

OCCASIONAL NOTES

Strangers Rest Evangelical Church

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

"Matthew 19:6:- Therefore what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"

Marriage is the oldest institution in the world. It was introduced for Adam and Eve before the Fall, and is applicable to everyone, which is why we find marriage in all societies. While in most cases western society recognises marriage as monogamous other societies recognise polygamy. Similarly elements of western society now recognise marriage between people of the same sex while the majority see it as a relationship between two people of the opposite sex. Confusion is also apparent on what actually constitutes marriage with some maintaining that God regards co-habiting couples as married in His eyes even though no formal vows have been exchanged. Similarly there is considerable division even amongst Christians as to what if any biblically lawful grounds for divorce and remarriage exist.

The aim of this article is to bring clarity to biblical marriage and demonstrate its uniqueness and importance as being central to any society that seeks stability and prosperity. I aim to define marriage and to consider whether the Bible teaches any grounds of divorce. I also address the measures that may have to be taken when people want to become Christians and are in unlawful marriages.

The Origin of Marriage

Genesis is our starting place because, when questioned on divorce by the Pharisees in Matthew 19, that is where the Lord Jesus referred them.

Genesis 2:23-24 provided the framework for the Lord and it does therefore for us:

And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be

called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

What one sees from these verses is that marriage consists of:

1. Leaving the protection of mother and father and forming a new family unit;
2. The joining together permanently (cleaving) of one man to one woman; and
3. The act of physical union (the two shall be one flesh).

In Matthew 19:6 the Lord Jesus stated that in marriage the two become one flesh and are joined together by God so that He is then able to go on to say in words that appear in every traditional marriage ceremony performed in the Anglican Church:

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Polygamy or Monogamy?

Marriage was created to be monogamous. The reason that it is between one man and one woman is given in Genesis 2:23; it is because a woman is part of the man being formed from his rib cf. verse 21. One man and one woman therefore make a complete unit. Two women and one man do not.

However, it seems that after the Fall the divine ideal was lost (we first read of polygamy in Genesis 4:19 when Cain's great grandson, Lamech, took two wives). Even in Israel polygamy was not only practiced but also

permitted by the Lord. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, the Prophet Nathan was sent to David to confront him with his adultery with Bathsheba. In verse 8, in order to show that God had held nothing back from David, God, speaking through Nathan, said:

I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!

However it should be noted that the Bible only records Saul having one wife (1 Samuel 14:50) although a concubine is also mentioned (2 Samuel 3:7). When questioned about divorce in Matthew 19, the Lord Jesus turned to the definition of marriage found in Genesis 2: 22-23 in its pre-fall state between one man and one woman and made it clear that they that are joined together become one flesh because God has united them (v6).

His teaching on divorce is then placed within the context of marriage between one man and one woman. In Matthew 19:9 the Lord says:

"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."

In Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 adultery, which means the breaking of wedlock, was committed only when a married woman lay with another man although both the guilty man and woman were put to death. Therefore a married man could lie with another woman without incurring the penalties of the Mosaic law provided that the woman was not herself married.

However, in Matthew 19 we see that the Lord extended adultery to a married man who broke wedlock as well. It has been suggested that the Lord was not ruling out polygamy because the Lord only defines adultery as the act of marrying another woman after divorce whereas polygamy does not require a divorce. However in the parallel passage on divorce in Mark 10 the Lord

defines adultery for the wife in v12 as being when she puts away her husband and marries another. If the argument was right then the Lord was extending the concept of polygamy to the woman also and legitimising polyandry (the marriage of one woman to more than one man).

This is the danger of reading verses of scripture out of context. In both Matthew 19 and Mark 10 the Lord defined marriage to be between one man and one woman. The mystery of that marriage is that the two people are joined together by God and so the Lord warns man not to separate them.

As already mentioned, adultery means the breaking of wedlock which happens in New Testament times when either spouse has sexual intercourse with a third party. The reason is clear. Fornication is a sin against a person's own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). Adultery is not only a sin against that person's body but also the spouse because the two are one flesh. Hence in Mark 10:11 the Lord speaks of the guilty husband committing adultery against the wife. Since both polygamy and polyandry involve one of the parties of the original marriage committing fornication with a third person then that is adultery.

When the Lord defined a second marriage as adultery, he was not redefining the sin of adultery as only being committed by a person who divorces without biblical authority and remarries. We know this from the passage in John 8 when the woman caught in "the very act of adultery" was brought to Jesus. The act being referred to was the act of sexual intercourse carrying forward the definition from the Old Testament.

The reason for Jesus defining adultery within the context of divorce and remarriage, in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, was because he was referring to the Pharisees'/disciples' questions about the lawfulness of divorce. The Lord was emphasising the futility of a divorce that God had not sanctioned because it does not give rise to a right to remarry. Since any new marriage unit is not joined together by God it is not recognised as a valid marriage by Him and so sexual intercourse within that new unit

continues to be adultery against the previous, and still divinely recognised, marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:2 Paul enjoins his readers that to avoid sexual immorality, "*let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband*". If polygamy and polyandry had been sanctioned then Paul should properly have written: "let each man have his own wives and let each woman have her own husbands" but he did not because of course the Lord had not sanctioned such conduct.

Further and most importantly, marriage reflects Christ's union with the church as Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:31-2:

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The image of marriage representing the union of Christ and His Church only makes sense when applied to monogamous marriages.

Some point to 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 to suggest that polygamy was permitted within the church provided the person was not in leadership. In those passages Paul teaches that an elder is to be the husband of one wife. However, these passages also contain qualifications for leadership that should be the mark of every Christian (not being arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard or greedy) and so it is unsafe to assume that a Christian, not in leadership, could have two husbands or wives since no Christian could remain in fellowship if they were, for example, a drunkard. If polygamy was allowed for Christians, then there would be no need for leaders to be in a monogamous marriage if polygamy was still acceptable in God's eyes.

1 Timothy 5:9 states that widows should only be taken into the care of the church if they had been the wife of one man. It could not be inferred from this verse that Paul was approving polyandry!

Unions of the same sex

In 2013 the Government passed The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 which legalised same-sex marriage in England and Wales.

The Bible specifically condemns sexual relations between couples of the same sex as we see from this well known passage in Romans 1:24-27:-

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: (25) Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (26) For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: (27) And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

See further: Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 2: 6-10.

As we have seen sexual union between a man and a woman is a necessary requirement for the formation of a biblical marriage. Same sex marriage applying only to couples of the same sex, cannot equate to biblical marriage because sexual relationships between couples of the same sex are forbidden.

Physical Union not sufficient for Marriage

Biblically the act of physical union does not in itself produce a permanent union in God's eyes, but instead permanent union follows the making of public vows. This is demonstrated in Exodus 22:16-17 where we are told that a person, who has had sex outside marriage with an unmarried woman, should marry her if the father permitted it. However, the father was not obliged to give his consent for his daughter to be married to the man. If the act of sexual intercourse produced a marriage union, then it would not be open to a father to refuse his consent because the couple would already be married in God's eyes.

When the Lord Jesus spoke to the woman at the well in John 4:18, He pointed out she was living with a man who was not her husband:

For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.

The Lord distinguished between the woman living together with a man out of wedlock and being married. Sexual intercourse was obviously implied in the last relationship otherwise there would have been no obvious point mentioning this relationship but it was not equated with marriage. We can go further and assert from the Bible that having children does not form a marriage between two adults. If this were so the writer to the Hebrews would not have compared our relationship with God as being sons as opposed to being illegitimate children when he wrote:

"But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (chapter 12, verse 8).

Believing Jews accused Jesus, in effect, of being a bastard¹ when they said:

... We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. (John 8:41).

If the act of sexual union was equivalent to marriage, then the Jews would not have been able to make this slur against the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 6:16 Paul warns against having intercourse with a prostitute because it would be making the two one flesh. However, this cannot mean marriage because in verse 18 Paul goes on to encourage his readers to flee sexual immorality, which, in the context clearly included fleeing from any involvement with a prostitute.

The Covenant of Marriage

Marriage is a covenant relationship and is a mystery which mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church as Paul wrote in Ephesians 5: 31-32 (see above).

In Ezekiel 16:8, God uses the covenant of marriage to illustrate the covenant He had entered into with Israel:

Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine

A covenant is a promise exchanged between two parties. However, in marriage it must be freely given. When Isaac's servant sought out Rebecca to be Isaac's wife her consent was sought in Genesis 24:58:

"And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go."

Just as commitment to Christ is forever, the commitment to the spouse is for a lifetime (Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39) but not forever because there will be no marriage in heaven (Luke 20:35).

In Bible times this covenant came in an act of betrothal. Betrothal means to promise by one's truth and comes from the Hebrew word: "Æaras" which means to engage for matrimony. The betrothal appears to have taken place before the actual marriage in biblical times. From the time of betrothal the woman was regarded as the lawful wife of the man to whom she was betrothed. We first see this, albeit in a rather negative context, in Deuteronomy 28:30 where the Lord speaks of the curses that would come upon the people of Israel if they lived in disobedience to Him:

Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof.

¹ The word "bastard" means illegitimate

In the New Testament the Greek word used for betrothal in Matthew 1:18 is *mnhsteuw* (*mnesteuo*) and means to woo and ask in marriage or to be promised in marriage.

The friend of the bridegroom acted as a guarantor of the bride's virginity. Paul is therefore able to write in 2 Corinthians 11:2:-

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Mary, the Lord Jesus' mother, though engaged to be married, would have remained a virgin until after the marriage ceremony because otherwise Joseph would not have reacted as he did on hearing that she was pregnant.

There is no requirement that the vows of marriage must be made in a religious ceremony to God but any vow is taken before God. Therefore, a covenant of marriage is equally binding on a Christian and non-Christian alike.

The Need for Public Recognition

The covenant of marriage therefore produces a permanent relationship between two people that must not be broken because God has joined them together (Matthew 19:6). In order to safeguard this covenant, a marriage must be known and recognised publicly otherwise others will not know that they are interfering with what God has joined together.

A good biblical example is the visit of Abraham and Sarah to Gerar where Abraham told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. When God revealed to Abimelech that they were married, Abimelech said to Abraham:

What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." (Genesis 20:9).

This shows how seriously a pagan king viewed marriage and the consequences of adultery, even when committed unwittingly.

There has always been a public element to marriage recognised by society as a whole. Job is one of the earliest books and he writes of adultery as "...*For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges.*" (Job 31:11). This citation is particularly important because Job was one of the early characters of the Bible living before the giving of the Mosaic Law. He is therefore likely to have reflected the general attitude of the world to marriage. For marriage to be regulated by judges there needed to be a public element to it that was provable before whatever courts were operating in those times.

Certainly in Israel the act of marriage appears to have taken place within the context of a ceremony. The Lord is recorded as attending a wedding supper (John 2:1). The Lord used the marriage ceremony in two of his parables (Matthew 22:2-14 and Matthew 25:13). He also referred to people marrying and being given in marriage as in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:38) implying that marriage ceremonies were widespread practices from that time, and will continue to be until the end of time.

At the very least witnesses would have been required to prove a marriage otherwise the courts (under Mosaic Law) would not have had jurisdiction to convict a person of committing adultery because there would have been no one to prove the marriage. As Deuteronomy 19:15 states (and which Paul confirms in 2 Corinthians 13:1):

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

The Place of Sexual Intercourse

There are many who believe that a marriage is not complete until consummation of the marriage has taken place. Therefore, if a husband or wife refuses to consummate the marriage by engaging in sexual intercourse, then the marriage can be annulled.

I have come to the conclusion that this concept is not biblical. The covenant of marriage is complete when a couple exchange vows in public. This then entitles the couple to engage in sexual intercourse. As we have seen, the act of sexual intercourse does not make the marriage. It ought to be part of marriage but does not constitute the act of marriage. So we find in Exodus 21:9-10:- (9) And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. (10) If he take him another *wife*; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

Here I suggest we see sexual intercourse described as a duty of marriage which is consistent with 1 Corinthians 7:3-5:-

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. (4) The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. (5) Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

It would therefore seem to me that the concept of an annulment of a marriage on grounds of non-consummation by either party, does not have any biblical justification.

Summary of Requirements for Biblical Marriage

Today, a couple must be married in accordance with the law in order to be recognised by the State and those requirements are clearly set down in statute. Paul in Romans 13:5 enjoins us to be subject to the authorities and in 1 Peter 2:13-14 we are exhorted to submit to every ordinance of man. These passages refer to man-made laws that do not conflict with the

revealed will of God (see Acts 4:19). Therefore, except in exceptional circumstances, marriage should take place in accordance with the laws of the land and ministers should not, in the normal course of events, marry people who are not intending to register their marriages with the marriage registrar. Otherwise there is a danger of a parallel society developing. That is not to say that there are no exceptions, but that should be the general view.

Couples are increasingly preferring a cohabitating relationship and the law is moving to recognise this by granting rights based on these relationships. However, cohabitation can never be considered equivalent to marriage because the essential ingredient of making a covenant to live together **for life** is missing. Indeed, it is for lack of commitment that cohabitation is generally preferred.

Given the availability of biblically recognised marriage one would have to ask why an eligible couple would not register a marriage in the normal way unless it was because they did not want to give a lifelong commitment to their partner.

If the church were to recognise a couple as married even though they were just in a cohabiting sexual relationship it would give the appearance that the church was condoning cohabitation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:22) and the church would be thus sending out a confusing message.

Furthermore, it would create insuperable problems. How would adultery be proved if on the one hand the State considered the person unmarried yet the Church, because of finding some form of private contract, believed they were married?

In the final analysis we must look to biblical precedent to form our understanding and requirements for marriages that are lawful in the sight of God. In countries where biblical marriage is still a state recognised institution vows should be made in accordance with the state's requirements in order for the public element of marriage to be present.

The fact that private vows could be recognised by the state in the past (although it was not always certain that they would be) cannot be an excuse for regarding cohabiting couples as married when they have not gone through the normal State ordained procedures of today unless the state refuses to allow a couple to marry unreasonably. In any event, as we have seen the Bible does not recognise marriage vows made in the absence of two or three witnesses. This might reasonably be applied to marriage vows except where exceptional conditions prevail and these safeguards are not possible (for example if an unmarried couple were washed up on a desert island and wanted to marry).

Finally, we must remember that, if the church does not enforce the clear biblical requirements of marriage, then it will be condoning fornication – a sin that will exclude a person from Heaven (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10). Such a possibility should not be countenanced by any Bible loving Christian.

The church must also take a stand against polygamy. While it might have been tolerated in the Old Testament, polygamy has no present day biblical mandate.

Divorce and Remarriage

As we have already seen the Lord Jesus is the ultimate authority on marriage and divorce. Whatever was permitted in the Old Testament, and in other cultures, the Lord Jesus made it clear that marriage was to return to the pre-Fall position between one man and one woman for life.

The one passage that countenances divorce and remarriage in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 24:1-4:-

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. (2) And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. (3) And if the latter husband hate her, and write

her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; (4) Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

It is plain that uncleanness referred to in verse 1 is something other than sexual intercourse because that would be adultery and the penalty for adultery was death. We find this in Deuteronomy 22:21-22 where if a woman was married to a man and found not to be a virgin because she had committed fornication prior to marriage she would be put to death:

(21) Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you. (22) If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

We also find this in Leviticus 20:10:- “And the man that committeth adultery with *another* man's wife, *even he* that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

Therefore the uncleanness referred to in Deuteronomy could not be sexual immorality but something of a lesser order. This is what John Gill said about the meaning of uncleanness:

Something that he disliked, and was disagreeable to him, and which made their continuance together in the marriage state very uncomfortable; which led him on to be very ill-natured, severe, and cruel to her; so that her life was exposed to danger, or at least become very uneasy; in which case a divorce was permitted, both for the

badness of the man's heart, and in favour of the woman, that she might be freed from such rigorous usage. This word "uncleanness" does not signify adultery, or any of the uncleannesses forbidden in Leviticus 18:6 (None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness); because that was punishable with death, when it could be proved; and where there was only a suspicion of it, the husband might make use of the bitter water (see Numbers 5:11-31).

It does nevertheless seem that the uncleanness was of a sexual nature so even in the Old Testament the grounds of divorce were very narrow (if properly understood) and only applied to the man but not woman.

Divorce and remarriage were allowed for those who were put away under this section. For those who favour remarriage after divorce in the New Testament it is argued that divorce in these circumstances ended the marriage and was equivalent to death. So whatever the cause was it was other than fornication or uncovering in Leviticus. It is important to remember, before we look at Matthew 19 and the other New Testament passages, that Deuteronomy 24 does not allow a wife who has been put away and subsequently remarries, to return to her husband in the event that she is again put away. Deuteronomy 24:3-4:-

And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; (4) Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

This means that it could not be said that the act of divorce entirely erases the first marriage because a defilement against the first husband takes place when she remarries. We will return to this later.

Let us now consider what the Lord Jesus taught about divorce and remarriage. I am going to quote the whole of Matthew 19:1-9:-

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; (2) And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. (3) The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (4) And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, (5) And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (6) Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (7) They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? (8) He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (9) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

The Pharisees came to tempt the Lord Jesus about marriage and divorce because there was a school of thought that Moses, in Deuteronomy 24, permitted divorce for any reason. As John Murray wrote in his book "Divorce" at p10, "The school of Shamai regarded it as unchastity of behaviour, the school of Hillel as any indecency or anything displeasing to the husband. Some of the latter school deemed most frivolous reasons as sufficient." His footnote quotes from the Talmudical Tract "Gittin" (as translated by Leo Auerbach) as follows: "The House of Shamai says: A man must not divorce his wife unless he has found her unfaithful. As was said (Deuteronomy 24:1), (1) because he hath found some uncleanness in her. The house of Hillel

says: He may divorce her if she only spoiled a dish for him because it was said: (Deuteronomy 24:1), "If it come to pass that she found no favour in his eyes" (The *Babylonian Talmud in Selection*, New York 1944, p178).

This then was the background to the question that the Pharisees posed to the Lord Jesus in their attempt to trap him. It would appear that the Pharisees sought to trap the Lord by forcing him to take the side of either the school of Shamai or the school of Hillel and set the other against him. Alternatively they wanted him to break the Mosaic Law. Of course he was not taken in by any of these ploys. Instead he returned the teaching of marriage to the beginning. Matthew 19:4-6:-

(4) And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, (5) And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (6) Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

As we have already seen, the Lord was making it clear that the mystery of marriage is that God joins a man and woman together in marriage and the clear command to man is not to separate what God has joined together. The question we shall have to address shortly is whether indeed it is possible for man to separate what God has joined together? We have already established that the sexual union, while illustrating the one flesh union of man and wife, is not in itself the divine joining together. That is accomplished when the covenant of marriage is entered into. I will suggest that it is impossible for man to put asunder a bond that God has formed.

The question is then asked by the Pharisees, Matthew 19:7:- "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" If man was not to break what God had joined together, then obviously it stands to reason that it is contradictory to issue a bill of divorcement. The implication was that Moses was in fact commanding divorce itself. The

Lord's reply was that this was not the case at all, Matthew 19:8: "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." Moses was only suffering divorce because of the hard hearts of the people of Israel. It is also interesting to note that this was not God who suffered divorce, but Moses. However, as John Gill commented, " in which may be observed, that, though it was by direction that Moses, in his system of laws, allowed of divorces; yet not God, but he is said to do it, because it was a branch of the political and judicial laws, by which the people of the Jews were governed under Moses, and whilst the Mosaic economy continued, and did not concern other people, and other times." Thus although it was Moses who gave the dispensation it was under God's direction.

Note the difference between the Pharisees using the word "command" in verse 7 and the Lord Jesus using the word "suffered". Matthew Henry said of this distinction, "they called it a *command*, Christ calls it but a *permission*, a *toleration*. Carnal hearts will take an ell if but an inch be given them. The law of Moses, in this case, was a political law, which God gave, as the Governor of that people; and it was for reasons of state, that divorces were tolerated. The strictness of the marriage union being the result, not of a natural, but of a positive law, the wisdom of God dispensed with divorces in some cases, without any impeachment of his holiness."

Therefore it was not a command to divorce but an allowance, a tolerance for the hard hearts of the people of Israel. Some have thought that the requirement to give a bill of divorcement was a command to divorce but this is not right. As David Engelsma wrote in "Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and His Church":

Moses did not command Israelite men, "Divorce your wives," not even if there was uncleanness in them. But his command was this: If you are going to divorce your wife, you must give her a bill of divorce." The purpose of the requirement of giving a bill of divorce was the welfare of the woman who was put away. The woman in Israel was

completely subject to the man and entirely at his mercy. If Moses had not required that the husband give a bill of divorce to the woman whom he was determined to put away, the women in Israel would soon have become mere playthings and would have been regarded as little different from whores. The bill of divorce had to be written to her and given in "her hand" (v. 1); that is, it was for her benefit.

David Engelsma went on to point out that the KJV translation of this passage is misleading because it seems to imply that Moses was approving the divorce and remarriage of couples whereas his focus was on verse 4, that a wife who was divorced by the second husband must not go back to the first. In other words, rather than being a law legislating divorce it is in fact a law restricting the right to remarry. David Engelsma prefers the translation of versions such as the ESV which translates the passage as follows:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (ESV) *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, (2) and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, (3) and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, (4) then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*

This translation still makes clear that it is an implied requirement to give a bill of divorce but that the mandatory or compulsory element is that the wife, in the case of a second divorce from another husband does not return to the

first. It makes it clear that rather than mandating divorce and remarriage, Moses is simply not forbidding it as I have already mentioned but is in fact merely restricting the right to remarry.

Now Jesus makes clear that he was returning to the original purpose of marriage in verse 8 and 9:

(9) He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (9) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

He is saying that while Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of their hearts, it was not the case in the beginning in Genesis 2 and the Lord is making it clear that that standard is the correct standard.

He set out one ground of divorce that allows for remarriage which He stated in Matthew 19: 9:

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Similarly in Matthew 5:32 the Lord said:

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.

It has been suggested that the translation of the Greek in Matthew 19:9 is based on an erroneous text where εἰ (meaning if) has been wrongly added by Erasmus in his Greek New Testament. His "addition" renders the parenthesis: *"except for sexual immorality"* instead of *"not for sexual immorality"*. It has been suggested that the Lord was in fact excluding adultery from consideration at all, given that the Mosaic law

was in force and the person would not be subject to a bill of divorcement but instead to death; in other words the Lord was saying "whoever divorces his wife for any reason (and I am not talking about sexual immorality) causes her to commit adultery". Some have gone further to suggest that the correct translation is "not even for sexual immorality" but this would involve adding words to the Greek text that were never in any original manuscript.

It appears that there may be some legitimate disagreement in the Greek manuscripts about whether *ei* should be included or not. (I am not a manuscript scholar!) Plainly Erasmus considered it should and it would appear that he had access to a number of manuscripts in addition to the five he found at Basel in 1515. However on the available evidence it does seem as though there is some doubt as to the legitimacy of *ei* and in those circumstances we should not rely on it to establish the case for the exception based on the sexual immorality of the other spouse.

We are assisted in resolving the conundrum by Matthew 5:32 where the Greek word *parektos* is used instead of "*ei me*" in the exception clause. *Parektos* unequivocally means "except for" so we know that Matthew 5:32 is correctly translated from the original Greek. In Matthew 5:32 Christ was warning that if you put away your wife you become a guilty accessory to any subsequent remarriage she makes. However the exception means that if you put her away on account of her sexual immorality then, because this is a lawful ground of divorce, you do not share the guilt in any subsequent remarriage she makes. This is consistent with the exception clause, as interpreted by Erasmus, in Matthew 19:9.

The modern versions of the Bible which are based on Westcott and Hort's Greek text where the *ei* is excluded, all translate the phrase "*me epi porneia*" as "except for sexual immorality". In the context it is difficult to see that it can mean anything else. The Greek word "*me*" is always translated as "not" in the New Testament and so the obvious meaning of "not for sexual immorality" in the context of the verse as a whole is an exception, in the case of

the person who divorces his spouse for adultery, to the general rule excluding remarriage after divorce.

Some believe that the word "*porneia*" is limited to pre-marital sex as set out in Deuteronomy 22 but this is not correct for the following reasons:

1. On a point of such obscurity the Lord would have stipulated clearly that He was referring to Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 22. He would not allow a person to be so easily lulled into a false sense of security where the destiny of his soul was at stake (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9).
2. Under the strict application of the Mosaic law adultery, along with undisclosed pre-marital sex by the wife, always led to the end of a marriage because the guilty parties were executed (Deuteronomy 22:21-2). However David was not put to death for committing adultery with Bathsheba and by the time of the Roman occupation execution was only permitted with their authority (John 18:31). This may have been why Joseph did not seek the death penalty for Mary but instead sought to put her away quietly when he wrongly believed she had committed fornication while they were betrothed.
3. The word "*porneia*" has a much wider meaning than just pre-marital sex as the following New Testament uses of the word show:
 - a. In 1 Corinthians 5:1, the man in Corinth had committed "*porneia*" yet it was with a married woman (his father's wife);
 - b. In 1 Corinthians 10:8, 23,000 Israelites died for committing "*porneia*". It would be unsafe to assume that they were all unmarried.

- c. In 2 Corinthians 12:21 Paul said that he would be compelled to deal with many in the assembly because of their "*porneia*". It would be unsafe to conclude that the Corinthian sinners were all unmarried.
- d. In Jude 7 the people of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to "*porneia*" and going after strange flesh. We must surely conclude that "*porneia*" here included more than just sex between unmarried persons.
- e. In Acts 15:20 the Gentile Christians were told to abstain from the sin of "*porneia*". It would seem strange if this injunction did not apply equally to sexual sin by married as well as unmarried people.
- f. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Christians were commanded to abstain from "*porneia*". This command must have been addressed to the married as well as the unmarried. The word for harlot is derived from "*porneia*" – it is *pornē*. The act of harlotry can be committed by either a married or unmarried person.

4. Some claim that Matthew was writing to the Jews and therefore assumed a full knowledge of the Mosaic Law to support their interpretation of Matthew 19:9 as including only premarital sex but I believe this is not conclusive because it involves the interpretation of scripture by reference to uncertain outside sources.

5. The Lord was explaining adultery in the context of the original teaching in Genesis 2:24. This was not new teaching because prior to the Mosaic Law adultery was recognised as an evil to be punished by the judges (Job 31:9-11). Furthermore the Lord

Himself is said to have divorced Israel for her (spiritual adultery) (Jeremiah 3:8) which could not have been based on a spiritual application of Deuteronomy 24 because the Lord Jesus explained in Matthew 19:8 that this provision was present for the hardness of man's heart. Plainly the Lord would not have divorced Israel because of the hardness of His heart because He is Perfect and to suggest otherwise would be blasphemy. Therefore the Lord was basing this ground of divorce on an authority other than the Mosaic Law which suggests that it was a creation ordinance. If the act of divorce for adultery was not present then the Lord would not have used this language to describe Israel's condition and punishment.

We are therefore left to conclude that the Lord Jesus has introduced an exception to divorce in Matthew 19:9 on the grounds of adultery. Many have argued that this corresponds with a corresponding right to remarry for the innocent party which, according to others, also by necessity grants a right to remarry for the guilty party.

Matthew 5:31-32

In considering these points we should begin with Matthew 5:31-32 because here, the Lord sets out his hatred of divorce itself:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: (32) 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.

This verse comes within the section where the Lord showed that the extent of the Ten Commandments goes beyond merely the outward sin. As Andrew Cornes puts it in his book "Divorce and Remarriage" at p197-8, Jesus is rebutting an accusation that he has come to abolish the Law (17a); on the contrary, he upholds and fulfils the Law (17a-17b). He

insists not only that his followers must practise and teach the Law (19) but that they must go further in their practice than the scribes and the Pharisees (20).

Hence the Sixth Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill, includes the state of the heart. Therefore, anger is equated with murder because murder begins with anger. Matthew 5:21-22:-

(21) Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: (22) But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

In relation to the Third Commandment, Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain (Exodus 20:7), we find that this extends to taking oaths and not being true to a person's word. Matthew 5:33-37:-

"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: (34) But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: (35) Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. (36) Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. (37) But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

When it comes to the Seventh Commandment the Lord Jesus, said this in verse 27-28:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: (28) But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Therefore, the sin of adultery begins in the heart with a look at a woman with lust in one's heart. In verses 29-30 the Lord urges that the believer takes strong action to avoid the sin of lust by metaphorically plucking out the eye and cutting off the hand. The Lord then goes on to address divorce, also equating that with adultery as we have just seen.

Thus the Lord is showing that divorcing a woman is itself a sin because it causes a woman to commit adultery by leaving her vulnerable to remarriage. We see the first example of this in Genesis 20 where Abraham, in effect, put his wife, Sarah away, describing her as her sister, rather than also his wife. Abimelech, King of Gerar, then took Sarah to be his wife, but was prevented from committing adultery by a dream in which the Lord revealed to him that Sarah was Abraham's wife – Genesis 20:3:-

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

Had the King taken Sarah to be his wife, the Lord in Matthew 5:31 is saying that the fault would have lain primarily with Abraham for putting Sarah away in the first place. It is worth pointing out that not every single woman remarried. Luke 2:36 tells us about Anna, a prophetess, who was at the time of the Lord's birth "a great age" and had only lived with her husband for seven years from her virginity.

So we see that in this passage it is not the evil of remarriage that the Lord is specifically pointing to but the evil of putting away because it exposes the other party to the temptation of committing adultery. However this is not the only reason that divorce itself is a sin. This is plain from Matthew 19:4-6:-

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, (5) And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (6) Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What

therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Here we see that the Lord Jesus is forbidding divorce because man is trying to separate what God has joined together. And so Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:10:- "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband".

Commenting on all of verses 3-9, Pierre Bonnard wrote in "Levangile selon S. Matthieu"² (translated by Andrew Cornes at p212 of "Divorce and Remarriage":-

Our conclusion is the following: the fundamental affirmation of the pericope is found incontestably in 6b (*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*), which excludes every sort of repudiation, separation or divorce; ... divorce, even without remarriage, because it legalises a notorious infidelity; separation of body because it artificially maintains at the legal level a marriage bond deprived of its indispensable expression: physical communion. There really is only one thing to say which corresponds to all the biblical teaching: man must not separate what God has united! (6b).

This is also the teaching of the Old Testament where we read in Malachi 2:15-16:-

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. (16) For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

So we see that divorcing, or putting away is forbidden for two reasons. The most important reason is that divorce is a sin in itself which sadly is something that many Christians

overlook these days. Secondly divorce or putting away is forbidden because it leaves the divorced person vulnerable to commit adultery.

However Matthew 5:31, as we have seen, allows divorce where the wife has committed adultery. However this exception does not say anything about whether the innocent party is free to remarry. In fact, verse 32 would suggest that there is no freedom to remarry because even if the wife is put away, not for her adultery, but to enable her husband to marry again, and she goes ahead and remarries, that still means that the person who marries her commits adultery which shows that the original marriage bond must still be intact. This prohibition is repeated in Matthew 19:9 in the KJV.

Exception Clause in Matthew 19:9

This then brings us to consider the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 with the background of the Lord's teaching that divorce is itself forbidden and is therefore sinful. Indeed it is a breach of the Seventh Commandment according to Matthew 5:31-32.

Matthew 19:9 says:

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.

Many have taken this verse to allow divorce and remarriage because on the face of it, this is what the verse means when taken at face value. However the first point to note is that the exception clause comes after putting away and before marrying another and so the most that can be said for this verse is that implicitly it is legitimising remarriage for the innocent party.

One of the arguments in favour of regarding this verse as allowing remarriage is the use of the word divorce which proponents of remarriage argue, breaks the marriage bond and allows at least the innocent party to marry again. Don Carson wrote in his commentary on Matthew (published in volume 8 of the Expositor's Bible

² Commentaire du NT. Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963

Commentary), "It is unwarranted to understand the same verb a few verses later in some other way, unless there is some compelling contextual reason for the change"

It is certainly true that in verses 3, 7 and 8 the word divorce (*apolyo*) is used in the full sense of the meaning of the word encompassing remarriage:

1. Matthew 19:3:- *The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*
2. Matthew 19:7:- *They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*
3. Matthew 19:8:- *"He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."*

However in verse 9 it plainly is not in relation to those who divorce for a reason other than adultery:

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.

A person who divorces his wife other than for adultery (*apolyo*) cannot remarry. If Don Carson's argument is right then the Lord Jesus is changing the meaning of the word "divorce" or "put away" within the same verse so I suggest that this is not a well made argument for advocating the right to remarry for the innocent party.

The other main argument concerns the syntax or make-up of the verse in Matthew 19:9. In other words does the exception clause govern just divorce or divorce and remarriage? John Murray acknowledges that the former construction is possible. He says at page 39 of his book "Divorce" (P&R Publishing), "It must be allowed that an exceptive clause is sometimes

used in Greek to intimate an exception to something more general than that which has actually been mentioned." He cites first Matthew 12:4:-

*How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only (*ei un*) for the priests?*

Secondly Romans 14:14:-

*I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but (*ei un*) to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

John Murray goes on to write:- "In such a case the exception stated here (except for the cause of fornication) would not be an exception to the principle that whosoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery but simply an exception to the principle that a man may not put away his wife. In such a case he concedes that "the real intent of the whole sentence would be, "But I say to you that whoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery – only, a man may put away his wife for the cause of fornication".

John Murray went on that the governing thought of the sentence is "commits adultery" and for that to make sense remarriage is essential because if we omit remarriage claiming it is merely an aside then we have a sentence that makes no sense: "whoever puts his wife away except for fornication commits adultery." As Andrew Cornes points out the weakness of this argument is that it relies on the exception being to the ruling thought (committing adultery). It may well be, but it does not have to be. As John Murray has already conceded above the exception could be merely to the phrase that precedes it namely, "anyone who divorces his wife".

The point of the sentence is that remarriage after divorce, at least in some circumstances, is adulterous. The ruling thought is not that marriage is sometimes permitted or even that divorce is sometimes permitted because this is an aside to the main point.

Andrew Cornes went on to consider the point of the sentence in its context and concluded that it was intended to add weight to the Lord Jesus' reply to the question he was asked by the Pharisees in verse 3 (*Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*). The Lord's answer was that it was not right to divorce for every cause "because God the Creator, right from the beginning of creation, made the marriage union (4-6a) which not only should not be broken (6b-8) but cannot be broken, because to remarry after divorce is adultery (9). The whole point of verse 9 in its context is to reinforce the command not to divorce.

However, without reducing the weight of his answer the Lord Jesus added an exception to the sin of divorce, being when the wife was guilty of adultery (v9).

Andrew Cornes next considered where the exception should be placed within the passage. John Murray claimed the position it is found in (after 'Whosoever shall put away his wife') is the 'natural position' if the Lord Jesus was wanting to make an exception to the whole sentence (i.e. if Jesus wanted to say: it is not committing adultery to remarry after divorcing your wife in the case of adultery). Murray questioned: 'Where else could the exceptive clause be put?' if it is to apply to the entire sentence (p. 41). The truth is that placing the exception in two other places would make it virtually impossible for the exception to apply to anything other than divorce and remarriage. First, Matthew could have written: 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, and shall marry another, except it be for fornication, committeth adultery', Secondly, he could have written "Whosoever putting away his wife, and shall marry another, except *it be* for fornication committeth adultery". At page 39, John Murray admitted that the interpretation that makes the exception only apply to divorce and not remarriage, by writing, "... does in itself make good sense and would solve a great many difficulties in ... the accounts given in the three Synoptic Gospels".

Heth and Wenham in their book, "Jesus and Divorce" at p120, concluded that when analysed into its constituent parts Matthew 19:9 was a

fitting answer to the Pharisees' question, whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause? Jesus' reply could be summarised as, "It is always wrong to divorce what God had joined together: what is more, divorce, except for marital unfaithfulness, is tantamount to committing adultery; and remarriage after divorce is always so".

We must also consider the second part of Matthew 19:9 which says, "and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." What is significant about this verse (which is also found in Matthew 5:32) is that it applies to the innocent wife who has been put away by her husband to enable him to remarry. If the exception clause allowed remarriage then her remarriage would not be adultery and yet the Lord Jesus plainly states that it is.

This is what Augustine said about interpreting the first part of Matthew 19:9 as allowing the husband to divorce and remarry on the grounds of his wife's adultery in the light of the second part of Matthew 19:9:-

If it be understood in the sense that he who putteth away for fornication, and then marrieth, doth not commit adultery,' it (our Lord's statement) apparently makes a difference in this case between the rule for the husband and that for the wife, seeing that the wife departing from the husband, though it be for fornication, and marrying another, commits adultery, while the husband, if for the same cause he dismiss the wife, and remarry, doth not so. But if the rule is the same for both, in both it is adultery to unite one's self to another, even when the separation was for uncleanness.³

Let me quote from David Engelsma, "Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and his Church" where he wrote (Kindle 1823-1833):

This settles the matter conclusively. Notice that there are three parties here, or really four parties; but that second wife is not taken into consideration. There is the first husband that puts away his wife. She didn't commit adultery. She

³ S. Augustine, De Conjugiis Adulterinis, lib. i. c. 8.

was entirely innocent. She never violated the marriage bond by committing adultery. Nevertheless, he put away his wife. Secondly, he remarries, marries another woman. Now the second party enters in—another man. Notice: the man put away his wife and married another woman. May that first woman now enter into a marriage relationship with another man? On the contrary, for the Lord says: "And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." That second party therefore, may not marry the innocent woman. To marry her is also adultery. And why is that so? Why is this marrying with the innocent woman called adultery? Simply because she is still married to the first man, although he had already married another woman. This, therefore, is the plain truth of Scripture.

Paul's Interpretation of the Exception Clause

An important consideration as to whether this is a correct interpretation of Matthew 19:9 (that the exception applies only to divorce and not remarriage) is provided by 1 Corinthians 7:10 which states:

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

I suggest that this is Paul's inspired commentary on the exception clause. Note that Paul is referring to what the Lord has previously taught (And unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord). He goes on to tell the wife not to depart from the husband but if she does depart then she should remain unmarried and be reconciled to her husband. He also includes the husband by saying "and let not the husband put away his wife". The only instance in which the Lord allows a wife or husband to depart from their spouse is in the case of adultery and so this verse must be referring to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 in which case the

innocent party must remain single to enable reconciliation to take place. Let me quote what Andrew Cornes wrote on page 244 of *Divorce and Remarriage*:-

This is what Paul is doing: relaying Christ's teaching about the right marital state after the one exception Christ allowed: divorce for adultery. The only difference is that Christ put it negatively (to remarry is to commit adultery) whereas Paul puts Christ's teaching positively (after divorce, you must remain single or be reconciled). As we have seen, the alternative view - that Paul was saying: 'If (disobeying Christ's teaching) you divorce your partner for a reason Christ prohibits, then ...' - is impossible.

In 393 AD, Jerome wrote books to answer a heretic called Jovinianus (who died in 403AD). In Book I, Jovinianus had written, that a virgin was no better as such than a wife in the sight of God. This provoked Jerome to write a treatise on marriage called, *Contra Jovinianus*. Commenting on Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:10, he wrote : "For he teaches that the wife, in accordance with the decision of the Lord, is not to be put away except for the cause of fornication; and that she who is put away ought either to abstain from marrying another during the lifetime of their husband, or indeed be reconciled to her husband ."⁴

Augustine of Hippo's commentary on the same verse (contained in the *Good of Marriage*, 27:18) is similar:

The Apostle says [in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11] that according to the command of the Lord a wife is not to depart from her husband, but, if she departs, she ought to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. She surely ought not to withdraw and remain unmarried except in the case of an adulterous husband, lest, by withdrawing from him who is not an adulterer, she causes him to commit adultery...But I do not see how a man can have freedom to marry another if he

⁴ Holy Matrimony, A Treatise of the Divine Laws of Marriage by Daniel Watkins

leaves an adulteress, since a woman does not have freedom to marry another if she leaves an adulterer.⁵

Elsewhere in his letter to Pollonius, published in "Adulterous Marriages", he writes:

For when it is written: 'I command her not to depart, and if she departs, that she is to remain unmarried,' Heaven forbid that a woman who departs and remains unmarried be thought to disregard this precept. Therefore, if we are not to understand that the Apostle is speaking of the woman for whom it is lawful to depart – she may not lawfully separate, however, except from an unfaithful husband – in what way is she commanded to remain unwed if she separates? Who is there who would say: if a woman leaves a man who is not a fornicator, she is to remain unmarried, since in no way may she lawfully separate from other than a fornicator?

A further reason for taking this interpretation of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is that it harmonises with the Lord's teaching in Mark 10 and Luke 16.

Mark 10:1-12

Let us first consider the passage in Mark 10:-

(1) And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. (2) And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. (3) And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? (4) And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. (5) And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. (6) But from the beginning of the creation God

made them male and female. (7) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; (8) And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. (9) What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (10) And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. (11) And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. (12) And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

What is interesting is that the Lord's teaching about the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is addressed to the Pharisees whereas the Lord's teaching about divorce and remarriage in Mark comes when just the disciples are present in the house (verse 10). In other words, Mark is recording a different conversation to Matthew about the same subject. It is plain that the Lord Jesus did not mention the exception clause when speaking privately to the disciples. Those contending that the exception clause gives a licence to remarry would say that the exception is assumed in Mark 10, but that is speculation. The better issue to try and resolve is whether the two verses can be harmonised without assuming they contain more than they do. In Mark 10:11-12 the Lord states that "(11) Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. (12) And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." Here the Lord makes plain that the same rule applies to both husband and wife, namely that if either put away their spouse and marry again they commit adultery. There is no exception. It is also clear that remarriage leads to committing adultery **against her**. This rules out polygamy. It also means that the marriage bond remains intact.

David Engelsma made the point that with the Pharisees the Lord was concentrating on the propriety of divorce whereas when he was

⁵ Engelsma, David J.. Marriage: the Mystery of Christ and the Church. Reformed Free Publishing Association. Kindle wrote Edition at location 2313.

speaking to the disciples on their own, his focus was on remarriage after divorce.⁶ His position on remarriage is that remarriage is forbidden, without any qualification. Note that Mark does not include the statement about the exception clause which implies that it was stated (as recorded by Matthew) but that Mark chose not to include it and focussed instead on what Jesus told the disciples privately afterwards.

Returning to Matthew 19, what is significant is the remark that the Lord's disciples make in Matthew 19:10 when one assumes they are on their own with the Lord, presumably in the same house that Mark refers to: "If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry." This question could either be referring to what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 19:9 or what the Lord Jesus said in Mark 10, verses 10-12. Interpreting the exclusion clause as we have (only applying to divorce and not remarriage) it does not matter which the disciples are referring to.

Certainly, it is difficult to understand why the disciples would make that remark if they understood the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 to grant a right to divorce and remarry but it would be far more understandable if the exception clause only gave a right to divorce the guilty party to adultery.

Chrysostom, commenting on this verse, had no thoughts of remarriage in mind when he wrote: "For it did seem an intolerable burden to retain a wife full of all mischief, and to endure an unruly wild beast shut up constantly with you in the house."⁷

Furthermore the Lord's reply to the disciples questions in Matthew 9:11 to 12 are consistent with his prohibition of remarriage for either party: Matthew 19:11-12:- "But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. (12) For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves

eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*."

The Lord seems to be acknowledging the difficulty of accepting the permanence of marriage which may lead to a person living one's life on one's own in circumstances when you are unable to remarry because they have been made eunuchs of men (v12) such as the person whose wife has committed adultery against him in the absence of any desire for reconciliation. His answer in v12 is "all *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given." This is certainly true concerning the permanence of marriage, even within the church where today very few of the Lord's people regard the permanence of the marriage bond.

The failure of the Lord to add an exception clause in Mark is surely significant. Some would answer that it is not necessary because of the exception clause in Matthew 5 and 19. But that is the problem. The exception clause in Matthew 5:32, as we have already noticed, does not grant a right to remarry, merely to divorce for the cause of adultery. We have also seen that the exception in Matthew 19:9 could be interpreted either as a permission only to divorce or a permission to both divorce and remarry. In order to decide which, we must look for additional support for either proposition. We do not receive support for the proposition that the exclusion clause grants a permission to divorce and remarry from Mark 10 at all. Rather it is the reverse.

Similarly, in Luke 16:18, the Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from *her* husband committeth adultery." Here the Lord Jesus makes it plain that divorce and remarriage is adultery and that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery, notwithstanding that she has been wrongly put away by her husband who has gone on to remarry.

⁶ Engelsma, David J.. Marriage: the Mystery of Christ and the Church . Reformed Free Publishing Association. Kindle Edition, Location 1707.

⁷ Quoted in Holy Matrimony, A treatise on the Divine Laws of Marriage on page 313

Bringing these passages together Augustine wrote in *Adulterous marriages*:

Therefore, who are we to say that there is one who commits adultery in taking another woman after he puts away his wife, and that there is another who, in doing this, does not commit adultery, when the Gospel says that everyone who performs such an act commits adultery? Furthermore, if everyone who does this, namely, marries another woman after the dismissal of his wife, commits adultery, there are undoubtedly included both the one who puts away his wife without the cause of immorality and the one who puts away his wife for this reason. For the one passage reads: 'Whoever puts away his wife,' and the other: 'everyone who puts away his wife.'

It is striking that the early church fathers almost without exception understood the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 to relate only to divorce. This is what Andrew Cornes wrote in his excellent treatment on the subject:-

The Fathers are almost unanimous in understanding Christ's exception in the same way. They often write about divorce and remarriage, and concentrate more on the issue of remarriage than that of divorce. When they speak of divorce, they frequently mention the Matthean exception. When, however, they speak of remarriage, they never mention any exception (Ambrosiaster is the only clear exception up to the end of the fifth century). Their normal practice is simply to prohibit remarriage absolutely (as in Mark and Luke) but significantly they often do this in a context of quoting Jesus' divorce sayings in their Matthean form or in the course of a commentary on Matthew's gospel. Where they do raise the specific question of whether remarriage may be legitimate in the case of divorce for adultery, they prohibit it.⁸

Professor Wenham wrote this perceptive comment about the modern reinterpretation of Matthew 19:9 which has led to the change in position of much of the Post-Reformation Church.

Since no modern New Testament scholar can ever hope to approach the Greek fathers' grasp of their mother tongue and its nuances, dissenters will have to have extremely powerful arguments to show that the understanding of the Greek fathers is not the natural understanding of the texts. (Wenham, *Remarriage After Divorce: Three Views*; p23).

Desertion - 1 Corinthians 7

There are some who maintain that there is an additional ground of divorce and remarriage taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:15 where an unbelieving spouse deserts a believer. The verse states:

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

Having rejected that there is a ground for remarriage following divorce for adultery, it is hard to see how there could be a ground for remarriage based on desertion given the Lord Jesus's absolute prohibition on divorce.

It is clear, though that desertion by an unbeliever is a ground for legal separation but it does not carry with it the right to remarry. Quite apart from the inconsistency that this would cause to the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels if it did, there is a further reason within the Corinthian passage itself.

The Greek word used for "under bondage" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 ("doulōō" meaning enslaved or becoming a servant) is a different Greek word to the word used for the marriage bond (deō meaning "bind, be in bonds, knit, tie" – see 1st Corinthians 7:27, 39 and Romans 7:2). Unlike "porneia" (fornication) and moichaō (adultery) which are used interchangeably, the words

⁸ Cornes, Andrew. *Divorce and Remarriage* (p. 311). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

doolō and deō are not. "Doolō" is always used in the context of slavery or servanthood while "deō" always refers to binding (as a rope – see for example Matthew 12:29). Therefore where Paul states that the person in 1 Corinthians 7:15 "is not bound" where the unbelieving spouse deserts it must be assumed that he means that the Christian is released from the obligation of seeking reconciliation rather than being released from the tie of marriage which can only be broken by the death of the other spouse.

Contrary to the teaching in many churches today, a person, who is divorced in such circumstances by an unbelieving spouse, who has left the believer on account of their Christian faith, should not seek remarriage based on these verses, because the marriage bond is not broken.

It is unfortunate that churches today go further than Paul and allow Christian couples to divorce where a professing spouse leaves the marriage which goes beyond what Paul taught. Such churches also grant a right to remarry in such circumstances which plainly cannot be right given the conclusions already reached in this paper.

Does Repentance allow a person to remain in a previously adulterous relationship?

I would like now to consider some of the ramifications of the Bible's teaching about divorce and remarriage. An issue that divides many in the church is whether a biblically unlawful marriage that was entered into by a couple prior to conversion of either can survive the conversion of one or other of the parties to the marriage.

As we have seen, marriage is an institution that exists irrespective of whether the parties are Christians. If this was not the case, Paul's teaching to those married to unbelievers in 1 Corinthians 7 would be meaningless because. The qualifications for a lawful marriage are entirely objective. Where those criteria are not met then it must follow that the marriage itself is not valid.

A wedding ceremony is of no value if the marriage is not valid in heaven. The Book of Common Prayer supports this interpretation in the following extract which is read out by the minister conducting a marriage ceremony in an Anglican service:

I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, **that so many as are coupled together otherwise that God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful** [my emphasis].

Similarly, RA Torrey in his book "How to pray" said this about biblically unlawful marriages:

Look at the legalised adultery that we call divorce. Men marry one wife after another, and are still admitted into good society; and women do likewise. There are thousands of supposedly respectable men in America living with other men's wives, and thousands of supposedly respectable women living with other women's husbands.

We have seen that in both Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 Christ states that whoever marries a divorced woman (that is the woman put away by her husband) commits adultery. The inference is that the marriage is biblically unlawful and the couple has not been joined together by God.

John the Baptist remonstrated with Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother Philip's wife, Herodias (Matthew 14:4). There were two reasons for this. The first is that it was adultery since his brother was still living. Secondly it was incestuous (Leviticus 18:16). If his brother, Philip, had not been living then it would not have been adulterous (in Old Testament terms) or incestuous (see Deuteronomy 25:6-7).

What Herod had done was by any standard unlawful and by stealing another man's wife he was living in a state of adultery. We know that Herod did not acknowledge his sin and that his wife, Herodias, was so incensed by John's imputation against her that she resolved and succeeded in having him put to death.

Since Herod did not repent at what he had done we do not know what the outcome would have been if he had heeded John the Baptist's pronouncement of their sin. In addition the issue is complicated by the incestuous nature of the remarriage which on its own is likely to have required separation.

The Bible says that the adulterer and the sexually immoral will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven although the effect of repentance on a new convert is to cleanse, sanctify and justify the repentant sinner (1 Corinthians 6:11) who becomes a new creation where all things are new (2 Corinthians 5:17). A Christian who has fallen into sin will likewise be forgiven upon repentance (2 Corinthians 2:7 and 1 John 1:9-2:2).

As an aside I think we have to treat the new Christian and repentant backslider in the same way. In both cases repentance is a necessary requirement of being forgiven.

Christ's teaching on marriage and divorce would have rendered any remarriage based on an application of Deuteronomy 24, which allowed divorce on lesser grounds than adultery, unlawful in Israel. Any polygamous marriage was also rendered unlawful where once they were accepted in the Old Testament as we have seen in 2 Samuel 12:8 (2 Samuel 12:8:- "And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things").

We are not told whether these marriages survived or resulted in separation. In fact, there is no example in the New Testament of what

happened when people in unlawful marriages came to Christ.

Some maintain that this explains why Paul stipulated that a person in leadership must be the husband of one wife in Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:2 for the very reason that there were some in the church either in marriages no longer deemed lawful or in polygamous marriages and there is some force in this argument although, as we have already seen, these passages also contain qualifications for leadership that should be the marks of every Christian (not being arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard or greedy). In 1 Timothy 5:9 Paul teaches that widows should only be taken into the care of the church if they had been the wife of one man. It could not be inferred from this verse that Paul was approving polyandry since polyandry was adultery under the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 22:22:- "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, *both* the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel").

It is difficult to see how polygamy or polyandry can survive conversion since marriage is unequivocally between one man and one woman and so polygamous/polyandrous households will have to be split up but plainly in a way that makes provision for the needs of those put away. It would be calamitous to cause, by insisting on separation, a situation where the supernumerary wives were left penniless and destitute.

Given that polyandry is never condoned in the Old Testament I think we would have to conclude that such "marriages" have never survived a person's conversion or repentance (if entered into when backslidden).

Whether these verses mean that second marriages (that were once accepted in the Old Testament but are now rendered unlawful by Christ's teaching), will always lead to separation, is a difficult question. While Paul never stipulates a requirement that every believer must always have been the husband of one wife, he does state that every elder should be (Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:2). This plainly

means that leaders must not have more than one current or "former" wife still living.

In 1 Corinthians 7:20 Paul writes: "*Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called*". It has been suggested that Paul was enjoining new Christians to remain within a marriage even if it was biblically unlawful. However, Paul was not suggesting that new Christians should remain in sinful lifestyles but rather they should remain within the lawful circumstances (whether as slaves or free) in which they found themselves, even though those situations may have been most uncomfortable (such as those in slavery). Separation from formerly sinful lifestyles is a requirement of the believer (1 Corinthians 6:11:- And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God).

The new Christian, while having a new beginning in Christ, nevertheless remains with his worldly responsibilities which may well include a wife he has unlawfully married and children that have resulted.

The requirement to do works consistent with repentance was not confined to John the Baptist but was repeated by the Apostle Paul in Acts 26:20 in his speech to King Agrippa. In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul described the nature of the repentance of the church to the man who had an affair with his step-mother (referred to in 1 Corinthians 5). This is how he described it in verse 11: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.". This speaks of a willingness to take action to put away the sexual immorality from among them.

The conclusion of the matter must be that anyone who has entered into a previously unlawful marriage must be willing to do whatever is necessary to put things right given that the only lawful remarriage between two

divorces is after both former spouses have died (Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Singleness for the sake of Christ

However uncomfortable the idea (and it plainly is), there is biblical precedent in Ezra 10 for families to break up where unlawful marriages under Moses' Law had been entered into during the Babylonian captivity. In Ezra's day it was because the people had entered marriages with Gentiles. Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 that the New Testament equivalent of being married to an unbeliever is not grounds for the believer to separate, as it was in Ezra's day, so long as the unbeliever is willing to live with the believer. Having said that we must concede that this principle of separation was not universally applied in the Old Testament because Ruth (a Moabite) married a Jew and then married Boaz and was in the line of the Messiah. Similarly, Esther is held up as a paragon of virtue despite entering into a marriage with a Gentile king while the people of Israel were in captivity.

Furthermore, Ezra required that not only the wives but also the children be put away in order to preserve the Jewish race. Putting away children that have become the responsibility of a parent could never be a New Testament response to true conversion so this passage is only of limited assistance to us. However, we should remember that the parents of those children would have loved their children as much as we would love ours. If they were prepared even to go to those lengths to obey the Lord, can we say, that separation from an unbiblical marriage is too much for us?

We do need to remember that Christ warned us that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 5:20). While of course it is the righteousness of Christ that we must have imputed to us for salvation, nevertheless, must not our zeal for doing what is right in God's eyes, as a result, exceed that of the Pharisees?

This whole area is extremely difficult. While we do not want to err on the side of legalism, with unnecessary heartbreak and disruption to family life, is there not also a danger, that even as

Bible loving Christians, we can offer people a cheaper road to heaven which is of course no way to heaven at all?

Interestingly we see this illustrated in the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16 – the unjust steward offering to cut people's debt which was owed to his master without his master's authority; we need to be very careful ourselves. Leaders of God's flock have a very narrow line to tread between being too strict on the one hand and advocating licentiousness on the other. Psalm 50:16-18 is sobering because it warns against those who teach God's law but also consort with adulterers:-

(16) But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or *that* thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? (17) Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. (18) When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.

This is precisely the danger we run if we take too liberal a view on unbiblical marriages as Christian leaders.

Reunion with Original Spouse

Some suggest that reunion with a former spouse, to whom a person was lawfully married, is never possible because, according to the teaching of Deuteronomy 24:4, it is an abomination for someone who has remarried to return to their former spouse because the land has become greatly polluted. However the Lord Jesus expressly set aside the preceding three verses, which provide the context for verse 4, making it clear that adultery, and not uncleanness in the wife, is the only ground for divorce.

Some take the view that the Lord did not set aside Deuteronomy 24:1-3 because it contradicts Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17 which state that not one jot or tittle of the law would pass away. However, the Lord was not talking about the Mosaic Law as a whole, since the civil, ceremonial and food laws passed away. Rather He was speaking of the moral law which is summed up in the Ten Commandments (see Mark 10:19, Romans 13:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-

10). In fact, quite contrary to setting aside the moral law on marriage, divorce and adultery, the Lord re-established it by removing the Mosaic concession for the hardness of hearts of the Israelites set out in Deuteronomy 24 and returning it to its original pre-fall state. This is made plain in Luke 16:17 (And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail), because in the very next verse the Lord Jesus goes on to say that a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and whoever marries the divorced woman commits adultery which runs contrary to Deuteronomy 24:1-3 and proves that this was not part of the law he was referring to in the previous verse).

Even in the Old Testament this requirement, not to return to a former husband, was not always followed. David required his first wife, Michal, to be returned to him even though she was by then bigamously married to Phaltiel who was greatly grieved by her departure (2 Samuel 3:15). Whatever the reasons for the bigamous marriage this is an example of a godly man taking back the wife that was by rights his. It is significant that he received no censure from Nathan the prophet for this act (unlike Nathan's denouncement of his adultery with Bathsheba). Hosea was required to take back his adulterous wife as a picture of the Lord taking back adulterous Israel.

Indeed we find this picture of the Lord divorcing and seeking to take back adulterous Israel not only in Hosea but also in Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16, and Isaiah 62:1-5 (having divorced her in Isaiah 50:1). In none of these cases does the Lord seek to marry any but his original spouse, Israel.

In the New Testament an act of adultery does not automatically lead to divorce as it is subject to the discretion of the innocent party who may forgive and accept back the erring spouse (Matthew 19:9). An act of adultery cannot therefore be a bar to resuming the original marriage as divorce and remarriage was under the Mosaic concession. Since a biblically unlawful marriage is not recognised as a marriage by the Jesus, we must therefore conclude that a return to the original marriage after adultery is not seen as an abomination by

the Lord as it was in the Old Testament and therefore that Deuteronomy 24:4 would appear to have no present-day application.

We must remember that the return of the erring spouse as a fruit of repentance would occur where the person's sin of adultery has been washed by the blood of the Lamb. The person is polluted no longer and so free to return. Using Deuteronomy 24:4 as a reason for not leaving a biblically unlawful remarriage illustrates the danger of applying an Old Testament provision without seeing it through New Testament eyes. That is not to say there may not be other reasons but this is not one of them.

The Christian life is not easy. It is not for nothing that Paul wrote that "through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

In Matthew 19:29, the Lord Jesus spoke about what sacrifices may have to be made when he said: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Summary of Principles

Bringing together the various strands that emerge from a consideration of the fallout of divorce we can conclude with the following principles:

1. The grounds for divorce tolerated by the exception in Deuteronomy 24 were limited to sexual uncleanness and that toleration for the hardness of men's hearts was set aside by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 19:8-9) and only applied to men putting away their wives and not vice-versa;
2. The New Testament makes it clear that marriage is only ended by death (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:29);
3. The Greek construction to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 can legitimately apply only to divorce (ie all divorce except for sexual immorality is unlawful) and not remarriage so to decide which

construction is correct the other passages in the New Testament must be consulted;

4. All the other Gospel passages on divorce support the exception clause applying to divorce rather than remarriage.
5. The Early Church, for whom NT Greek was their mother tongue, understood the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 to apply only to the legitimacy of divorce but not to remarriage. It is difficult to accept that this generation knows their Greek better.
6. The Holy Spirit's commentary on Matthew 19:9 is contained in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11:- and supports the "no remarriage" interpretation:- And unto the married I command, *yet* not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband: (11) But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.
- 12.1 Corinthians 7:15 does not grant a right of remarriage to a party divorced based on the desertion of an unbelieving spouse because (1) it would contradict Christ's clear teaching on the matter in the Gospels and (2) the Greek word used in v15 for bondage (δουλόω /doulōō) is not the same as the Greek word for marriage bond (δέω/deō);
13. The Lord Jesus appears to have appreciated that an unfaithful spouse may render a person an eunuch (Matthew 19:12:- and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men);
14. In the Old Testament the picture is used of Israel being divorced by the Lord for her adultery. The Lord never seeks to remarry anyone else but seeks to take back adulterous Israel (see Hosea 2:7, Jeremiah 3:1-14, Ezekiel 16 and Isaiah 50:1,54:1-10 and 61:1-5);
15. People in biblically unlawful marriages should not be admitted into the

fellowship of the church unless clear repentance is demonstrated;

16. A Christian must not enter a biblically unlawful union but if they do they must be put out of fellowship until repentance and (where necessary separation) has taken place;
17. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the safest course to take for a person in a biblically unlawful marriage is separation, at least from the marriage bed;
18. Reunion with one's original spouse is always the preferred option where this is possible (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Conclusion

To conclude, marriage is a divinely ordained institution; not only is it the foundation of a healthy society but more importantly it is the reflection of Christ's relationship with His Church. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and forbids adultery (Exodus 20:14). As we have seen, the writer to the Hebrews pithily summed up its status when he wrote in chapter 13:4:

Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

We tamper with that truth at our peril. May this article serve to increase our confidence in the biblical authority we have been given to stand up for this ancient and honourable institution.

Testimony of Dawn Tillett

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Before I became a Christian I was in a ten year relationship with a man who didn't make me happy at all. I used to go to fortune tellers and tarot card reading. I was hoping to see if my life was going to get better. But it was the devil's lies they were telling me that my boyfriend was not a bad bloke and that I was meant to be with him and that the spirits were doing all they could to keep us together.

I did try leaving him but he would come after me. Then I would have these thoughts in my mind that I'm meant to be with him. I was even offered a flat from a housing trust where my mate lived. I got it all ready. My boyfriend was going away with his friends, so I thought great I'll leave when he goes. That week I discovered I was pregnant. I was still so depressed, I thought I can't live here for 9 months till this baby comes so I just left. I lived on my own for the whole of my pregnancy. Once my daughter was born, I decided to give it another try. I was given a two-bedroom flat so he moved in with me. The main problem with him was that he didn't like to work. He got the odd job but never stayed long. I was getting pretty low again and didn't want to be with him feeling trapped.

I remember watching "Cannon and Ball" on the TV. They were saying what God had done for them. I was wishing that God would come into my life.

My aunt Pat, who was a Christian, started to come and visit me, and we used to do baking together and talk. She started to read the Bible to me and we were going through a book named "Ultimate Questions" by John Blanchard. One day she forgot the book and I started to read it for myself. I realised that Jesus had died on the cross for my sin so I cried out to God to save me and to forgive me of my sin even though I never knew much about Jesus then.

This was just the beginning, OK. I just felt the love of God.

After I started to read the Bible, I was reading the gospels and accepted Jesus as my saviour, the one who died upon the cross for my sin. then I went to the Church of England.

I felt like God had come into my life. He gave me so much peace and joy, it was amazing. I then started to read the Bible. God was showing me what was in my heart. I then started to go to a Church of England church. I decided to get my daughter Christened because that is what they did there. At her Christening, I had to read out that I would bring my daughter up in the ways of God and to repent of my sins. That night God convicted me of my sin. I had to repent. I could no longer have a relationship with my boyfriend. I did ask him to leave but he

didn't want to. He kept saying God wouldn't want us to break up. What about our daughter? Eventually, I decided to marry him to get out of my sin. I was told by my aunt that you should not marry an unbeliever, but I didn't know enough about the Bible. My sister and aunt both went to Grace Baptise church.

Their Pastor phoned me for a chat. He was asking me if my boyfriend was marriageable and was he a good father? I wasn't too sure. The night before I got married I was reading the Bible and God said, what has light to do with darkness? But I didn't take heed. I still married my boyfriend. That night God showed me I did wrong. It was a awful. It was like a darkness had come over me. I was so upset. Then my sister's Pastor called me again to see how I was. I just busted into tears saying that God had shown me I had done wrong and I had sinned against him. I then started to go to Grace Baptist church in Gurney Road, Stratford, where I knew I was going to be taught the Word of God and to be supported. My husband began to play me up. It was a very bad experience and there was nothing I could do about it . I was being very humbled crying out to God then my husband decided to leave me. I dropped him to his mum's house. Then the next day he wanted to come back but I didn't want that. I gave it a few months. I ask my Pastor if I took my husband back would God move him again from my house, and he said yes. So, I took him back but my husband just didn't like the new me. He told me I had changed radically. So, he left after a few months again. Then he wanted to come back but this time I never took him back. Eventually I divorced him when he started seeing another woman. I felt that God broke me from the bond of believing the Devil's lies, what the fortune tellers were telling me. No, I wasn't meant to be with that man.

Once I started at Grace Baptist Church and through the trial I had been through with my husband, I was brought closer to God. I also learned the fear of God. And I acknowledge that without Christ I am nothing. It's only His sacrifice on the cross that has made me right with God. I'm clothed in His righteousness alone.

I got baptised at Grace Baptist Church within two years of going there. We had to go to membership classes. The pastor went through the 1689 Confession of Faith. It took about nine months before I could be baptised along with others.

God has been very merciful to me. I have stayed single and very happy for over 28 years. God truly has fulfilled my life. I love his Word. the Bible. He has kept me busy.

I attended Grace Baptise church for twenty years where Pastor Blaze was. After he retired we got a new Pastor called Elisha. It was ok for some time. Then he wanted to make changes. He wanted women to pray. After lots of talks which the deacons had with him and I myself challenged him, I then decided to leave the church along with other members.

I started to go to a church at Chelmsford with my sister and her husband. After a while I was trying to look for a local church for the evening after some time.

I went to quite a few different churches but they weren't for me. So I continue going to Chelmsford. Then my daughter wanted to go to church so I thought I would take her to Poplar Baptist Church. So that's where I started to go with her. Then we had the lockdown so I went on the Zoom meeting and got to know the better people at the morning prayer meeting. I knew this wasn't really my style of church worship but what was being preached was Biblical. The women prayed and women spoke on a Sunday in the service if they were giving a testimony of things that had happened that week. I just didn't have anywhere else to go. All the other churches I visited allowed women to pray. So, I became a member there. I did love the people there.

Then my brother in law, David told me about Stranger Rest, how they believed women should not pray. I thought I would try that as I had visited a year before when women prayed and children spoke in the service. It wasn't for me then. So, I was pleasantly surprised at the change. After a bit of toing and throwing, I decided to leave Poplar Baptist Church and start attending Strangers Rest where God has really

been blessing me even though I have had a few challenges, God has been with me.

So I would like to be a member because I know the preaching and teaching is biblical at this

church. I love the people there they are very friendly. I also like the strong headship from Pastor Mark and Pastor Ernie that makes me feel secure.

Baptisms on 15th September 2024

Keith Burden

On the Lord's Day morning 15th September a Baptismal service was held when three teenage siblings from the Burden family were baptised. Josiah, Kezia and Tabitha are longtime regulars at the Friday Children's Club and it was a joy to hear their testimonies and be reminded that the Lord is still calling people to himself and granting the wonderful gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

The minister, Mark Mullins, spoke from Acts Chapter 8 on the theme of *Good News from Gaza* on the occasion of Philip meeting the Ethiopian Eunuch on his way from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip had been directed by an angel of the Lord and we were reminded that today the Lord speaks by His word and in providence. Philip *ran* to the chariot and we likewise should be instant and willing in our service to the Lord.

This Ethiopian was a man of great authority and although Paul wrote *not many mighty, not many noble are called* 1. Cor. 1.26, yet this man, in charge of the Queen's treasure, is recorded as one of those notable exceptions. His eyes were opened through reading Isaiah 53 and the preaching of Jesus to him by Philip who *began at the same scripture*. As he heard Philip explain about the one *who was led as a sheep to the slaughter*, his spiritual eyes were opened. Looking down from his chariot and seeing water, he immediately requested that Philip baptise him.

It was fascinating to be reminded that, coming from Ethiopia, it was possible that perhaps some light of the gospel was still to be found within the royal house as a legacy from the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon some nine hundred years beforehand.

The candidates' testimonies were read out and it was striking to hear the way in which the great, eternal creator God condescends to answer the simple, childlike prayers of his people when they seek Him; we heard the chapter on Baptism from the 1689 Confession of Faith and there was a solemn reminder to all those gathered when the questions of their

allegiance to the Lord Jesus were put to the candidates, especially, *Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all its covetous desires, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?*

There were many visitors including relatives, neighbours and friends of those being baptised. It is always such a blessing to see sinners coming to the Lord Jesus but it must have been a particular joy for those present who have known these three young people and prayed for their salvation since their early years. The enlarged congregation provided a loud and joyful sound to the singing of the psalms. The service was followed by lunch and fellowship downstairs and it was lovely that so many of the visitors were able stay.

We pray that those baptised will go on with the Lord, will grow in grace and wisdom, will be faithful in their journey through the wilderness of this world and will be prepared for when the Lord Jesus takes them home.



Praise and Prayer Requests

For Praise:

- For the Lord's Keeping and Prospering the Work;
- For the baptism of Josiah, Kezia and Tabitha Burden in September 2024;
- For the baptism of Roger Cox in December 2024;
- For the return of a family and three of their children who left Strangers Rest in 2017 (the daughter remains a member of Westminster Baptist Church);
- For the Burden family joining us for our Lord's Day morning meetings since February 2025;
- For the return of Joel after three years at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and for his willingness to take over the young people's work;
- For Joel and Dawn becoming members in January 2025;

- For the "in person" Sunday School from 3-4pm being run by Joel, Chrisann and Lorna Witter;
- Please continue to give thanks for the Christian men living in the flat above the church and for their weekly support of Strangers Rest;
- For a successful trip by Mark Mullins and David Cooke to Sri Lanka in January 2025;
- For the open air opportunities on Friday afternoons with Charles Soper.

For Prayer:

- Please pray that the Lord would bring in children for the Friday Kids Club and Sunday School;
- Please continue to pray for good fruit from the outreaches;
- Please give thanks that one of the children from the local family that used to attend has been coming from time to time to church but please pray for his (B's) conversion and that his mother, brother and two sisters would return;
- Please pray that the Lord would send more workers for the harvest field;
- Please pray for the Christian Institute Event at Strangers Rest on 19th March at 7pm.



You are invited to our
**148th Anniversary Service in
Person and Online**
DR MARTIN ERDMANN DV
On Saturday 24th May 2025
At 2:30 pm

Details:
Zoom
Meeting ID: 910-993-1031; Password: 667012
Or call 0131 460 1196 using the above details.

YouTube
Strangers Rest
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUV3ZmDVydcAFtZ6TCL>
GliA



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Services: *Sunday Service* 11:00am and 6:30pm; *Wednesday Bible Study* 7:00pm; *Friday Children's Bible Club* 6:30pm, *Sunday School* 4:00pm.

www.strangersrest.org