

Jesus said Divorce & Remarriage is Adultery

by Elliott Nesch

Divorce and Remarriage is Adultery

This issue of divorce and remarriage often provokes some of the most intense emotions felt by the human heart because there is no relationship more personal than that of marriage. Most of us have many relatives and close friends who have had multiple divorces and remarriages. But Jesus explicitly taught that divorce and remarriage is adultery. Nevertheless, we must remind ourselves that what Jesus taught on divorce and remarriage is good news! It is an important part of the Gospel.

Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11-12); "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Luke 16:18). Anyone or "whoever" divorces their spouse and marries another is guilty of adultery. And whoever marries a divorced person is guilty of adultery.

Luke 16:18a is almost exactly the same as Mark 10:11: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her." But Luke 16:18b introduces a new concept: "whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery." In other words, the person who marries a divorced woman is guilty of adultery. This represents a harder teaching than Jesus' teaching in Mark. In the case of a man who wrongfully divorced his wife and married another woman, his first wife cannot marry under penalty of adultery. Whether "innocent" or "guilty," both spouses alike are regarded as off-limits to new marital unions.

For Jesus to describe remarriage after divorce as adultery was radically counterculture to the first-century understanding of divorce. Jesus declared that divorce did not enable remarriage. According to Jesus, legally dissolving a marriage by divorce does not actually end a marriage. The Lord said that subsequent remarriage is adulterous, which can only mean that the first marriage still stands.

Let me illustrate the teaching of Christ by example. Robert and Linda are a married couple. Robert divorces Linda and marries another woman. Under Mark 10:11, Robert is guilty of adultery. Though Robert may have obtained a legal divorce, Jesus teaches that in God's eyes Robert is still united to Linda when he marries another woman. Under Luke 16:18b, if James marries Linda after Robert divorced her, then James would be guilty of adultery also! Conversely, if Linda divorces Robert and marries under man, she would be guilty of adultery under Mark 10:12. Neither Robert nor Linda is able to marry another person. Taken at face value, the entire teaching is quite straightforward: neither Robert nor Linda has the ability to divorce or remarry.

This issue of divorce and remarriage is such a serious one in the church because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. Like Jesus, Paul also quoted from Genesis and said, "'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). The NT frequently uses this language about Christ as the Husband and the church as the bride. Paul said to the church, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). To the church of Ephesus, Jesus said,

"I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4). Jesus was calling the church to repent and come back to Him, her first love. When two people come together in their first marriage, it is holy. And it's a picture of the church.

The Law of Moses

When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

In the Old Testament, Moses gave a law concerning divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which permitted a man to divorce his wife if he placed a certificate in her hand and sent her away. But not anymore! In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduced His teaching on divorce and remarriage saying, "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you..." (Matthew 5:31-32). Thus, Jesus introduced something contrasting the Mosaic Law. When Jesus said, "But I say to you" He did not provide us with the true interpretation of Deuteronomy 24, but Jesus is changing things and giving us something different. According to Jesus and the eternal law of His kingdom, a certificate does not make divorce official or legitimate. The reason that divorce was allowed was the hardness of men's hearts, but from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept" (Mark 10:5). For our standard, we can no longer rely on a passage in the OT which was written for the hardness of men's hearts. The Apostle Paul explained that the Law of Moses "was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator" (Galatians 3:19). Now that Jesus has come, hard-heartedness is not an excuse. In the New Covenant, God gives you a new heart and puts a new spirit within you; He takes the heart of stone out of your flesh and gives you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). In the New Covenant, Christ's law is written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus again referenced the Law of Moses when He spoke of His teaching on divorce and remarriage in Luke's Gospel:

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men,

but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.” (Luke 16:14-18)

The Law of Moses was *until* John the Baptist. Since then, something new and revolutionary was preached: the kingdom of God. And one of the primary characteristics of the kingdom of God is that divorce and remarriage is adultery. What Jesus says about divorce and remarriage is a distinctive of his kingdom. So we cannot cite the Law of Moses in order to justify a divorced and remarried couple.

Jesus was not talking about theoretical adultery when He talked about divorce and remarriage. He was talking about *real* adultery, just like sneaking out of your house behind your spouse's back and sleeping with another person. Jesus is not using language which we can lightly overlook or dismiss. He is using serious words: Adultery. Jesus knew the imagery that would be in the minds of His disciples and Jewish listeners. “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14), was one of the Ten Commandments in the Law of Moses. According to Jesus, divorce and remarriage is literal adultery, a transgression of God's eternal law, no different than a man laying with a married woman.

Nevertheless, there are hints even within the Law of Moses that marriage was permanent. For instance, there are the following regulations for the Levites: “They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God” (Leviticus 21:7); “And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife” (Leviticus 21:13-14). In Deuteronomy 22:13-19 is a passage which explains the situation of a man who found his newly wed wife not be a virgin. However, if the evidence of her virginity is produced, then the man will be punished for falsely accusing her and “she shall be his wife; *he cannot divorce her all his days*” (Deuteronomy 22:19). Also in the Law of Moses was the following command:

Suppose a man comes across a virgin who is not engaged and overpowers and rapes her and they are discovered. The man who has raped her must pay her father fifty shekels of silver and she must become his wife because he has violated her; he may never divorce her as long as he lives. (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)

Thus Moses enacted that he who had married after violence to a virgin, should not have it in his power to divorce his wife. Now, if a compulsory marriage contracted after violence is permanent, how much more shall a voluntary marriage be permanent! In all of these two cases above, divorce was not permitted for any reason, even in the Law of Moses. Therefore, we should expect that Jesus did not allow divorce for any reason when He declared, “What God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Matthew 19:1-12 & Mark 10:1-12

Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12 contain the Lord's interaction with the Pharisees on divorce and remarriage which climax with a hard saying of Jesus which shocks His disciples. We will look at these accounts together because of their similar subject matter. Later we will treat the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:32.

Though there are many similarities between the two passages, there remains minor differences: (1) In Mark 10:2, the question posed to Jesus does not contain “for just any reason” as it does in Matthew 19:3; (2) In Mark 10:3, it is Jesus who asks the Pharisees about Moses whereas Matthew 19:7 has the Pharisees asking Jesus about Moses, though both accounts have the Pharisees stating that Moses' permitted/commanded a man to write a certificate of divorce; (3) The Lord's hard saying occurs publicly in Matthew 19:8-9 but privately with the disciples in Mark 10:11-12; (4) His hard sayings prohibiting remarriage after divorce have important differences between the accounts, most notably is the exception clause in Matthew 19:9; (5) Matthew 19:10-12 contains the eunuch saying after the disciples response that it was better not to marry but Mark's account omits it; (6) Mark 10:10-12 contains the disciples private meeting with Jesus in the house whereas Matthew's account omits it.

Because of these noted differences, Mark 10:1-12 and Matthew 19:1-10 most likely represent different encounters. Jesus often repeated similar but slightly varying teachings at different times and places. For example, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is slightly different than the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-49. We should be slow to assume that Mark omitted the exception clause if indeed the accounts in Mark 10 and Matthew 19 are separate encounters. Probably Jesus did not give the exception clause in the separate accounts recorded by Mark and Luke. In fact, many commentators believe that the exception clause is a parenthetical statement added by Matthew and does not accurately represent the Lord's oral teaching.¹ A parenthetical comment is nonetheless divinely inspired and has an intended meaning which the readers should desire to understand.

The account begins with Jesus coming to the region of Judea on the other side of the Jordan. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Matthew 19:3; cf. Mark 10:2) The Pharisees wanted the Lord's opinion concerning divorce and remarriage. Today, many teach, like the Pharisees, that Christians can get divorced “for any reason” including things like incompatibility, abandonment, financial issues, abuse, neglect, etc. In that time, there were well-known rabbinic interpretations of Deuteronomy 24. The Mishna is the first major work of Rabbinic literature and the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions. The Mishna summarizes these schools of thought regarding divorce and remarriage:

Bet Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he found her guilty of an unseemly moral matter, for it is written: “[And it will be that she does not find favor in his eyes] because he discovers an unseemly, moral matter in her [—then he should write her a bill of divorce and place it in her hand, thereby sending her away from his household]” (Deuteronomy 24:1). But Bet Hillel say: Even if she burned his food, for it is written: “Because he discovers an unseemly, moral matter in her.” [Bet Hillel reads the

¹ See Matthew 24:15 for an undisputed parenthetical addition.

verse as if had been written: “Because he discovers an unseemly or moral matter in her.”] Rabbi Akiva says: Even if he found another more beautiful than her, as it is written: “And it will be that she does not find favor in his eyes.” [Rabbi Akiva reads the verse as if it had been written: “And it will be that she does not find favor in his eyes or because he discovers an unseemly, moral matter in her.”]²

Those who followed Shammai believed that divorce was only allowed for a serious moral offense, whereas those who followed Hillel believed that divorce was allowed for any reason. Hence, the Pharisees question to Jesus: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Matthew 19:3). Does Jesus side with Shammai or Hillel? Notice how the Lord responds to the Pharisees:

And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6; cf. Mark 10:6-9)

Quoting from Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 5:2, Jesus went all the back to Creation and used Adam and Eve as an example. When a couple unites themselves in marriage, they are no longer two but “one flesh.” What God has joined together and made “one flesh” let not man separate. On the basis that marriage is a one-flesh union, He declares that man should not separate what God has united. The Lord's answer to the Pharisees' question about divorce being lawful is evidently “no.” Jesus was superseding the Mosaic Law's tolerance of divorce. What the Law of Moses merely regulated, Jesus now forbids. What Jesus said about divorce and remarriage was different than the Law of Moses, and different than the rabbinical schools of Shammai or Hillel. The disciples clearly understood that the Lord's standard for marriage was radically higher than Hillel, Shammai or Moses. Notice the disciples reaction:

His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

But He said to them, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.” (Matthew 19:11-12)

The Lord's eunuch teaching was is to be understood in the context of divorce and remarriage. Based upon the reaction of His disciples, Jesus taught something very difficult to accept. If we are

² Mishna, Gitten 9:10, available online: http://www.emishnah.com/Nashim_Vol_2/Gittin9.pdf

hearing Jesus correctly, then it is safer not to get married at all than marry and risk divorce. Jesus taught on celibacy as a response to the disciples' reaction. A single or virgin disciple of Jesus may have to forego marriage altogether. A disciple of Jesus must become celibate and remain unmarried if his or her spouse deserts them. If in an adulterous remarriage, a disciple of Jesus must separate and become celibate or be reconciled to their first spouse.

This eunuch saying should not be understood in the sense that some of Jesus' disciples are gifted eunuchs and some aren't. When it comes to marriage, a disciple of Christ must be content with one marriage or become a eunuch. This saying is a direct response to the disciples reaction to His divorce and remarriage teaching, not a general teaching on the gift of celibacy. The phrase, "He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" does not mean some disciples can accept it and others can't. It was the Pharisees who couldn't accept it because of the harness of hearts. But for a disciple of Jesus, it isn't an option. Similarly, Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables" (Mark 4:11).

Later in the house His disciples asked Him again about divorce and remarriage. They wanted to be sure they were understanding Him correctly about marriage being indissoluble.

In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:10-12)

The Exception Clause

Does Jesus allow divorce for limited exceptions? Most of the various understandings of divorce and remarriage seem to focus on different interpretations of the exception clause, found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. First, consider Matthew 5:31-32 found in the Sermon on the Mount:

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 her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32, KJV)

Matthew 19:9 is the other passage which contains the exception clause. Jesus said,

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. (Matthew 19:9, KJV)

To what was Jesus referring in this exception clause? It is only if this text is read in isolation that one could conclude that a man may divorce his adulterous wife and lawfully marry another. However, in consideration of all the other passages where Jesus spoke on this issue (plus the surrounding context

of Matthew 19:9), we cannot conclude that this is the case for the man with an adulterous wife. If Matthew 19:9 is granting permission for a man to remarry in the event of his wife's unfaithfulness, then the Lord's statements about divorce and remarriage in the gospels of Mark and Luke are false. In Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18, Jesus made no mention of this exception. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, Paul explicitly cited the Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage, yet said nothing about this exception. Elsewhere Paul made it clear that the only means of being loosed from the bond of marriage is the death of either spouse (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2-3).

Why would Mark, Luke and Paul omit such an important detail if there really were an exception for divorce and remarriage? There are some people groups nowadays and in history who have only possessed the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Luke. For them, we must acknowledge that they do not have the complete truth about divorce and remarriage if Matthew's gospel really does teach that a man may divorce and remarry for sexual immorality. In the first century, bound Bibles did not even exist. It seems unreasonable to assume that Mark and Luke would presume that their gospels should be read through the lens of Matthew's exception clause. Or that Paul's letter to the Corinthians should be read through the lens of Matthew's exception clause. These texts should be able to stand on their own and be understood without contradictions. These considerations imply that the exception clause pertains to an unusual circumstance, so rare that Mark and Luke didn't even think it needful to mention to their Gentile audience.

Probably the most common interpretation of the exception clause among Protestant Evangelicals is that Jesus is granting permission for an innocent spouse to divorce and remarry in cases of marital unfaithfulness. In other words, "except for fornication" is understood to mean that an act of sexual immorality makes an exception to the general rule that putting away your wife and marrying another is adultery. However, such an interpretation makes the sin of adultery worse than any other sin, including murder, because "except for fornication" was the only exception Jesus made. And Jesus didn't use the word "adultery" in the exception clause, but the word "fornication."

It is important for us to consider the practical results of treating adultery as grounds for divorce and remarriage. The main problem with this interpretation of the exception clause is that it contradicts the plain meaning of every other passage on divorce and remarriage in the New Testament: Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 39.

There are also logical conflicts that arise if Matthew 19:9 grants permission for a man to divorce his first and legitimate wife because of her sexual immorality *and marry another woman*. If a married woman divorces her husband to be married to another man, then she is committing adultery by any reading of the Gospels. But if her former husband uses her adultery as an exception for remarriage, then how is the former wife still committing adultery against him if he is free to remarry? In other words, the two are either both still married to each other, or both no longer married to each other. She can only be committing adultery if she is still married to him; and she can only be married to him if he is married to her. Her second marriage can only be considered adultery if she is still actually married to her first husband. And if she is still married to him, then he is not free to remarry. If her adultery makes him free to remarry, then she is also free to remarry upon the grounds of her own adultery.

If adultery is truly an exception for divorce and remarriage, then we must make the irrational conclusion that remarriage is adulterous for the guilty party, but not for the "innocent" party. But if

remarriage is not adulterous for the "innocent" spouse, then remarriage cannot be adulterous for the guilty spouse either. The two are either both still married to each other, or both no longer married to each other. The guilty spouse can only be committing adultery if they are still married to their former spouse. But for those who make the exception of adultery for divorce and remarriage, subsequent marriages cease to be adulterous because of the guilty spouse's original adultery. If that be the case, then Christ's words are meaningless.

Not only does that interpretation contradict the plain meaning of every other passage on divorce and remarriage in the New Testament, but it also inconsistent with the surrounding context of Matthew 19:3-12. Let me explain.

First, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason (Matthew 19:3). Jesus responded and gave no reason to ever divorce. Jesus appealed to the account of Creation to support the permanency view of marriage: "Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27); "He created them male and female" (Genesis 5:2). Again, Jesus quoted the Creation account and said that it is for this reason that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus concluded: "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). That was His original answer to the Pharisees question about whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. In short, there are no lawful reasons to divorce because the two are one flesh.

Secondly, the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" (Matthew 19:7). Once again, Jesus re-affirmed the permanency of marriage: "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). The verse that follows is the exception clause. Is Jesus going to backpedal now and say that actually adultery can separate the two that God has joined together as one flesh? Is Jesus also going to make a concession for the hardness of men's hearts and allow divorce like Moses? Is Jesus going to tell us that from the beginning it was not so, but now it is so that you are allowed to divorce for adultery?

Thirdly, the response of the disciples was that it was better not to marry based on what Jesus had said (Matthew 19:10). If Jesus was allowing divorce and remarriage for the cause of adultery, this would mean that His disciples were shocked by the idea of marrying a woman they could not divorce for any other reason except adultery. It is highly unlikely that the Lord's disciples would have such a low view of marriage that they would be disturbed by a perspective which was actually commonly held amongst many Jews already.

Fourth, Jesus taught on celibacy as a response to the apostles' reaction (Matthew 19:11-12). In other words, celibacy is the only alternative to the Lord's teaching on marriage. He concluded, "He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matthew 19:12). It is not credible to understand that Jesus was saying some of His disciples were able to accept this eunuch saying and others were unable to accept it. If this were the case, the eunuch saying would have been a clear teaching from the Lord concerning virgins, but Paul the Apostle knew of no such teaching when he wrote the Corinthians: "Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 7:25). Therefore, the eunuch saying must be understood in the context of the Lord's teaching on the permanency of marriage. A single or virgin

disciple of Jesus may have to forego marriage altogether. A disciple of Jesus must become celibate and remain unmarried if his spouse deserts him. If in an adulterous remarriage, a disciple of Jesus must separate himself and become celibate or be reconciled to his first spouse.

Thus, even from the surrounding context of Matthew 19:1-12, it cannot be argued that Jesus is making an exception for divorce *and remarriage*.

Moreover, the Lord's own disciples later asked Him about the same matter again in private. As Jesus exited the public eye from His discussion with the Pharisees, His disciples asked Him further about what He meant in His teaching on divorce and remarriage. In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:10-12).

Most importantly, all of the other relevant passages in the NT do not make any sort of allowance for remarriage when the first spouse is still alive. In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote,

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Paul was reiterating the Lord's command from Matthew's Gospel and says to remain unmarried or reconcile. This should end all arguments about what Jesus meant in Matthew 19.

Finally, if Jesus was merely siding with the rabbinical school of Shammai, the disciples' shock is totally unwarranted. If Jesus were agreeing to a commonly held rabbinical school of thought, then why would the disciples say it is better not to marry? Why would Jesus teach on celibacy if he were making an allowance for divorce like that of Shammai?

Though there have been varying interpretations of the exception clause throughout church history, it was not until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century that the professing church allowed remarriage for adultery. Compared to most Protestant Bible translations, two leading Roman Catholic Bibles offer quite different translations of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9:

But I say this to you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32, NJB)

But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32, NABRE)

Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife -- I am not speaking of an illicit marriage -- and marries another, is guilty of adultery.' (Matthew 19:9, NJB)

I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries

another commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9, NABRE)

The Roman Catholic interpretation does not force Matthew to contradict the plain, absolute meaning of Matthew 19:3-8, Mark 10:11-12:, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1-3, and 1 Corinthians 7:39. But there is a better interpretation of the exception clause.

The Betrothal View

If we understand that Matthew's exception clause is referring to a betrothal, we also have an explanation for why Mark, Luke, and Paul do not mention the exception. This interpretation is based on the translation of fornication, the Greek word πορνεία (*porneia*), as referring to pre-marital sex, distinct from adultery.

The word “adultery” or μοιχεία (*moicheuō*) specifically describes sexual immorality involving at least one married person. The Greek verb μοιχάω (*moichaō*) or “commits adultery” is defined as to have unlawful intercourse with another's wife, to commit adultery with. This word is used strictly in the NT passages in which Jesus teaches on divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11,12). The Greek word μοιχεύω (*moicheuō*), also translated “commits adultery”, is another verb used to speak of divorce and remarriage as adultery in Luke 16:18. The Greek word μοιχεύω (*moicheuō*) is a parallel to the Hebrew word נָאֵף (*na'aph*) because Jesus and the apostles use the word when quoting Seventh Commandment of the Decalogue (see Matthew 5:27; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 2:22; 13:9; James 2:11).

In the NT, fornication is often distinguished from adultery, being listed together in the same passages as separate sins. For instance, Paul the Apostle said, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery [*moicheia*], fornication [*porneia*] . . .” (Galatians 5:19-21). The only other passage besides the exception clause texts of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 where Matthew uses the word πορνεία (*porneia*) is 15:19-20: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries [*moicheia*], fornications [*porneia*], thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15:19; cf. Mark 7:21).” Therefore, the contextual evidence for Matthew's usage of the word πορνεία (*porneia*) is that he conceives it as something different than adultery.

Likewise, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, there is a distinction between the words. Look at the following passages:

And her fornication (*porneia*) was nothing accounted of; and she committed adultery (*moicheuō*) with wood and stone (Jeremias 3:9, LXX).

I also will expose thy skirts upon thy face, and thy shame shall be seen; thine adultery (*moicheia*) also, and thy neighing, and the looseness of thy fornication (*porneia*): on the hills and in the fields I have seen thine abominations. Woe to thee, O Jerusalem, for thou hast not been purified so as to follow me; how long yet shall it be? (Jeremias 13:26-27, LXX)

Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband: and I will remove her fornication (*porneia*) out of my presence, and her adultery (*moicheia*) from between her breasts. (Osee 2:2, LXX)

Thus, the two words *πορνεία* (*porneia*) and *μοιχεία* (*moicheuō*) are not interchangeable. Similarly, fornicators and adulterers are listed together in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Hebrews 13:4 to make a distinction between the two. If Jesus was referring to a pre-marital sin of sexual immorality, it would explain why He used the word “fornication” rather than “adultery” in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

In addition to these two words having different meanings, the fact that Matthew's gospel was written for a Jewish audience is essential. There are also many internal evidences within Matthew's Gospel which demonstrate that he was writing for a Jewish audience. For one, Matthew began his Gospel with the Lord's genealogy, which would have been of very little interest to Gentile readers. Secondly, he focuses on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy with more Old Testament quotations than any other Gospel writer. Third, Matthew gathered the Lord's teachings into five discourses, which may have been a conscious effort to echo the five books of Moses in the Jewish Torah. Fourth, Matthew does not explain Jewish culture like the other Gospel writers (cf. Mark 7:3-4, John 19:40). Fifth, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is a term appropriate to a Jewish audience because Jewish readers were cautious to use the word “God” to be sure not to blaspheme or take the Lord's name in vain.

In addition to the internal evidence, the early Christians attest to the fact that Matthew's Gospel was written for a Jewish audience. Of the Gospel of Matthew, Papias had the following to say: “Matthew compiled the sayings [*logia* of Christ] in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could.”³ This historical fact that the Gospel of Matthew was “written for the Jews” is also affirmed by Irenaeus and Origen.⁴

In Jewish culture, a betrothal or engagement was regarded as a marriage covenant, though the marriage had not yet been consummated. Notice how the KJV translates Deuteronomy 20:7, “And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.” Though the word may also be translated “female” or “woman”, the translators thought it fitting to render *יִשְׁשָׁאֵל* (*ishshah*) as “wife” even though the passage is speaking of a betrothal.⁵

Another reference in support of the dual usages of “husband” and “wife” is in Deuteronomy 22:23-

3 Eusebius, *The Church History*, tr. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 114.

4 “For Matthew, writing for the Hebrews who looked for Him who was to come of the line of Abraham and of David, says: ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham’” (Origen, ANF, 9.299); “And we will begin with Matthew, who is reported by tradition to have published his Gospel before the others, to the Hebrews, those, namely, of the circumcision who believed” (Origen, ANF, 9.366); “The Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ should be of the seed of David. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire to establish this point, took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with an account of His genealogy” (Irenaeus, ANF, 1.573).

5 “Wife” is also the translation in the ASV, ESV, JUB, RSV, WEB, and WYC.

If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbor's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 22:23-24, KJV).

Above, we see a virgin who is considered as a “wife” betrothed to a “husband.” Also, a man who raped a betrothed woman had a more severe punishment than a man who raped a woman who was not betrothed (Deuteronomy 22:25-29). The man who raped a betrothed woman was sentenced to death (Deuteronomy 22:25), but a man who raped a virgin who was not betrothed is commanded to pay her father the bridal price, be her husband and “not put her away all his days” (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Clearly the Jewish betrothal custom was a much more serious commitment than engagement today.

This custom of betrothal was common Jewish practice even in the NT. The Greek word γυνή (gynē) can refer to a wife, a betrothed woman, a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow. However, out of the 50 Bible translations that I consulted, every single one of them translated *gynē* as “wife” in Matthew 1:20 which contains a reference to Joseph and Mary's betrothal. In other words, based upon the context the word *gynē* is understood to be referring to Mary as Joseph's wife, even though the betrothed couple had not yet consummated their marriage. Likewise, in an overwhelming majority of the same 50 Bible translations of Matthew 1:19, the Greek word ἀνὴρ (anēr) is translated “husband” with reference to Joseph, Mary's betrothed husband. Similarly, the word *anēr* may broadly refer to any male, but based upon the context of Matthew's Gospel and the Jewish custom of betrothal, the word has been translated “husband.” Matthew said in his gospel:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph *her husband*, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary *your wife*, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18-20, *emphasis mine*)

The same is true in Luke's Gospel speaking of Mary as Joseph's betrothed “wife.” Luke records:

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his *betrothed wife*, who was with child. (Luke 1:4-5, *emphasis mine*)

In both the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Joseph and Mary are referred to as being husband and

wife even though they are only betrothed to each other. Matthew says that Joseph was a “just” man in making the decision to divorce Mary, presumably on account of her fornication. During their betrothal period, “Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.” (Matthew 1:19). The Greek verb ἀπολύω (*apolyō*) is here translated “to put away.” In Matthew's Gospel, the same exact word is used in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 with reference to divorce and remarriage and the exception clause:

Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces [*apolyō*] his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces [*apolyō*] his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced [*apolyō*] commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31,32)

He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce [*apolyō*] your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces [*apolyō*] his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced [*apolyō*] commits adultery. (Matthew 19:8,9)

Thus, in Matthew's Gospel, the verb *apolyō* is used to describe a divorce, whether it be that of a married couple or that of a betrothed couple like the case Joseph and Mary. Keep in mind that Matthew's Gospel is the only gospel containing the account of Joseph being minded to “put away” his betrothed wife Mary. It is therefore very reasonable to assume that the exception clause (also only contained in Matthew's Gospel) refers to the unique case of a man “putting away” his betrothed “wife” for the exception of fornication, namely pre-marital sex. As Matthew constructed the narrative of his gospel, he finds himself in chapters 5 and 19 needing to prohibit all divorce and remarriage (as Jesus taught) and yet to allow for “divorces” like the one Joseph contemplated with his betrothed wife whom he suspected was guilty of fornication. Matthew in particular includes the exception clause to absolve Joseph, a truly “just” man. In sum, the kind of “divorce” Joseph pursued during a betrothal on account of fornication is not included in the Lord's absolute prohibition of remarriage.

If fornication refers to premarital promiscuity, then the Synoptic Gospels are in full agreement. Nothing arising after marriage can justify divorce and therefore all remarriages after divorce are adulterous as stated in Mark/Luke. This interpretation does not force Matthew to contradict the plain, absolute meaning of Matthew 19:3-8, Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1-3, and 1 Corinthians 7:39. This interpretation also provides an explanation for why the word *porneia* (fornication) is used in Matthew's exception clause instead of *moicheia* (adultery). By the way, in John 8:41, the Jewish leaders indirectly accused Jesus of being born of fornication. Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God” (John 8:41). They assumed that Jesus was born as the result of Mary committing fornication rather than being virgin born.

Did Paul Make An Exception?

Paul received his gospel directly from the Lord Jesus (Galatians 1:12), consequently he was in full agreement with Jesus that divorce was forbidden. It's therefore important that we read Paul's letters through the lens of what Jesus taught in the Gospels. There are many erroneous interpretations to 1 Corinthians 7 which imply that the Apostle Paul made allowances for divorce that Jesus never made, and that he permitted remarriage after divorce. It is a dangerous and irresponsible assumption to use a more ambiguous passage in Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 7 to contradict all of the more explicit statements made elsewhere in the New Testament.

Moreover, a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 7 with regard to its context is completely harmonious with the teaching of Christ on divorce and remarriage. The so-called "Pauline Privilege" is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15-16, the most exhaustive treatment of marriage in the within the NT epistles. The chapter begins with Paul addressing marriage related questions that the Church at Corinth had previously wrote him (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). For our present study, we will begin with verses 8-9.

But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

First, Paul addressed "the unmarried" and "the widows." A widow is a woman who has lost her husband in death without remarrying. The unmarried refers to widowers. The noun *ἀγαμοίς* (*agamos*) for "unmarried" is in the plural masculine form. It makes sense that Paul is addressing widowers and widows together. Paul is not here addressing those who have never been married because in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35, Paul devotes a lengthy section to virgins who have never been married. "The unmarried" cannot refer to *all* single people, including divorced people, because this would clearly contradict Paul's later statements (1 Corinthians 7:11, 39) as well as the Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage. The divorced are not eligible for marriage. By context and deduction, "the unmarried" in 1 Corinthians 7:8 must be widowers. Remarriage is not advised but it is a viable option for those who have lost a spouse through death. Paul continues:

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

In this section, Paul is addressing those who are married. Notice he is repeating the command from the Lord Jesus: "I command, yet not I but the Lord." He gives neither spouse permission to depart. But if the wife departs she must remain unmarried or be reconciled. The Greek word *χωρίζω* (*chōrizō*) for "depart" is the same word translated "put asunder" when Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6, c.f. Mark 10:9). It is accurately defined by Thayer's Greek Lexicon: "to leave a husband or wife: of divorce." But if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. Why? Because Jesus said, "And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:12), and, "whoever marries her who is

divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

Written to “the rest” or unequally yoked marriages, Paul addresses Christians who are married to an unbelieving spouse. Jesus did not address this group of people, thus Paul says, “I, not the Lord, say.” Why did Paul have to address them separately? These Corinthians were no doubt struggling with living with an unbelieving spouse. In the OT book of Ezra chapter 9 the Hebrews were commanded to put away their unequally yoked marriages with pagans. Perhaps the Corinthians had this in mind when they first wrote Paul. But Paul tells the Christian spouses not to divorce. Unlike the OT example, Paul is commanding those in unequally yoked marriages to remain with their pagan spouse. This actually affirms the Lord's teaching on marriage that God has joined the two together and they are “one flesh” regardless of whether or not they are Christians. Even though these disciples in Corinth were married to pagans, their marriage was still valid in the eyes of God.

In many cases, the unequally yoked brother or sister is going to experience some disdain, ridicule, hostility, persecution or even divorce for their faith. Paul encourages them to bear it and be a testimony to their unbelieving spouse. Christians are not to divorce their unbelieving spouse so long as the unbeliever is willing to dwell with them. If an unbelieving partner took the initiative to get a divorce from a Christian spouse, then the Christian must stay single in hope that the unbelieving partner would be reconciled, even if the unbeliever remarried in the meantime.

What is meant by “not under bondage”? The Christian spouse is not bound to follow after the unbeliever if they leave. The brother or sister is not bound by their Christian convictions to save a marriage which is out of their own control. The Christian spouse is not responsible for the actions of the unbelieving spouse. The believer is not obligated to chase after them and force the marital relationship upon them. They are not bound to fulfill marital duties which their unbelieving spouse has made impossible to perform. In all of these ways, the Christian is not under bondage; let the unbeliever depart in peace. Nevertheless, remarriage is not permissible. Perhaps the unbelieving spouse will repent and return. However, nothing Paul says here is a clear basis for assuming that the unbeliever's departure ends the bond of marriage. It is dangerous and irresponsible to use a more ambiguous passage in Scripture to contradict all of the more explicit statements made elsewhere in the New Testament. He continues:

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.

And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

This section is linked to the previous section about unequally yoked marriages. The overall context of remaining in the calling in which he was called has to do with marriage though Paul also brings up circumcision and slavery. If a Christian was converted while married to an unbeliever, they are to remain in that calling regardless of whether or not the unbeliever is content to dwell with the Christian. If a separation does occur, Paul expresses hope of reconciliation and abiding in the calling wherein you are called, but never does he encourage divorce or allow remarriage. Neither would he be encouraging a person to remain in an unlawful marriage, contrary to the teaching of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:25-38 deal with virgins who are engaged to be married; those who have never been married before. (I will not quote it in full here because of its length, but you may read it in your Bible). Paul's comments are his own because Jesus did not mention their situation in any of the Gospel accounts. Many professing Christians interpret 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 as permitting divorce and remarriage. They say the "loosed" refers to the divorced, and thus arrive at the false conclusion that if the divorced marry, they "have not sinned." But the overall context of this segment of instruction in verses 25-35 is "concerning virgins." It is therefore reasonable to assume that "bound" and "loosed" refers to betrothal of virgins.

In verses 1 Corinthians 7:36-38, Paul is advising fathers who have unmarried daughters, Paul says the father who does not give his daughter in marriage does better than the father who gives his daughter in marriage. In his closing thoughts, Paul reiterates that marriage endures until death

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 7:39-40)

A woman is free to remarry another Christian man, only if her husband dies. There is no ambiguity and no exceptions to this rule. There is one final passage of importance for our study on divorce and remarriage. Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the

law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:1-6)

To illustrate the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant, Paul presents this analogy about marriage. In order for a woman to be lawfully married to a second husband, the first husband must be dead. A marital covenant is similar in nature to the Old and New covenants. Death and remarriage symbolizes the relationship of God's people to the Law of Moses and subsequently to Christ. The first husband represents the Law or the Old Covenant. A death had to occur in order to establish a legitimate new marriage covenant. Through Christ's death, we have become dead to the Law of Moses. Only then can we be married to a second husband, even Jesus, in the the New Covenant. According to Paul's illustration, we have been delivered and freed from the Mosaic Law like a woman has been freed to marry a second husband upon the death of her first husband. Thus, the headship and legal claims of the Law of Moses have been severed like that of a deceased husband. In so many words, we are not obligated to keep the Old Testament Law but Christ is our new Head. So those who would seek to keep the Mosaic Law can be likened to a woman who is trying to please a dead husband.

Consistent with the Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage in the gospels, Paul notes in Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 that only death terminates the marriage relationship. Jesus also implied the same fact when He said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). God's standard is consistent. Divorce doesn't end marriage. Death does.

Conclusion

Jesus and His apostles taught that divorce and remarriage is adultery. If all people knew that remarriage wasn't an option, they would be much less inclined to divorce and remarry and much more inclined to reconcile with their spouse.

Answering Objections

Divorce and remarriage is a sensitive topic which raises some sincere and difficult questions. Let's address some of the most common objections to Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage.

Objection 1: If someone was divorced before becoming a Christian, their past life is washed away by the

blood of Christ including divorce. All things have become new, including their remarriage. Similarly, a remarriage becomes "sanctified" when a person is converted.

I've even heard people take this to the extreme of saying that a Christian becomes a virgin again at the moment they are born again, even if they were previously a fornicator or divorced person. The overall implication is that a person is not accountable for the sins they committed prior to becoming a Christian; that a person is not accountable to their first marriage if it was prior to their conversion. This is false. God does hold us accountable for things we have done before coming to Christ. Zacchaeus is a great example of this. This was a man who ripped people off before coming to Christ. But he knew he was accountable. He couldn't just let it go and say he was forgiven. Repentance was required. Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8-9).

If I steal another man's truck, and become a Christian, is that truck now mine to own and drive? Do we say that the theft is washed away by the blood and now the truck belongs to me? Or is it right for me to return the truck to its owner? Repentance would require me to make restitution. In the same way, Jesus said that a man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. It is adultery because she is still married to her previous spouse in God's sight and that is not his wife; she does not belong to him but to another man (even if the former husband doesn't want her back). She does not belong to him and their relationship is adulterous. Yes, Jesus' blood washes away *sin*, but we cannot continue living in sin. "He who sins is of the devil" (1 John 3:6). The sin of adultery is not unique and should not be treated any differently than theft or fornication.

Our past *sins* are washed away, but marriage is not a sin. In other words, it was not a sin for two unbelievers to get married to each other. It was a sin for them to divorce. And it is a sin for them to remarry. Their sins are washed away but their first marriage still stands, because it was not a sin to get married for the first time! God will not wash something away which wasn't sinful. Marriage is an honorable thing for all (Hebrews 13:4). Marriages between unbelievers are just as valid as those between Christians. Marriage is a universal sacrament that was given to all of humanity, not just Christians. Divorce does not end marriage, whether it was before or after becoming a Christian. The only way to break the bond of marriage, according to Scripture, is for one of the spouses to die.

If we say that marriages of non-Christians are washed away when they are converted to Christianity, then a new Christian would have to remarry their current spouse. But the marriage is still valid in God's sight. Jesus didn't come to annul marriages. As long as both spouses are alive, the marriage of either of them to somebody else constitutes adultery. The only option that the Bible gives for those separated from their spouses is to either remain unmarried or be reconciled to their former legitimate spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10,11).

Jesus said, "*Whoever* divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery" (Mark 10:11). That same word "*whosoever*" is used in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." *Whoever* believes! And we rejoice at that Scripture because it applies to us: *whoever* believes. It means everyone. It applies to whoever. Likewise, "*Whoever* divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and

whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery (Luke 16:18).” It means everyone. It applies to whosoever, believer and unbeliever alike.

Herod is a good example of this. Herod was an unbeliever. The Bible says, "Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:17-18). So John the Baptist lost his head over the issue of divorce and remarriage. And he was calling upon an unbeliever to repent of his unlawful marriage. So to say that a person is not accountable to their first marriage if they were an unbeliever does not hold any weight. To say that God did not join two unbelievers together in marriage is false. So if someone was divorced in their past (as an unbeliever) and is now married to someone else, this is still adultery because the person is still married to their original spouse. The new marriage is not legitimate.

God does not sanctify sin. Jesus said that a remarriage after divorce is a sinful relationship. Never does God sanctify a sinful situation. If a fornicator "gets saved" their fornication does not become sanctified. If a homosexual "gets saved" their homosexuality does not become sanctified. If an adulterer "gets saved" their adultery does not become a sanctified marriage. Are they really saved then? Don't be deceived, homosexuals, fornicators and adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. If this teaching is consistent that God is able to sanctify *every* situation (including divorce and remarriage), we must say that these other sexually immoral sins are also sanctified. Does fornication and homosexuality become sanctified when a person is converted? Of course not. Well, Jesus also defines divorce and remarriage as sexually immoral and sinful, so why make an exception for the sin of adultery?

Speaking of immoral people, Paul says, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Becoming sanctified is becoming purified and no longer doing sinful things. We cannot be sanctified if we are still living in fornication, homosexuality or adultery.

Objection 2: Divorce and remarriage is wrong, but for the sake of children remarriages should not be separated.

It is argued that the phrase, "the two shall become one flesh," is referring to children. Normally, those who hold to this view justify the subsequent remarriage in favor of the children. It is true that children involved in divorces (and remarriages) often bear the brunt of the pain that these situations cause. Because of this fact, this argument in favor of divorce and remarriage is a very strong emotional appeal.

If children are the deciding factor for splitting up an adulterous union, then we become hopelessly inconsistent. What if the former marriage has children and the adulterous "marriage" has no children? Do we then make a judgment of which marriage is valid based upon which marriage tips the scale by the amount of children from it? Those who would support a subsequent remarriage in favor of the children would rarely advocate the legitimate prior marriage because of the children.

The fact is Jesus never said that children make or break a marriage. Many people get married and are unable to have children because of infertility or health issues, but this does not mean they were never really married or made "one flesh."

What if two homosexuals are legally married with children? Once again, children are not the

determining factor in what is considered joined together by God. The Lord is not going to overlook the sin of homosexuality because there are children in a homosexual marriage. They need to repent of their homosexuality and somehow care for the children they've adopted. Divorce and remarriage, like homosexual marriages, are sinful relationships, and children aren't an exception for sinful living. Never does God excuse sinful behavior, it is always wrong and immoral.

Children are born from fornication, from rape, and from adultery. The children will not have to answer for the sins of their parents. But it doesn't change the fact that the parents are still living in adultery. The implication of this argument is that repentance from an adulterous marriage would require a parent to abandon their children. But this is not the case. Parents still can and must raise their children and responsibly care for them, but the worst case scenario is that the parents would continue living in adultery.

Objection 3: The woman at the well was saved and Jesus never told her to separate from her adulterous remarriage.

This objection is loaded with assumptions and builds a case on silence. First of all, was this woman saved? Jesus never said to this woman that she was saved. He never said, "Your faith has saved you," as he did to another woman on another occasion. We don't know if she was saved or not.

Secondly, she had five husbands, but we are not told how she lost five husbands. It is unlikely that she was widowed five times, but it is certainly possible. We are simply not told. In Matthew 22, the Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him whose wife a woman would be who had seven consecutive husbands who all died one after the other. Apparently, it is not too far-fetched for a woman to be bereaved of five husbands. We are simply not told whether or not the woman at the well was divorced and remarried or widowed.

Thirdly, was she really living in fornication? Probably; it seems unlikely that a woman would be cohabiting with a man and not be in fornication, but again we're not told. All we are told is that she was living with a man who was not her husband.

Finally, Jesus never told her what to do about her situation. We want to know what Jesus counseled her about her relationships but John didn't record it, maybe because Jesus didn't address it. There are far too many possibilities here to use this text in a teaching on divorce and remarriage. If she was divorced and remarried, Jesus may have told her to go back to her first husband. He may have told her to remain celibate from then on. You could make a case either way. Those who try to build a case based on the fact that Jesus didn't address her divorce and remarriage are forced to face the fact that Jesus didn't address her fornication either. If indeed she was divorced and remarried four times and was indeed living in fornication, Jesus never addressed the divorces and remarriages or the fornication. John's gospel was intended to highlight the Person of Messiah, and it contains very little of His practical doctrine for life.

It is assumed she was divorced and remarried but we don't know. Either way, Jesus didn't tell her what to do. So the case of the woman at the well does not help us at all in regard to divorce and remarriage. We cannot build a case on silence. We cannot make assumptions based upon what is *not* said, especially if it contradicts Jesus' clear teaching elsewhere. Rather than use our imaginations as to

what Jesus may have told her, it is safer to work with what Jesus explicitly stated elsewhere on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

Objection 4: Divorced and remarried people must have a real marriage in God's eyes since Jesus said, "and marries another."

Some have argued that a divorced and remarried person has a legitimate marriage simply because Jesus said, "and marries another." Because Jesus used the word "marries," they insist that a divorced and remarried person is truly married in God's eyes. But this is an overly simplistic usage of the word. Just because Jesus said, "marries another," does not mean that the marriage is acceptable or blessed in God's eyes. Conservative Christians use the phrase "homosexual marriage" even though they do not believe that a union of two homosexuals is acceptable to God. Like Jesus, we are simply using the best words for our hearers to understand the concept.

Is an adulterous "marriage" a "marriage"? Are they married? Technically, yes. But so is a "married" homosexual couple. Jesus did say, "And marries another . . . commits adultery." It is a marriage, but it is an unlawful marriage in the Kingdom of God. How else could Jesus define what He is talking about without using the word "marries" or "marriage." He is talking about a man or woman who divorces their spouse and "marries" another. Just because he uses the word "marriage" does not mean that it is a legitimate marriage. By the choice of the word "adultery" Jesus can only mean that divorce doesn't end marriage, and that subsequent marriages are unlawful.

If a man divorces his wife and marries another he commits adultery or if a man marries a divorced woman, he commits adultery. Who is the adultery against? The adultery is against the former living spouse of the first marriage. So even though a divorce took place and even though the second union involved a marriage ceremony and is called a "marriage" by the state and by friends and family, according to Jesus it is an adulterous relationship. Are they married? Yes and no. Are they married in God's eyes? No. They are not joined together by God. How else could we say that divorce and remarriage is adultery without using the words "marries another"?

Objection 5: A person who has been divorced and remarried is forgiven of their sins; they should acknowledge their remarriage was sinful but continue in their remarriage because the Bible does not command to put away "marriage."

If it is true that a person can still be a Christian and remain in an adulterous marriage, then that would be the only sin in which a person could remain and still be forgiven. There is no other sin like that! It cannot be that an adulterous remarriage is exempt from true repentance. Adultery is adultery, whether it be an adulterous affair, a pornography addiction, or divorce and remarriage. All of these alike are sexual sins that require repentance in order to inherit the kingdom of God.

This objection and others like it attempt to redefine the sin of adultery. Defenders of this view make an exception for the sin of adultery by calling it a true "marriage." The Scriptures don't have to explicitly say to repent of divorce and remarriages because Jesus called them adulterous relationships. All sin requires repentance and this sin is not exempt. The implications are obvious. If what God has

joined together is not to be put asunder, then what God has not joined together must be put asunder.

Objection 6: But God is divorced and remarried.

Some have imagined that there is an example for divorce and remarriage with God himself. They say that God divorced Israel for her spiritual adultery and married the church. But this is not the case. Paul spoke of the Old Covenant and New Covenant in terms of marriages in Romans 7. We see there yet again that divorce does not end a marriage, only death does. Paul says: “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:2-4).

Just like a woman is free to marry another when her first husband dies, so when Christ died He set us free from the Old Covenant. We became dead to the Law of Moses through the body of Christ so that we may be married to another—even Jesus in the New Covenant. In God's case, there is no *divorce* and remarriage but *death* and remarriage. Though God divorced Israel, He was still married to her and told her to return (Jeremiah 3). Christ's death ended the Old Covenant and began the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:16). Thus, God is not divorced and remarried as some have argued because the death of Christ legitimately ended the Old Covenant and began the New.

Objection 7: Holding someone to their original marriage is following the “letter of the Law” and not the “spirit of the Law.”

Paul said, “we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6). Paul also said, “God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). I've heard many people misuse this idea Paul has about the letter and the spirit and mistakenly apply it to divorce and remarriage. They say that to call upon divorced and remarried people to repent is the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law. Likewise, many professing Christians today claim that the Scriptures and the words of Christ are “dead letter,” and they rely upon private interpretation and subjective “leadings of the Spirit.”

But the letter which kills is referring to the Law of Moses, not the words of Christ. It is the letter of the Law, not the letter of Christ. Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you *are* spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The phrase “letter of the law” cannot be applied to Jesus' words. The spirit of Jesus' commandments will never contradict the letter of them because they *are* spirit and they *are* life, unlike the Old Covenant Law. The Old Covenant was the “ministry of death.” The Old Covenant kills, not the commandments of Jesus. With the giving of the Old Covenant, “three thousand men of the people fell that day” (Exodus 32:28). With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, “that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41). A person who operates in the spirit of what

Jesus commanded will fulfill the letter of what he commanded also. The spirit and the letter of the Lord's commands are not at odds with one another. People have just taken a concept in the Bible which is referring to the Old Testament "letter" and applied it to the Lord's commandments. Jesus' statement that whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery *is* spirit and is life, not dead letter.

Objection 8: The permanency of marriage doctrine is legalism and those who teach it our modern Pharisees.

The Pharisees were the ones who hated what Jesus said. Many professing Christians have no problem with accepting the face-value meaning of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). No Christian is considered legalistic because they believe in John 3:16. Notice it says "whoever believes." All professing Christians take that "whoever" literally and seriously, but many do not apply the same seriousness when it comes to "whoever divorces his wife," or "whoever marries a divorced woman." The more difficult the statements of Jesus become, the greater the tendency there is to explain them away by finding a supposed hidden meaning behind His words. A disciple who obeys the letter of Jesus' words is not a legalist, they are legal. It's the workers of lawlessness that to whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you."

A legalist is one who looks for a loophole in the law of Christ. Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11,12). The intent or spirit of Christ's commandment forbids all divorce and remarriage because, according to Jesus, it is adulterous. But the legalist will try to find a loophole by focusing on the letter of the law. For example, a legalist will say that the letter of the law does not forbid a man to remarry if his wife divorces him. Granted, Jesus never said that a man who remarried after his wife divorced him commits adultery, but, based upon what Jesus did teach, one can fairly deduce that the same twice-married man would nonetheless be committing adultery because he is violating Christ's intended meaning that "they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). If the woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery (according to Mark 10:12), then who is she committing adultery against? Her original husband of course. Therefore, she is still bound to her original husband (Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Even though he was innocent, he is nonetheless bound to her. It cannot be that a woman who divorces her husband and marries another commits adultery while her husband is free to remarry. Either they are both still married to each other or both free to remarry. Since her subsequent marriage is declared adulterous, then the original marriage is still "joined together." Many Evangelicals would rightly call upon two "married" homosexuals to separate from their sexually immoral and illegitimate "marriage", even though there is not a Scripture which commands the separation. Yet they say that there is no command in Scripture to separate an adulterous "marriage" and thereby make an exception for this sin. Only a biblicist and legalist would build a case on silence like that because it gives them a loophole to escape repentance.

By the way, it was the legalistic Pharisees who "tested" Jesus about His teaching on divorce and remarriage and tried to "catch Him in His words" (Matthew 19:3ff.; cf. Mark 12:13; Luke 20:26). It

was the legalistic Pharisees who looked for a loophole for them to divorce their wives. They said, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (Matthew 19:3) Nowadays, the divorce rate within the Evangelical church is similar to that of the world. And those who would call divorced and remarried people to separate from their adulterous remarriages are castigated as legalistic Pharisees. But it was the Pharisees who divorced their spouses because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5). And it was the Pharisees who could not receive Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage (Matthew 19:12).

Objection 9: The permanency of marriage doctrine makes righteous men of the Old Testament sinners, as well as disciples in other countries where polygamy is practiced.

Jesus said, “the two shall become one flesh,” (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8). He did not say, “the three shall become one flesh,” or, “the four shall become one flesh.” God has joined together two (the male and female), but not more than two. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate (Matthew 19:6). Divorce and remarriage is *consecutive* polygamy, having more than one wife or husband one at a time. On the other hand, *simultaneous* polygamy is the practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time. The intent of Jesus' teaching is that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Mark 10:7-8). But any spouse subsequent to the original “one flesh” marriage is illegitimate and adulterous. Therefore, polygamy, whether it be consecutive or simultaneous, is adultery.

Just as professing Christians argue for divorce and remarriage from the OT, they also find their case for polygamy in the OT. Certainly there are many examples of polygamy from our OT examples of righteous men, but these examples are against the New Testament standard for the Christian life. For example, both Abraham and David were righteous men in the OT, and they were polygamists. Does this mean that we can adopt polygamy as an acceptable practice in the NT just because we have an OT precedent? Absolutely not. Abraham and David were righteous men, but they were not Christians! Jesus said, “For assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17). We cannot go by the OT standards of divorce and remarriage and polygamy. Once again, the standard of Christ is taken from the beginning in Creation. “But from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). “From the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:6-9).

Objection 10: Those who have fornicated prior to marriage are also guilty of divorce and remarriage because Paul equates fornication to marriage when he says the man joined to a harlot is “one body” with her.

Some have mistakenly taught that sexual union alone creates a marriage. They often base this on a passage in 1 Corinthians. Paul says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I

then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh.' But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Corinthians 6:15-17). Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 because he observes a spiritual union between a man and a woman joined in sex. But this does not mean that fornication equals marriage.

An essential component of marriage is the covenant (Proverbs 2:16,17; Ezekiel 16:8; Malachi 2:14), but fornication is without a marriage covenant. Understanding marriage as a covenant helps correct this misconception that *any* sexual intercourse is considered a marriage.

In the OT, concubines were different from wives because concubines lacked covenantal sanction. To have a covenant without sexual union is to be betrothed. For example, Joseph "divorced" Mary even though they had no sexual union because they were bound by covenant (Matthew 1:19). On the other hand, to have sexual union without a covenant is to engage in sexual immorality such as fornication, adultery, or prostitution.

There is a clear distinction in the Law of Moses between sexual intercourse and marriage. In Exodus 22:16-17, a man who had sexual relations with a woman was expected to marry her. However, the woman's father could refuse to give her to him as a wife. Thus, sexual relations alone do not define marriage. If we adopt the view that sexual relations define marriage, then we must say that rape also defines marriage. Obviously if consensual sexual relations do not define marriage than forced sexual relations do not define marriage either. In Deuteronomy 22:28-29, a man who raped a virgin was expected to marry her. But the sexual intercourse alone did not make them married. The man still had to pay her father fifty shekels of silver in order to marry her because sexual relations alone did not make them married.

Hosea took a wife who was a harlot. One of the children she had belonged to another man. This sexual relationship or child did not mean that she was also married to that other man in addition to Hosea. She only had a marriage covenant with Hosea. And Hosea was able to lawfully take her as wife even though she was a harlot of fornications because those fornications did not make her married to these men. Marriage requires a covenant, as it says in Malachi 2:14.

If sexual relations determined a marriage, then there would be no distinction between the words *adultery* and *fornication*. But the Bible often uses these words side by side to refer to two distinct types of sexual sin: adultery is sexual sin involving at least one *married* person, whereas fornication is sexual sin involving two *unmarried* people. For instance, both the exception clause passages on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 contain both words *fornication* and *adultery*, thus signifying separate sins (see also Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21 ; Galatians 5:19-21). Fornication is not marriage.

Objection 11: "Not under bondage" means free to remarry.

There are also those who say that in Paul is making an exception for divorce and remarriage if an unbelieving spouse departs from a Christian. Paul says, "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Paul has not said in this verse or anywhere else that a Christian deserted by a heathen spouse may be married to someone else.

They point to 1 Corinthians 7:39 where “bound” refers to the marital bond: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives.” Thus, they gather from verse 15 “not under bondage” means free to remarry. Not only would this interpretation make those verses contradictory, but the Greek word δουλόω (doulōō) for “under bondage” (verse 15) means enslave and is never used for divorce. A different word is used in verse 39 for “bound”, the Greek word δεῖω (deō) which means to be bound to one, a wife, a husband.

Another problem with this is that it would contradict what Jesus taught and what Paul taught before and after verse 15: “Remain unmarried or be reconciled” (1 Corinthians 7:11); “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives” (1 Corinthians 7:39). Even if we understood Paul to mean that abandonment is a valid reason to divorce, remarriage is still not an option. But people interpret verse 15 (which is somewhat ambiguous) and say that a Christian may remarry if an unbelieving spouse leaves them.

If marriage ends by someone merely deserting their spouse at any time and for any reason, then how could anyone under any circumstances be in a situation where there remarriage constitutes adultery as Jesus taught in the Gospels? Every marriage ends with at least one spouse leaving the other. If the first marriage is automatically dissolved as soon as one of the spouses departs, making the innocent spouse free to remarry, then under what possible conditions would any married person not be free to remarry? Such an interpretation renders the teaching of Jesus meaningless.

Objection 12: Remain in the calling wherein you are called applies to divorced and remarried people. Paul didn't address the divorced and remarried in 1 Corinthians 7, so the divorced and remarried should remain married.

Based on this passage, some would argue that Paul taught divorced and remarried converts to remain in adulterous remarriages. Of course Paul was not including sinful situations to remain in.

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Corinthians 7:19). Divorce and remarriage which is adultery is nowhere in Paul's discussion of remaining in the same calling in which you are called. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. He is not saying a pure marriage is nothing and fornication is nothing, and homosexuality is nothing, and adultery is nothing. Circumcision was indeed nothing because it is not a moral issue. But keeping the commandments *is* what matters.

There was absolutely no need for Paul to address overtly sinful situations. He did not have clarify that a harlot should not remain a harlot. It's obvious. Or that a homosexual should not remain a homosexual. Paul did not have to explicitly mention adulterous remarriages either. It's obviously overtly sinful because Jesus defined it as adultery in the Gospel. The Corinthians have already received the Gospel and believed it. Their foundation was the Christ, and Jesus taught divorce and remarriage to be adulterous. Paul didn't have to say anything about it.

Objection 13: “Loosed” means divorced and therefore the divorced are free to remarry.

Paul says, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife." Commentators have also used this verse to suggest that Paul means to say "divorced" when he says "loosed." They say that Paul is also allowing divorce and remarriage here because verse 28 says: "But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." But the Greek words λύσις (lysis) and λύω (lyō) translated "loosed" are never used to refer to divorce. It would be a very unfortunate choice of word if Paul was referring to "divorced." Never did Paul or Jesus use this word for divorce on all other occasions they talked about it. Not only that, but Paul would be teaching the exact opposite of what Jesus taught on the subject if he were permitting remarriage. It is even clearer from the context of verses 28-29 that Paul was not addressing divorced people, but virgins. He says in verse 25: "Now concerning virgins" and proceeds to give his instructions. Again, in verse 28: "if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." Again in verses 35-37, he clearly address male and female virgins. The entire context of verses 25-40 is Paul's instructions to virgins. So being "bound" or "loosed" to a wife in verse 27 is referring to virgin males and the custom of betrothal.

Objection 14: Everyone is guilty of adultery, so stop throwing stones!

According to Jesus, adultery is not *just* sleeping with another person's spouse. It's not only that, but it's also having an affair in your mind with someone else's spouse or someone other than your spouse. Jesus said, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). I would venture to say that almost everybody has committed adultery at one time or another.

I know that I cannot say that I have never lusted after a woman. Jesus said that is adultery. When I was a teenager, I was addicted to pornography. So I cannot say that I am free from having committed adultery. But by God's grace, I can say that I am free from *committing* adultery now that I've repented of adultery. In the process of being at peace with God, a person is convicted of sin, and then, in humility, repents and turns away from sin. Repentance is turning from sin.

I am also guilty of having committed fornication. But I am no longer *committing* fornication now that I've repented of fornication. Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. I used to be a drunkard and drug addict. Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. By God's grace, I quit drinking, quit using drugs and quit living that lifestyle. I repented of all these things; I no longer do these sinful things.

Did Jesus die for fornicators? Yes, but He did not die for fornication. Did Jesus die for homosexuals? Yes, but He did not die for homosexuality. Jesus died for drunkards, but not for drunkenness. He died for them, but not so they could continue in their sin. Jesus died for the adulterer and the adulteress, but not for adultery. There is no forgiveness for those who continue in sin. There is no exception for divorce and remarriage, which is the sin of adultery. If I were living in an adulterous affair, you would counsel me to repent and turn from that relationship. But to say that I could continue in that relationship and be forgiven of God would be absurd. Yet so many professing Christians say that they believe what Jesus said about the sin of divorce and remarriage but are unwilling to separate from their adulterous spouse.

God forgives, but there are consequences of sin which often live with us for the rest of our lives.

Some Christians must live in a prison cell the rest of their lives because of crimes they committed as an unbeliever. Some Christians have to live with STD's and health problems because of their sexual immorality or sins committed as unbelievers. And some Christians will have to live celibate because of a failed marriage as an unbeliever. God forgives us, but there are still consequences.

Objection 15: The Lord's teaching about divorce and remarriage being adultery is true; therefore anybody who has been divorced and remarried or married to a divorced person should live a celibate life and they cannot have a legitimate marriage.

Unlike the objections above which advocate a lax interpretation of the Lord's teaching, this objection is mistaken because of its unwarranted severity. I call this the anti-reconciliation view. Many serious-minded Christians have taken the Lord's words literally about divorce and remarriage being adultery, but fall back on the Law of Moses by suggesting that reconciliation with the original spouse is "an abomination" (Deuteronomy 24:4). First of all, unclean foods are also called an abomination in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 11), but these dietary laws are not binding upon Christians in the New Covenant.

In the OT a man really could dissolve his marriage with divorce. In the OT, men and women really could remarry after a divorce. But in the NT marriage is absolutely permanent and only dissoluble through death. In other words, the OT recognized divorce and remarriage whereas the NT does not.

If a man were to have an affair with another woman, would it be a sin for him to go back to his wife in the same way as the divorced woman in Deuteronomy 24 returning to her husband? No. Would it be an abomination for that man to return to his wife? Of course not! Now Jesus has defined divorce and remarriage in the same terms.

The church is not built upon the Law of Moses, it is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). In the Law of Moses, it was an abomination for the wife to return to her first spouse. But in the New Covenant (and even in the prophets), God reveals His will in taking back the adulterous wife in spite of it being an abomination (Jeremiah 3). Even though God gave Israel a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8), and even though the Law of Moses was cited as it was said an abomination for her to return, God says "Return, . . . for I am married to you" (Jeremiah 3:4).

Paul encouraged reconciliation (1 Corinthians 7:11). There is no reason for us to assume that reconciliation with the first spouse is not intended for those who forsake their adulterous remarriages. The burden of proof lies upon those who would forbid reconciliation based upon OT legislation. Jesus brought the dynamics of marriage back to the beginning of Creation, long before the Law of Moses. Ironically, the anti-reconciliation view ends up separating what God has originally joined together. Adultery is defined as voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse. By definition, an adulterous remarriage is a sin against the original marriage bond which must still be in tact. Otherwise Jesus would not call divorce and remarriage adultery. Because it is adultery, reconciliation is imperative.

Those in this camp would also forbid a legitimate marriage to a person who was previously

married to a divorced person. For example, if a woman's first marriage was to a man who had a living wife, then this camp would forbid the woman to enter into a legitimate marriage. They would count her a divorced woman and forbid her a legitimate marriage, even though the previous marriage was adulterous on account of the husband's former living spouse.

We must be consistent. Either a marriage is one hundred percent valid or one hundred percent adulterous. If a remarriage is adulterous, then we need to consider it adultery, not a marriage. If a person's union was adulterous on account of the other spouse's past marriage history, then we cannot consider it binding upon that person as would a legitimate marriage. For a man or woman who married a divorced person, they should be permitted to enter into a legitimate marriage after putting away the adulterous union. Divorce and remarriage is adultery *because* the first marriage is permanent and binding. In the end, the anti-reconciliation view ends up destroying the marriages that it seeks to protect. Ultimately this view separates what God had joined together by forbidding reconciliation.

Concluding Remarks

It is the more ambiguous and questionable passages that are used to make a case for divorce and remarriage *not* being adultery. But all of the NT passages concerning divorce and remarriage can be legitimately harmonized according to the absolute indissolubility of marriage as taught by the Lord in the gospels. Thus we ought to humbly and responsibly approach the more ambiguous texts which are argued to make exceptions for divorce and remarriage. Therefore, as explained above, the exception clause in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:8-9 must refer to the unique situation of betrothal.

By way of summary, Jesus taught that marriage was absolutely indissoluble (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:5-9) and that remarriage while the spouse lives is impossible (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Far from there being any "Pauline exception", the indissolubility of marriage and adultery of remarriage is also affirmed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 39. Divorce doesn't end marriage; death does.