adultery under Moses led to immediate or eventual death. But what about in Christ's day? Was the Mosaic Law still enforced during His time as well? That the Jews were still in the habit of stoning persons caught in adultery is clearly evidenced when the Pharisees brought a convicted adulteress to Jesus before attempting to stone her as recounted in John 8:1-11. This fact alone is why most traditional scholars believe that the "uncleanness" alluded to in Deuteronomy 24:1 clearly pertains to **anything less than adultery**.

But what exactly is meant by "uncleanness"? It is important to realize that the Hebrew word "ervah", translated as "uncleanness", contains the connotation of sexual impurity. Some speculate that this particular uncleanness relates to lewd or improper behavior of an immoral nature. Perhaps referring to a wife who had become discontented with her own husband and had begun exhibiting promiscuous behavior around other men. Regardless, it is clear that sexual indecency is the matter being discussed in Deuteronomy 24 and not some external physical blemish. So this alone is proof that the passages quoted above cannot legitimately support divorce for adultery.

Nevertheless, it is ironic that the same individuals who use Deuteronomy to justify divorce do so while decisively rejecting this book's various other regulations believing them to be superseded by New Testament principles. For instance, they are quick to ignore the laws pertaining to slavery (15:20), the treatment of female prisoners (21:10-14), polygamy (21:15), and so on. So why then are we wise enough to recognize that all of the others no longer apply in the New Covenant yet refuse to acknowledge the same with divorce?

GOD'S DIVORCE WITH ISRAEL (JEREMIAH 3 VS. DEUTERONOMY 24)

The example of God divorcing Israel in Jeremiah 3 is often touted by Christians seeking to justify divorce. But when read carefully it is clear that such justification is completely misconstrued and non-existent. In fact, few scripture passages condemn permanent legal divorce more strongly than those in Jeremiah 3. What's further remarkable about this chapter is that it intentionally undermines the law for divorce located in Deuteronomy 24. By recognizing this fact, we can easily understand why God did not intend Deuteronomy's divorce ruling to represent His eternal purpose for Israel, but rather a temporal guideline by

which to **legislate and control the inevitable outcome of their choice**. So let's read the following passages carefully to truly appreciate this truth:

*They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted?But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord.And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery **I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce**; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; **for I am married unto you**: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion (Jer 3:1, 8, 12, 14).*

Beginning in verse one, God reminds Israel of Deuteronomy's divorce law. He wants them to realize that since they had gone and joined up with other gods, they were henceforth restricted from returning back to Him based on this very ruling. But then God does something rather remarkable. Making sure Israel was fully aware of it, He deliberately sweeps aside the divorce edict and calls upon His people to return to Him and be fully restored. Clearly, while God had officially divorced Israel because of her idolatry, He was nonetheless willing to once more be reconciled to them. In fact, verse 14 makes it abundantly clear that God still considered Himself joined to Israel in marriage. This alone is strong enough evidence pointing to the fact that God's form of divorce is neither permanent or legal. It is merely separation with the hopes of reconciliation just as echoed by Paul in the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:11).

HOSEA AND GOMER

The story of Hosea and Gomer is similar to that in Jeremiah 3 and just as compelling. In chapter one, God brokers a unique marriage between a whore and one of the holy prophets. Hosea is expected to marry Gomer, a known harlot, and remain faithful to her in spite of her repeated adultery. Through this story, God uses the most profound covenant symbol (marriage) to portray His enduring faithfulness and love toward Israel, an unfaithful "wife". In chapter 2, while taking on the role of a husband, God urges Israel to repent and turn back to Him from idolatry. His attitude toward Israel in the following verses is an example of "suffering love" and should provoke every Christian to think more responsibly before contemplating divorce:

*And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: **then shall she say, I will go and return to my first***

husband; for then was it better with me than now...And I shall take you as a bride unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in mercies (Hosea 2:7; 19).

AGAPE LOVE

One of the most compelling themes in Scripture is the principle of unconditional love. The New Testament uses the Greek word "agape" to describe this type of love. It is important to recognize that agape love is neither selfish nor does it rely upon the performance of others. Yes, indeed it is entirely unconditional.

When embarking upon the subject of divorce, we must ask the question, does this practice comply with the concept of agape love? There is no better example describing the type of love which Christ extends toward us than the famous "love is" passage found in 1 Corinthians 13. I believe agape love embodies the revolution Jesus came to inspire! Let's examine these verses:

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth (1 Cor 13:4-8).

We don't need close scrutiny to realize that divorce is the very antithesis to the New Testament principle of unconditional love.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it....(Song Of Solomon 8:7).

Chapter 3

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

MATTHEW 5

As stated earlier, the view of most evangelicals today is that the Matthean exception clause provides legal grounds for divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery. But is this interpretation correct or does it violate the rest of Scripture? To answer this question, perhaps a deeper and more thorough examination of the exception clause is required. So let's begin by studying the exception clause as it appears in Mathew 5:

*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, **saving for the cause of fornication, causeth (FORCES)** her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Mat. 5:31-32).*

The above passages suggest that EXCEPT for the case where a wife was ALREADY guilty of adultery, the husband initiating a divorce was responsible for CAUSING her.... or FORCING her to commit adultery. Just how this would play out is pretty easy to see. A woman had virtually no rights in the culture of ancient Israel and apart from the husband's provision would be hard pressed to survive the harsh conditions of that era. Desperation would compel her to seek out a new spouse or partner and consequently **force her into adultery**. So who was to be blamed? The husband, of course, for **causing** her to commit adultery— "*causeth her to commit adultery*". While the wife was not absolved of sin in her act of remarriage, nevertheless, it was not her own choice that drove her there, but rather her husband's. Obviously, there is nothing in this reading that conflicts with the permanence position thus far defended.

MATTHEW 19—FINDING BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Finding the background and context to Christ's dialogue with the Pharisees in Matthew 19 is essential for a proper understanding of our subject. Without it, we may be lead to imagine that the issue at large pertains to divorce in the case of adultery. After all, what else could Christ be referring to and was there really any other cause for controversy? But such reasoning is in error. Earlier in chapter 2 it was demonstrated that the Law of Moses spells only ONE outcome for those guilty of adultery—DEATH. If Jesus and the Pharisees were debating divorce due to adultery, then they were grossly ignorant of the Law. But this is contrary to the example found in John 8:1-11, where the Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman

caught in the very act of adultery seeking His approval to stone her. Both Christ and the Pharisees well understood that adultery led to death—NOT divorce. The writing of a bill of divorcement was for other reasons, but never for adultery. Now that we understand this, let's uncover the real issue in Matthew 19 by navigating this chapter verse-by-verse:

3 *The Pharisees also came unto him, trying him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. 10 His disciples say unto him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. 11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 12 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 (Matthew 19:3-12).*

v. 3 The Pharisees' question was a deliberate attempt to draw Jesus into one of their ongoing debates on what constituted legal grounds for divorce. Each side was hoping Christ would align Himself with their own personal view. You see, the rabbinic body of Christ's day was split into two camps, one representing Rabbi Hillel and the other, Rabbi Shammai. Each differed on their specific interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 in relation to divorce. Hillel's interpretation was by far the most liberal and permitted divorce and remarriage for ANY reason, while Shammai's was more conservative and restricted divorce to issues of "immorality" only. Once again, **adultery was entirely outside the scope of this debate.**

So when the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was "...*lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause*", they were essentially asking Him whether He thought divorce was acceptable in every situation. [This referred to Hillel's position—every reason was justifiable cause.]

v. 4-6 The answer Christ offered the Pharisees was unequivocal in its tone. Jesus wasn't taking sides in this debate. In fact, He had His own opinion. And so He reminded the

Pharisees that marriage was an institution erected by God at the beginning of creation. Since God had facilitated marriage, He alone could define its structure and parameters, *not* man. It was God who brokered the marriage **covenant** between husband and wife and therefore it was He who decided they would be joined together inseparably into ONE: *For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.* On account of this fact, man has **NO** power whatsoever to undue the work of God in the area of marriage: "*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*"...

v. 7-12 Now it's interesting that Matthew 19 actually contains two questions related to this issue, both posed by the Pharisees. When Christ answered the first question with a decisive no, the Pharisees immediately countered with a second one: *...Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?* That the Pharisees were surprised by Christ's reply is plenty clear. No doubt they felt it was in direct opposition to the law of divorce contained in Deuteronomy 24. Yet when pointed to the Mosaic Law, where does Christ point them back? Notice: *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered (A CONCESSION) you to put away your wives: **but from the beginning it was not so...***

Jesus recognized that the law of divorce was merely a **concession** given by Moses on account of Israel's hard heartedness. It was not meant to last forever. In fact, Jesus would soon repeal it. His self-described mission was to restore man back to the **beginning**, before the Fall and the emergence of sin. Christ was getting set to destroy the effects of sin and restore fellowship between God and man just as enjoyed in Eden. So while the Law of Moses had it's place in human history, it was only a temporal measure required to deal with man's selfishness until a better solution was provided. That solution was Christ. And now, through His ministry, the power of sin would forever be conquered and man would be empowered to live by a greater Law—the Law of grace.

Yet it was not as though these changes were unwarranted. Moses had already prepared Israel to accept Christ's future ministry and to observe whatever He would tell them: *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken* (Deut 18:15). This is where we believe the question, "did Jesus correct Moses?", posed by those who defend divorce, receives its most appropriate answer. Jesus did not correct Moses, He **SUPERSEDED** Him! His **WORD** was the final solution. **Henceforth, the Church would progressively apply itself to the principles of restoration back to the beginning in the Spirit and pattern of the New Testament. The Mosaic law and its precepts permitting polygamy, legal divorce, slavery, and corporal punishment were now forever abolished.** The

closing of the old Law was complete and in its place the New Testament, written by the Apostles, permanently functioned to settle all matters of doctrine.

Note: The exception clause appearing in verse 9 will be treated to a detailed interpretation in our next section.

Now there are several clues that prove beyond doubt that Jesus truly did elevate the marriage bond to a much higher standard than hitherto realized. The first is found directly in the manner in which Christ asserts His authority in verse 9. Notice: ***And I say unto you....*** In other words, Jesus was saying, “here is ***my*** say on the matter, and my authority is final”.

The second clue and perhaps the most compelling, is demonstrated in the disciple's incredulous reaction to Christ's words: *His disciples say unto him, **If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*** (Matthew 19:10-11). The disciples were shocked! They had never heard such a teaching! Jesus was clearly rejecting the rabbinic traditions of His time. He was neither for Hillel (every cause) or for Shammai (fornication only). The teachings of Hillel and Shammai were what remained of God's standard of marriage after the religious leaders got through with it. But Jesus was establishing a new law and revolutionizing the concept of marriage. We are certain of this not merely because of the disciples' reaction, but also on account of Christ's response to their question later on. Notice: *But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 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* (Matthew 19:10-12).

So why does Jesus bring up eunuchs? And where is He heading with this? To lay it out simply, Christ presented His disciples with one of two choices, either they would embrace a single lifestyle or they had to agree to remain married permanently. Christ's reference to the eunuchs cannot be logically explained any other way.

DISSECTING THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

FOUR HISTORICAL VIEWS

The bellow excerpts copied in blue were borrowed from "What the Bible Says about Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage" by John Coblenz

The Erasmian View

“The Erasmian View is by far the most widely accepted today among Protestants. It holds that Christ's words in Matthew 19:9, allowed divorce in the case of **adultery** and, since in

Jewish marriage contracts the granting of divorce always implied the right to remarry, he also was permitting the innocent party to remarry. (Author's note: Steele and Ryrie are not here asserting that the granting of divorce under Jewish law did indeed imply the right to remarry, but rather that Erasmus and those following his viewpoint have erroneously tried to make such a case, and thereby interpret the words of Christ.) Most of those who take this position also say that Paul expanded this concept by allowing for divorce and remarriage in the case of the willful desertion by an unbelieving spouse of a believing partner (1 Cor. 7:15). Many even go further by allowing divorce and remarriage to take place for a variety of reasons—irreconcilable differences, mental promiscuity, mistreatment, etc.

At the beginning of the Reformation, the classic humanist Desiderius Erasmus suggested this interpretation and it is defended by the modern reformed scholar John Murray. Erasmus was a contemporary of Luther who influenced Luther's thinking on a number of issues but eventually broke with the reformers. It is curious that though Erasmus was essentially regarded as a heretic by his contemporaries, the Reformation writers were greatly influenced by his doctrine of divorce and remarriage. Since most evangelical literature has in turn been influenced by the reformers and subsequently by the Westminster Confession, his view is widely held among evangelicals today.”

The Patristic View

“Careful research through the hundreds of manuscripts written by leaders of the first five centuries has revealed that with only one exception (Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century Latin writer), the fathers were unanimous in their understanding that Christ and Paul taught that if one were to suffer the misfortune of divorce, remarriage was not permitted, regardless of the cause. This remained the standard view of the church until the sixteenth century when Erasmus suggested a different idea that was taken over by Protestant theologians.

“In the Patristic view, the only reasonable explanation for the disciples' reaction to Christ's words in Matthew 19:10 was that Christ was not following the arguments of the rabbinical schools of either Hillel (divorce and remarriage allowed for any trivial reason) or Shammai (divorce and remarriage allowed in cases of adultery), but was presenting an entirely revolutionary concept—that divorce is sinful and not according to God's plan; but if divorce were to take place, remarriage was forbidden. Great weight was given to the word order of Matthew 19:9 which, the fathers held, forbade remarriage *even* when immorality was involved.”

The Betrothal View

A growing number of evangelicals are persuaded that **Jewish betrothal** is key to solving the exception clause. The background for this position was summarized in the first chapter of this book defining marriage, and the reader is encouraged to locate and read the section

on betrothal if it was skipped. So while Christ prohibited **all** divorce and remarriage in the context of **consummated** marriage, He did not restrict the use of “divorce” between engaged couples when **fornication** or immorality were discovered, “...*except it be for **fornication***”. In other words, a man was allowed to initiate divorce ONLY if his **bride-to-be** was guilty of some type of immorality or sexual impurity **less than adultery**. Some examples of this may have included cases of undisclosed rape or if the arranged marriage was against the bride's will and she was discovered to be involved romantically with another man, but **not** indicted on charges of fornication. However, the best example of such divorce was when Joseph suspected Mary of sexual infidelity within their betrothal period and secretly decided to “put her away” (Mat. 1:18-20). While some would allege that he should have followed the prescription of the law and had her criminally charged and dually punished, Joseph must have realized that only a **confirmed (proven) case of adultery** resulted in stoning and was wise enough to conduct his divorce privately being a “just man”, as was said of him.

Understanding the Greek wording in Matthew 19:9 is essential to this position. *Moichao* (adultery) and *porneia* (immorality) are two distinct words that underlie our Matthean text. Here is how they are used: *And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for **fornication (porneia)**, and shall marry another, committeth **adultery (moichao)**: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit **adultery (moichao)***. While adultery specifically refers to infidelity between married couples, immorality is a generic term referring to a broad range of sexual sin. If Christ had meant that husband or wife may divorce only on account of adultery, then this was a prime opportunity to use *moichao* to settle the debate with the Pharisees, rather than to confuse them with the word *porneia*. Therefore it is obvious that Jesus was strictly referring to sexual sin distinct from adultery. Perhaps this explains why *porneia* was translated as **fornication** by some of the earliest Bible scholars who must have recognized this linkage.

The Unlawful Marriage View

The unlawful marriage view is yet another alternative for unlocking the meaning of Matthew's exception clause located in chapter 19. It proposes that while Christ forbade almost all divorce and remarriage, He allowed for and **expected** divorce in the case of unlawful unions. In other words, any marriage consummated in accordance with God's law was permanent, **unless** it fell into one of several unlawful categories. Both Leviticus and Deuteronomy list several types of illicit unions. Close kin and interfaith marriages (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:17-21; Deut. 27:20-23; 7:1-3), remarriage between a former husband and wife (Deut. 24:1-4), and even marriages in violation of levirate law (Deut. 25:5-10) are all examples of illicit unions. In fact, Ezra 9-10 vividly demonstrates the consequences of entering into such marriages contrary to God's Law. God required them to be disannulled

through divorce. Another example that may be cited is the case of King Herod and John the Baptist, who refused to recognize the king's marriage to Herodias, labeling it as unlawful (Mark 6:19).

Consider the text from Matthew 19:

*And I say unto you, whoever puts away his wife, **except it be for fornication** (except for unlawful sexual relations) and shall marry another commits adultery, and whoever marries her which is put away commits adultery (Matt 19:9).*

Now the clause, “except it be for fornication,” is translated from the Greek phrase μετὰ τὴν πορνείαν (me epi porneia). The usual meaning of the word porneia is “fornication” (i.e., sex between two unmarried people). However, depending on the context, porneia can also refer to other forms of sexual relations that are illicit or irregular by biblical standards. For example, many Greek lexicons (e.g., Strongs and Thayer & Smith) define porneia broadly as “illicit sexual intercourse” and then go on to define porneia to include fornication, homosexual activity, sexual intercourse with animals, sexual intercourse with close relatives (as spelled out in Leviticus 18), or sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman (Deu. 24:1-4). Modern evangelicals tend to include adultery in the definition of porneia more so than traditional protestants. But the reason that many early protestants have resisted lumping adultery into the definition of porneia is that there is another Greek word specifically for adultery, which is, μοιχία τὰν (μοιχίαοιχαιο). Therefore we do not consider adultery to be grounds for divorce based on either Matthew 5 or 19.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

MERGING MATTHEW AND MARK INTO ONE NARRATIVE

By closely following the narratives in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, it is obvious that they nearly duplicate each other. In fact, they are twin reports. Both describing the same event and subject. However, each contains distinct information vital to completing the bigger picture. Put them together and the riddle is solved. So this is exactly what we will do in the following section. But as we combine these texts, pay special attention to Mark's account, specifically the **private circumstances** in which the disciples question Jesus, and also His straightforward answer. I hope this may dispel any confusion regarding the issue.

NOTE: Mark's relevant passages appear in red, inserted where necessary.

Matthew 19: 3 *The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one*

flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. **10 And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.** 10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. 11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 12 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.

So we see that by merging both gospel accounts into one, the text becomes a much more coherent narrative. **It is now clear that while Matthew's gospel captures well the disciples' reaction, his gospel does not record the question they initially posed to Jesus, nor the fact that Jesus gave them a personal interpretation of the exception clause (as recorded by Mark) thus accounting for their very strong reaction in Matthew.** In fact, thanks to Mark's passages, the meaning of the exception clause is no longer a mystery. His interpretation is clearly spelled out and most valid to Christians today because **it was addressed personally to the disciples, NOT the Pharisees.** The disciples knew full well that when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, He often kept them in the dark, cloaking His messages within parables (Matthew 13:10-13). Perhaps that was why they waited patiently for the right moment before asking for further clarification. Essentially, they were after the “insider scoop” and that’s exactly what they received (Mark 10:12). Jesus gave them the **simplified version**, as recorded by Mark. No wonder they reacted in such a surprised manner. After hearing Christ's uncompromising position, a single lifestyle sounded a lot more attractive than a married one.

Perhaps it is easy to see now why Christians who try to decipher Matthew’s text without realizing that it was addressed to the Pharisees wind up so confused. Yet when Jesus clears up the smoke by offering a simplified interpretation, as presented in Mark’s Gospel, we balk at the meaning just as the disciples had, and choose rather to fiddle around with Mathew’s text hoping to find convenient loopholes.

A CLOSER LOOK AT 1 CORINTHIANS 7

But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 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 Cor. 7:12-15).

In the above verses, Apostle Paul addresses the problematic home life of a couple "unequally yoked" in their religious beliefs. Paul's advice in such cases is that they remain together as long as the unbeliever is content to live with the Believing spouse. Further along in verse 15 Paul makes it clear that if the unbeliever desires to leave, the Christian must let them go without causing conflict or strife. **The fact that Christians are "not under bondage" simply means that they are not obligated to co-exist with their unbelieving partners when their partners choose to leave.** In other words, Christians should not strive contentiously to keep an unbelieving spouse from living elsewhere. It is better, in Paul's words, that we maintain peace because "...God hath called us to peace".

Now some would argue that the word "bondage" in these passages refers to the legal "yoke" of marriage and therefore sets at liberty the believing spouse to remarry a believing partner. However, several significant flaws exist with this interpretation. First, **Christ made it clear that the only exception for divorce was due to issues of immorality less than adultery occurring within the betrothal period. Or if a couple was married unlawfully (aka. illicit unions).** So if the interpretation here is to vary from the original commandment given by Christ, Paul is effectively raising the benchmark to include spousal abandonment also. But by what authority? This puts him in direct variance with the teachings of Christ. Second, a little earlier in verses 10-11, Paul instructs wives to remain single, if separated from their husbands, until reconciled: *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.* So it is clear that separation with the hope of reconciliation is the main principle advocated here and throughout Paul's writings.

But to be sure we are not bending or twisting Paul's advice to fit our own constructs, let's carefully examine the **context and meaning** of the words "bound" and "loosed":

*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** (Rom. 7:2).*

*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 (1 Cor. 7:27-28).*

*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 Cor. 7:39).*

So how exactly do these scriptures define “bound” and “loosed”? **According to Paul, “bound” is the condition of marriage with a living spouse and “loosed” indicates freedom to remarry in the case of a deceased partner.** So by taking into account the clear meaning here and applying it back to our original passages (1 Cor. 7:12-15), we now understand that Paul is setting at liberty **only the widows, not** the married individuals (1 Cor. 7:27-28).

But in case you are still unconvinced, let's conclude this section by studying the words “bound” and “loosed” as they appear in the original Greek to see if their meaning squares with our explanation so far. Notice:

*Art thou **bound** (**deo = bond/knit/tie**) unto a wife? seek not to be **loosed** (**luisis = divorce**). Art thou **loosed** (**luo = dissolved or non-valid, i.e. death**) from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned... (1 Cor. 7:27-28).*

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

*For the woman which hath an husband is **bound** (**deo = bond/knit/tie**) by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if **the husband be dead, she is loosed** (**katargeo = discharged or separated from**) 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 (Rom. 7:2-3).*

It is highly noteworthy that everywhere the word “loosed” appears in our English translations it corresponds directly to a different Greek word with its own unique meaning. For example, “loosed” appears exactly three times in the above

passages. When referring to divorce, the Greek word **luisis** is applied, yet in reference to death, the Greek *luo* or *katargeo* are used instead. There is simply no stronger evidence in support of our interpretation than that which was just demonstrated using the original Greek terminology in these verses.

Chapter 4

KEY ISSUES AND OBJECTIONS

THE NEW CREATURE CONTROVERCY (PT. 1)

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

A popular teaching in Churches today claims that once an individual becomes “born-again” he or she is a “new creature” and therefore no longer encumbered by their past choices. This teaching is then applied to the area of divorce and remarriage. Meaning that if a couple was married, and then divorced and remarried *prior* to their conversion, after it, they are no longer living in adultery because in God's eyes they are henceforth “new creatures”. Therefore it's as though they were married for the very first time. After all, they reason, “all things are past away and behold all things have become new”. But such reasoning is a gross misrepresentation of the true meaning of the actual text. We must realize that only after repentance is achieved do we actually become born-again (Rom. 6:4; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). **So yes, in the case of genuine repentance, there is absolutely nothing in our past record that can be leveled against us. And in God's sight, our slate is totally wiped clean.** But the important key here is repentance, or rather how it is defined.

According to the Bible, the word repent means “to change one's mind.” The Bible also tells us that true repentance will result in a change of actions (Luke 3:8-14; Acts 3:19). Acts 26:20 declares, “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and **prove their repentance by their deeds.**” The full biblical definition of repentance therefore is a change of mind that results in a change of actions. Believers who fail to make this vital shift away from sin and towards an obedient lifestyle, have not yet repented and therefore are not genuinely “born again”.

So what exactly does repentance look like? Well, for instance, a thief would stop stealing and make **full restitution** for what he stole. Likewise a liar would no longer lie and confess his deceit to any deceived by his lies. A sodomite would break away from all homosexual relationships. And a couple living in fornication would have to do the same by terminating their immoral relationship or choose to legitimize it through marriage. So why should we treat the sin of adultery any differently? Isn't that a clear form of compromise?

Furthermore, imagine telling your unsaved friend who's been persisting in his or her marriage for over 20 years that it was all in vain because God doesn't even honor the vows of an unbeliever. I'll agree that such a **philosophy of absolutism** is very appealing, but it simply doesn't compute.

This issue also brings to mind the story of John the Baptist and King Herod. Herod was half Samaritan and half Idumean, a complete Gentile. Having committed adultery with his brother's wife, Herodias, he then married her. Nevertheless, as a follower of Christ, John was not sparing this pagan any part of the Gospel, whether it would discourage the King or not:

*For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, **his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.** For John had said unto Herod, **It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife** (Mark 6:17-18).*

Since they were already married, John could have taken the position of most modern-day evangelicals and told the king to simply confess his wrongdoing, receive Christ's forgiveness, and henceforth dedicate their new union to God's glory. This palatable message would not have offended the king in the least and would have made John popular with Herodias. It certainly would not have threatened anyone or made Herodias desperate enough to request his head on a platter. But because John kept insisting they absolve their adulterous affair, she wanted him dead without delay.

What's even more interesting is that throughout the story she continues to be referred to as Phillip's wife, in spite of the fact she was legally remarried and could not be returned back to Phillip—at least not according to the prohibition found in Deuteronomy 24. So not only does this prove Deuteronomy's prohibition was no longer valid (as demonstrated in an earlier chapter), but it also shows that John was certainly unaware of the “new creature” philosophy advocated by modern-day evangelicals. On the contrary, this forerunner of Christ, operated in the same Spirit and wisdom of His Master.

THE NEW CREATURE CONTROVERCY (PT. 2)

Todd & Betsy

Todd and Betsy have been living together for the past five years. They are not married, but have three of their own children. One day, they encounter an evangelist who offers them the plan of salvation and soon they decide to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Todd is now faced with a dilemma. Having read the Bible he is keenly aware that his relationship with Betsy is immoral. In fact, since he was previously married and neither he

nor his wife are currently divorced, his relationship with Betsy is clear cut adultery. Betsy, however, was never married, but lives in a sinful relationship with Todd. So she too is guilty of adultery.

Todd and Betsy are now left with two options: (1) Todd can divorce his wife claiming to be a new creature in Christ and remarry Betsy. Or (2), he must terminate his sexual relationship with Betsy and seek to return to his legitimate spouse. So which one is the right choice according to the Bible?

Sadly, if they were to seek council from most modern day preachers, they would be encouraged to get married because their past no longer counts in God's eyes.

While we might shake our heads in disbelief, this bad advice is being offered to new converts all the time by many well meaning ministers and teachers of the Christian Faith. But little do we realize that this teaching is the very reason why so many marriages are suffering ship wreck throughout the Christian world, and why marriage is now a flexible contract instead of a covenant relationship as God had always intended.

THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY CHURCH & THE MARCAN HYPOTHESIS

One objection commonly raised against the permanence position is that no evidence exists to prove that the early Church split up couples with divorce and remarriage in their past nor did the Apostles require it anywhere in their epistles. There are several ways to address this objection. First, the writings of the early Church (quoted further down) clearly demonstrate their unbending position against any type of divorce and remarriage. And second, in respect to the epistles, we must never take the absence of information on an issue as proof *for or against it*. An argument from silence is no argument at all. Up until now we have provided innumerable proofs to show that both Christ and Paul taught that marriage was indissoluble apart from death. We have also drawn heavily from the Old Testament to demonstrate the permanency of the marriage covenant. So to assume anything more than what is clearly spelled out in the Scriptures is treading on dangerous grounds.

It's of great significance that from the first century and well into the third, the Church was exclusively unanimous on their position of no divorce or remarriage for any reason. This is probably due to the Marcan hypothesis, which states that the early Church had no access to Mathew's Gospel until well into the 80s or 90s (10-15 years after Mark was written). Therefore they relied heavily upon Mark to establish Church doctrine. So it's no wonder that they demonstrated such an aversion to any type of divorce and remarriage. In fact, not until Ambrose entered the picture in the late third century was there any variation in

opinion regarding this matter. That in itself is a strong argument against the exception view and its claims.

The following section (in blue) was borrowed from “One Flesh: A Biblical Perspective on the Permanence of Marriage” by Joe Fogle.

Probably the earliest writing we possess on this issue came to us from Hermas, who was responsible for writing, *The Shepherd of Hermas* circa A.D. 160. The writings of the Shepherd are important as they were held in the highest regard by early Christians. These writings were seen as quasi-canonical and were often bound together with other portions of Scripture, specifically whatever gospels the congregation had at the time.

In his second book, *Commandments*, Hermas speaks about putting away one’s wife for adultery. He writes:

*If any one 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 is also 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.**” And I said to him, “What if the woman put away should repent, and wish to return to her husband: Shall she not be taken back by her husband?” And he said to me, “Assuredly. If the husband does not take her back, he sins, and brings a great sin upon himself; for he ought to take back the sinner who has repented. But not frequently.*

Hermas believed that the man who continued to live with an adulterous wife, in a sense, shared in her adultery. It also was a logical application of 1 Cor. 6:15-17 which teaches that Christians should never have sexual relations with a prostitute (pornes).

Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165) wrote his First Apology at around A.D. 150. Chapters 15-17 are a Christian catechism based on the Sermon on the Mount and other Gospel portions. Chapter 15 is subtitled, “What Christ Himself Taught.” Justin Martyr quotes Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:12. He gives no exceptions for remarriage. He lists lust and remarriage as sinning against Christ:

*Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced from another husband, commits adultery. And, there are some who have been born eunuchs of men, and some who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake; but all cannot receive this saying. **So that all who, by human law, are twice married, are in the eyes of our Master sinners, and those who look upon a woman to lust after her.***

Athenagoras who wrote his Plea for Christians around A.D. 177, says the following about the issue:

*For we bestow our attention, not on the study of words, but on the exhibition and teaching of actions, that a person should either remain as he was born, **or be content with one marriage...For whosoever puts away his wife, says He and marries another, commits adultery; not permitting a man to send her away whose virginity he has brought to an end, nor to marry again.***

Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 153-217) was the headmaster of the Christian school in Alexandria, Egypt from A.D. 190-202. Book II of the Stromata or Miscellanies was written to show that Christian morality was superior to paganism. Book III is an exposition on Christian marriage. Clement has this to say regarding the biblical understanding of marriage:

Now that the Scripture counsels marriage, and allows no release from the union, is expressly contained in the law, "Thou shall not put away thy wife, except for the cause of fornication;" and it regards as fornication, the marriage of those separated while the other is alive..."He that takes a woman that has been put away," it is said, "commits adultery; and if one puts away his wife, he makes her an adulteress," that is compels her to commit adultery. And not only is he who puts her away guilty of this, but he who takes her, by giving to the woman the opportunity of sinning; for did he not take her, she would return to her husband.

Theophilus (A.D. 115-181 or 188). In book 3, chapter 13 Theophilus writes:
*And the voice of the Gospel teaches still more concerning chastity, saying: "Whosoever looks on a woman who is not his own wife, to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart." **"And he that marries," say the Gospel, "her that is divorced from her husband, commits adultery; and whosoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery"**.*

Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) was born in Asia Minor and raised in Smyrna. He claims to have known Polycarp who was taught by the apostle John. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus quotes Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:7-8 to show God's original intent for the permanence of marriage. He shows that the Mosaic Law was enacted only because of the hardness of men's hearts:

And not only so, but the Lord also showed that certain precepts were enacted for them by Moses, on account of their hardness of heart, and because of their unwillingness to be obedient, when, on their saying to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to send away a wife?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of their hearts he permitted these things to you; but from the beginning it was not so;" thus exculpating Moses as a faithful servant, but acknowledging one God, who from the beginning made male and female, and reproofing them as hard hearted and disobedient.

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) was an elder in Carthage. He wrote in Latin and was a voluminous theologian. He was born into a pagan household and seems to have been educated in Rome. Tertullian transitions from an orthodox Christian period to semi-Montanist and Montanist periods. His Montanist beliefs led him astray in certain areas. Nevertheless, his writings concerning the permanence of marriage reflect the general consensus of the early church. In *Against Marcion* book 4 chapter 24 Tertullian's writings are quite lengthy. The reader is encouraged to obtain a copy and read it in context. Chapter 24 includes these statements:

*But Christ prohibits divorce, saying, "whosoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery; and whosoever marries her that is put away from her husband also commits adultery". **In order to forbid divorce, he makes it unlawful to marry a woman that has been put away... For in the Gospel of Matthew he says, "whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery". He also is deemed equally guilty of adultery, who marries a woman put away by her husband.***

Origen (A.D. 185-254) wrote extensive commentaries on the Scriptures. He writes this in his *Commentary on Matthew*:

But as a woman is an adulteress, even though she seems to be married to a man, while the former husband is still living, so also the man who seems to marry her who has been put away, does not so much marry her as commit adultery with her according to the declaration of our Savior.

5 PM JANUARY 3RD, JERUSALEM (A MAJOR CRISIS UNFOLDS)

A certain author who defends the view that divorce and remarriage is acceptable in the case of adultery, proposes the following scenario:

“Let's just say, hypothetically, that it is 5 pm on January the 3rd when Jesus confronts the Pharisees on the issue of divorce.... If Jesus had truly stated a position of no divorce or remarriage for any cause, then at the very hour in which His words were spoken every Torah observing Jew throughout Israel would have been guilty of committing adultery had they followed the law for divorce contained in Deuteronomy 24 when putting away their wives and marrying others. Jesus would have effectively condemned a large portion of the Jewish population and cast them as adulterers merely because until then they only knew and practiced the Mosaic Law delivered by God through Moses. Less than an hour earlier, they were justified fully by God's Law, yet now they all stood condemned by Christ. Is this truly what Jesus came to do??”

Incidentally, the same argument could be raised against Paul's instruction restricting both elders and deacons to marriage with only one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). So was the Apostle Paul guilty of doing the same thing Jesus is accused of doing in the author's proposed scenario? Was he guilty of turning all **existing** polygamous unions into a violation of law? Absolutely not!

Neither Jesus nor Paul were condemning those who lived and married under Old Testament Law in ignorance of God's perfect standards revealed in the New Testament. **Nor were they asking them to amend their marriages in accordance with the new commandments given.** For up until Christ's ministry, no one knew any differently and neither were they expected to.

So let me just paraphrase what Jesus was saying in His dialogue with the pharisees:

“**Up until now**, Moses permitted you to divorce and remarry because of your hardened hearts, **BUT FROM NOW ON**, I'm going to change that....”.

The dispensation of Law was coming to an end and God's perfect standard was being unveiled through Christ. Jesus was abolishing the old Law in order to introduce a new and better one. But nevertheless, it was understood that all who divorced and remarried **PRIOR** to the New Testament era were certainly **EXEMPT** from the new commandment given. However, any who failed to comply from that moment forward would be guilty of violating Christ's righteous decrees. At this point, Old Testament marriages were grandfathered in no differently than how our American government phases in newly passed laws today.

THE WOMAN AT JACOB'S WELL

In John 4 we have the story of Christ's private dialogue with the woman at Jacob's well. In this story, Jesus reveals several hidden facts about her life, including the exact number of all her preceding husbands:

Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that sadist thou truly (John 4:18).

Based on the information provided in the above passage, some Christians draw the following conclusions:

“Jesus clearly distinguished between a live-in and a husband and recognized the legal contract of marriage between her and her previous husbands. If Jesus recognized all five of them as being legal, how can He discount the remarriage of Christian couples today?”

However, there are several problems with drawing such conclusions. First, there is no mention anywhere in the text that all five preceding husbands were surviving ex-partners before they became the next “ex”. They could have very easily been deceased at the time of her subsequent remarriage. And in light of that era's survival prospects due to economic hardship, war, and the lack of modern medicine, it is very likely that they were. Second, this argument suggests that just because Christ classified these men as husbands He automatically legitimized and approved of them. However, we know that a prophet, false or otherwise, is still a prophet, etc. Finally, we can only guess that the woman's last partner, whom Christ exposed, was simply a “live-in boyfriend”.

JOSEPH & MARY

Some try to use the story of Joseph and Mary (Mat. 1:19) as proof that divorce was being implemented contrary to the Law when judicial punishment prescribed the death penalty instead (Deu. 22:17). Now it's true that Joseph may have been justified in making Mary a **public example** just as stated in the account. He could have demanded legal trial resulting in execution. **But since he could not conclusively prove that she was indeed guilty of any type of immorality, his efforts would have failed because only a confirmed case of adultery or fornication resulted in death (Num. 5:24).** Perhaps that is why he chose to be discreet and put her away in private. So then this too agrees with our assertions that the Bible never offers a single example where **adultery** resulted in divorce rather than the death penalty.

WHAT ABOUT SPIRITUAL ADULTERY?

For those who teach that adultery is grounds for divorce, permit me to insert a few questions here. If adultery is truly grounds for divorce, how would we apply this? Just how far would we go in our definition of adultery? Could a wife request a divorce because she saw a gleam of lust in her husband's eye when gazing at another woman? Could a husband divorce his wife simply because he thought she was a bit too chatty with the Pastor on Sunday? Well, you say, that's awful silly. Ok, but do you realize that Christ taught that to look at a woman with lust is the equivalent of adultery?

You see, if we take the position that **Jesus was simply siding with Rabbi Shammai's interpretation of the exception clause then just imagine how many reasons we could contrive to justify divorce and remarriage for "adultery". We might as well lump promiscuous behavior, immodest dress, obscene language, lustful thoughts, and pornography into this category also. Because according to Christ, all of these behaviors amount to spiritual unfaithfulness.**

So does it make sense then why we reject the notion that adultery constitutes grounds for divorce?? Indeed, instead of encouraging divorce, Christ's teachings reveal that adultery is a prime opportunity to manifest Christ-like forgiveness just as exemplified by Jesus with the woman caught in the act of adultery (Jon. 8:1-11). Instead of condemnation, Christ extended forgiveness. Likewise, we too are instructed to do the same.

SET FREE TO SIN WITHOUT PENALTY?

If the exception rule truly applies to adultery, then essentially, once either spouse or both are guilty, they are free to remarry. If you take this to be the valid interpretation of Matthew 5 and 19, you are perverting God's justice. Only a criminal god would reward both the offender and the offended with a license to remarry as long as one or both are guilty of said crime.

MALACHI 2:14-15

*....the **wife of thy youth** (THE FIRST ONE YOU MARRIED)...Yet is **she** thy companion, and the **wife of thy covenant** (SHE IS THE ONE AND ONLY IN TRUE COVENANT WITH YOU). And did not he make one?" (Mal 2:14-15).*

KINGS & PRIESTS

***Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold** (Deut 17:17).*

*And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a **divorced woman**, or **profane**, or an **harlot**, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife (Lev 21:11-14).*

Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before (Ezek 44:22).

The above verses mention several prohibitions applicable to kings and priests. The kings of Israel were not to multiply wives or wealth and the priests were not to take to themselves divorced wives or any who were widowed [by a non-priest], profane, or harlots.

In 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:10, Christians are given both of these designations. Notice: *But ye are a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people ...And hast made us unto our God **kings and priests**: and we shall reign on the earth.*

So could it be that because of our New Testament designation as “royal priests” these prohibitions carry over to us as well? I certainly believe so. Let me explain. First, according to the teachings of Christ and the Apostle Paul, Christians today are not permitted to marry into a polygamous relationship. They are not to **multiply wives to themselves, not one at a time, or one after another** (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1). Neither are they allowed to remarry while their spouses are still living or marry a **divorcee** (Mat 5, 19; Mark 10; Luk 16). And they are certainly not to marry those outside the faith (1 Cor. 7:39), which would exclude a non-Christian widow, harlot, or profane woman. [Of course, if a lewd woman were to repent and turn to Christ, she too could be added to the eligible category.] Moreover, just like the kings of ancient Israel, Christians are forbidden to multiply riches and are required to distribute their excess wealth among the poor. We call this the doctrine of non-accumulation (Luke 12:33, Act 2:45, 1 Cor 16:2). But are all these similarities merely coincidental? Not at all! Such obvious parallels between Old Testament priests and New Testament members of the Church could hardly be called a coincidence.

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST MARRYING A DIVORCED WOMAN

All four Gospels contain a prohibition forbidding marriage with a divorced woman. What's interesting is that no exception appears to accompany this prohibition making it a closed restriction. Notice:

...and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Mat. 5:32b).

...and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Mat. 19:9b).

....and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery (Luk. 16:18b).

And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mar. 10:12).

The text here is exceedingly clear. No man may marry a divorced woman. Now if marrying a divorced woman is clearly forbidden according to these passages, what about marriage with a divorced man? Why would that be any different? So either we can take these verses to be expressing a bias toward men, meaning that only men may divorce and remarry, but not women, or we can acknowledge the fact that the prohibition here functions equally for both sexes.

Now based on this prohibition some groups would teach that a divorced woman may never remarry under any circumstances whatsoever, not even if her first husband was a divorcee and they were technically living together in adultery. But taking these verses to such an extreme is unwarranted, neither is it in harmony with the plain reading of the exception clause or the explanations proposed so far in our study. Christ was not teaching that all cases involving divorce, **irrespective of the situation**, must always result in a single lifestyle. Rather He taught that if a **lawful marriage** resulted in divorce, remarriage was not an option as long as both spouses were alive. Marrying into an adulterous union is never legitimized by God and therefore a man or woman breaking from such a relationship through legal divorce should not be disqualified from pursuing a God sanctioned marriage.

OLD COVENANT CONTINUITY—A BRIEF REBUTTAL

There are those who preach that Christ didn't come to "correct" Moses. Otherwise, He would have undermined the prior rulings of God under the Sinaitic period and made Himself a false prophet. Certain scriptures are used to defend this argument, like Matthew 5:17-19, where Jesus said that He did not come to "destroy the Law, but to fulfill it". Moreover, they apply the law of divorce contained in Deuteronomy 24 to both the Old and New Covenants, contending that while the ceremonial and civic portions of the Law are obsolete, God's moral commandments will always remain valid and binding. But this assertion is based on a false conviction that God's moral law is somehow intrinsically bound to His immutable character and to defy this is to discredit Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8.

Now while I agree that God's character is immutable, I think we sometimes confuse many of the moral commands in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the Law as being a perfect standard of His morality. When in fact, as demonstrated earlier, these were mere concessions made toward a hardhearted people. For instance, one would hardly argue that polygamy or forced marriages are a perfect standard of God's morality, yet both are advocated in the Mosaic Law

(Deu. 21:15; 22:19-22; 24:5-10). This clearly proves that not all of the Law's moral rulings were to be considered eternally binding.

What we should realize is that the **temporary reforms** of the Old Covenant were instituted until the “setting of all matters straight” (Act. 3:21), a concept introduced to us in the New Covenant. So Old Covenant continuity is true to a point, but there exists a definite dichotomy between Covenants which must be acknowledged. Notice these Scriptures:

*Who in times past **suffered all nations (INCLUDING ISRAEL)** to walk in their own ways, but now calls all men to repentance (Act 14:16).*

*And the **times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent (Act 17:30).***

I think it's important to understand that God's morality is not perfectly expressed in the Law of Moses, but rather in the ministry and teachings of His Son, Jesus Christ, under the New Covenant dispensation of Spirit.

IS IT REALLY GOD'S HEART TO SPLIT UP A FAMILY?

According to Jesus, those who divorce and remarry exist in perpetual adultery. Some would agree but argue that if a couple with a history of divorce and remarriage simply confess their past wrongdoing, God will forgive them and bless their new union as if it were no longer adultery. However, this belief is strictly rooted in the assumption that God couldn't possibly require any couple to split up their marriage or family on account of a poor decision so far back in their past. Perhaps they were unsaved and unfamiliar with God's Word when they divorced and remarried, “could God really ask this of them”, is the way most reason around this prospect. Yet it was already proven that God honors every couple's first marriage vows, Believer or unbeliever included, and that the one flesh marriage covenant established at the beginning of creation still stands regardless of a person's faith or religious creed. So while we can't deny that splitting up a family on account of divorce and remarriage seems cruel and unnecessary, we must step back and allow God to decide what's best for people, and not lean on our own emotional feelings. We can rest assured that God has His own reasons for such matters and all we must do is assent to follow and obey, ***For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord (Isaiah 55:8).***

Now besides the fact that God's standards apply regardless of how we feel about them, we can also gain biblical perspective on this issue by studying two Old Testament accounts that clearly reveal the manner in which God dealt with man's wrong choices in the area of marriage. The story of Abraham and Hagar is the first account that comes to mind. By

studying this account we find that God was not emotionally influenced when commanding Abraham to put away his second wife Hagar and Ishmael their son on account of the promise made to Issac (Gen. 21:8-21). The second account is located in Ezra 10. When Ezra discovered Israel's marriage to foreign wives, especially in regards to their priests and chief rulers, he commanded the men guilty of this infraction to divorce their foreign wives and send them back along with their children to the nations from which they came. As a result, many families were split up and much heartache ensued, but God's will was done:

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law (Ezra 10:2-3).

These two accounts clearly demonstrate that God's scope of concern is of eternal consequence and not so much with our present pain and suffering. God knows that our physical suffering is only temporal compared to our eternal condition. And therefore our choices now, if in alignment with God's commandments, will determine our everlasting reward in the afterlife: *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, **or wife**, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Mat 19:29).*

I AM DIVORCED AND REMARRIED; WHAT DO I DO NOW?

PRACTICAL/BIBLICAL ADVICE

You now realize that God only honors the marriage vows of a couple never before married. And you also realize that remarriage, apart from the death of your spouse, constitutes adultery and is neither God-sanctioned nor lawful. Since you willingly acknowledge these biblical truths, allow me to present some practical and scriptural steps that can be taken to remedy perhaps the most difficult situation you may ever face.

The first step any couple should take when becoming aware that remarriage is equivalent to adultery is to cease from participating in any type of sexual activity together as part of their commitment to repent and make reparation for their sinful lifestyle. The next step will require much prayerful consideration. Just how to dissolve an adulterous union and the appropriate measures to be taken is a process that will vary from couple to couple and not always addressed clearly in Scripture. No single rule applies equally across the board and especially not in this situation. Such a process, then, must be advanced with **extreme caution and plenty of earnest prayer**, seeing there may be multiple lives impacted by

your decision such as those of your children and other family members. If spiritual prudence is forfeited, great harm or worse may result. So let's review several possible scenarios that typically exist in such marriages and then review the options applicable to each:

1. Divorced and remarried having children from both marriages
2. Divorced and remarried having children from either the first or second marriage, but not from both
3. Divorced and remarried having no children from both marriages

If number 1 applies, and you have already disengaged from each other sexually, then proceed to seek God diligently about your next course of action. The children involved in your first and secondary marriages are going to be your greatest concern and consideration. You will prioritize your next moves based on their emotional and physical wellbeing since this is of supreme importance to God (Mat. 18:10).

Now perhaps your initial marriage partner is currently remarried and not interested in reconciliation of any type, nor do any of your original children have any desire to be restored back to your parental care. If so, then only prayer and fasting will open up new channels of communication between you and them. Or perhaps there **is** in fact an opportunity to be fully restored back to your original spouse and children. In which case the appropriate and biblical action is to return back to your first marriage partner and your abandoned children and trust God to heal and repair the damage inflicted through your past mistakes. Nevertheless, you will have to make some type of provision for your second set of children both emotionally and financially. They must never be neglected.

But in the event that your first marriage partner refuses to accept you back into relationship, it may well be God's will for you to share the same house with your secondary marriage partner and children, while remaining in a completely platonic (non-sexual) relationship with him or her. I will offer my advice on how this may be done safely whilst avoiding sexual temptation at the end of this section. In any case, you must not rely on your own logic or plan of recourse when making these tough decisions, but the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit, since only God can undue the harm and repair the damage inflicted through divorce and remarriage.

Number 2 is very similar to 1 and also requires thoughtful consideration of your children and their welfare. Once again, seek the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit and follow the advice offered in the first example discussed above since it may equally apply.

In our final scenario (no. 3), the course of action is easier to decide and not as complicated. Both of you must agree to separate and return back to your original marriage partners or remain single if your original partners are not minded to receive you back. Also, if one of you was previously single and never married outside of your current adulterous union, then the Bible frees you to find a legitimate marriage partner and enter into a one flesh marriage covenant with him or her.

In his book, “Till Death Do Us Part”, Joseph Webb states the following applicable truths as relating to these complicated and very painful situations:

“Some upon forsaking their present adulterous relationship, have said 'Jesus is all I need' and have directed all their energies toward ministering to others. Some have seen the Lord ever so slowly resolve old irreconcilable circumstances, rekindle mutual respect and admiration, and initiate reunion. Others are presently joyfully and peacefully functioning in a separated platonic relationship while caring for the children and unashamedly thanking the Lord for the release and spiritual freedom Christ has brought into their lives.

“I cannot tell you how the Holy Spirit will direct you to forsake your present adulterous relationship. Nevertheless, however the Spirit directs you; it may be hard, but it will be with a deep inward peace and conviction that you are obeying God's Word.”

Note: Jesus said, *...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* (Mat. 19:12). Is it possible, based on this passage, that there are some situations within the context of divorce and remarriage that warrant a man's decision to physically pursue surgical castration as a viable alternative to dealing constantly with the physical temptation of sex. In such a way, he is not only able to remain with his subsequent marriage partner, if this be his only alternative, but do so without any sexual desire while engaging in parenting responsibilities for as long as it takes to raise his children to adulthood. I realize the ideal is that a man master his feelings through the power and grace of the Spirit, but perhaps taking a more proactive measure to safeguard himself is fully in accordance with the straightforward instruction Christ offers in the above passage. Just my thoughtful observation....

CLOSING STATEMENTS BY JOSEPH A. WEBB (AUTHOR OF “TILL DEATH DUE US PART”)

(in blue)

Dear Reader,

Divorce and remarriage is no trivial matter. Secular and religious leaders are alarmed at the moral decay being witnessed today in our society. The ripping asunder of marriage relationships has now passed the alarming stage and has reached epidemic proportions. What we are seeing develop in churches now is only “a sowing the wind” (Hosea 8:7), and unless the church of Jesus Christ returns to a historically consistent biblical position on marriage and divorce, we will witness the “reaping of a whirlwind” beyond our wildest imagination. Part of that whirlwind is already becoming evident. Statistics show that kids from broken homes are affected profoundly in the following ways:

They are 5 times more likely to commit suicide.

32 times more likely to run away.

20 times more likely to have behavior disorders.

14 times more likely to commit rape.

9 times more likely to drop out of high school.

And 20 times more likely to become career criminals and end up in prison.

Recent psychological studies also show that three out of four children coming from broken homes will repeat the pattern of their parents when they establish their own homes.

If this nation's churches won't stem the tide of this plague with the uncompromising truth of God's Word, then the warning that Jesus gave may become a reality in the next generation (Luk. 14:34-35).

There is a clear answer, though, in God's Word. It will not be an easy answer, but a sure one. Many will have to unlearn much of what they have accepted in the past as gospel. They will have to quit looking at the experiences of men and get back to “thus saith the Lord.” Some who receive this truth will pay a dear price in present ministries if they preach it, but it will be worth the price when harvest time comes.

In studying church history we find that every time God restored truth to the church, those who were willing to adjust their theology to agree with God's Word paid a great price. Yet, God has always honored those servants who were willing to stand on His Word, regardless of the cost. The late A.W. Tozer stated it well when he said:

“Bible exposition without moral application raises no opposition. It is only when the hearer is made to understand that truth is in conflict with his heart, that resistance sets in. As long as people can hear orthodoxy divorced from life, they will attend and support churches and institutions without objection. On the other hand, the man who preaches truth and applies it to the lives of his hearers, will feel the nails and the thorns. He will lead a hard life, but a glorious one.”

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 (Malachi 2:16).