

Understanding the Biblical Grounds for Divorce



John M. Otis

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE

I. THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE

There is a tremendous need for a biblical approach to divorce and remarriage in American society. Divorce is an immense problem facing our culture. Presently, one in two marriages ends in divorce — a statistic reflecting the American population in general. Though the overwhelming numbers of these divorces are among non-Christians, divorces among professing Christians are growing at an alarming rate.

The family is society's most fundamental and important institution. The marriage bond was God's idea, not mankind's (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:22-24). As a normative rule, God intended marriage to produce children; hence, the creation and importance of the family. God places a high premium on the value and protection of the family. Psalms 127 and 128 stress such an importance. The fifth, seventh, and tenth commandments specifically relate to the family.

Being a covenant keeping God, God instituted His covenant in terms that incorporated family generations as the recipients of His covenant blessings. Of course, these blessings are promised to families of believers (Deut. 28:4; Ps. 103:17,18; 115:13,14). Likewise, God's curses also run in family generations (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 5:9; Hosea 9:11-17; Ezek. 24:21). It is clear that the family institution is uppermost in God's mind.

The reason the Bible views rape, incest, homosexuality, and adultery as serious sins and crimes is that these assault the family. Such family assaults seek to disrupt and thwart God's purposes for mankind. God will not tolerate nor condone such actions. Even though divorce is not necessarily in the same category as these sins, it is a direct assault on the family, that is, when the divorce is an unbiblical one. In this book, whenever the phrase "biblical divorce" is used, it refers to divorce which is allowed in the Bible. Likewise, "unbiblical divorce" refers to that which is prohibited in the Bible.

Divorce brings serious consequences to the marriage partners, to their children, and to the culture at large. Even though God permits divorce in some instances, sin causes every divorce and always brings serious consequences. What are the consequences of divorce? Since sin is at the root of all divorces, alienation and guilt are frequently seen in spouses and in children. Especially when the divorce is on unbiblical grounds, alienation results between God and the divorced couple. Sin separates us from God, who cannot tolerate sin in His presence (Isa. 59:1,2; 1:13). A professing Christian is assumed here, for we know that all non-Christians are already in a state of alienation from God because of their refusal to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. The professing Christian who divorces in an unbiblical manner often feels separated from God, as they should. They often feel guilty, for they are guilty. The emptiness and guilt often experienced by divorcees is real, and it takes its toll on them physically. Many physical ailments have been medically diagnosed to be emotionally induced.

The consequences of divorce for children from broken homes are also devastating. One of the greatest if not foremost needs in children is that of security. Divorce viciously attacks this emotional need in children. The child wonders what the future holds, and whether they are loved (if so, then why did one parent leave). Also, many children experience guilt feelings blaming themselves for their parents' divorce.

One of the most devastating effects of divorce on children is their own view of marriage. The most profound educational tool in a parent's possession is that of being a role model. Children learn far more from parents' personal behavior than by any verbal instruction. The old

adage, “a picture is worth a thousand words” is so true. Many children from divorced homes have negative views about marriage; they wonder if their marriage too will fail. Probably the most damaging example set by divorced couples is the idea that divorce is a legitimate means of dealing with interpersonal problems.

The enormous statistic of fifty percent of all American marriages ending in divorce has tremendous implications for our culture. It is a sign of great social upheaval and disintegration. Knowing the individual impact of divorce, imagine the impact on a society at large. At the heart of a godly society’s welfare is family solidarity. The rampant increase and acceptance of divorce is one of the greatest threats to that solidarity. In fact, it is one of God’s judgments on our culture. We have sown a blatant disregard for His standard (the Bible); thus, we have reaped the natural consequences of rebellion against God — cultural disintegration. This brings us to the root cause for America’s and, specifically, the Christian community’s divorce problem.

Several decades ago divorce carried a social stigma. It was an embarrassment to admit to having a divorce. This stigma is virtually gone. Our society’s divorce problem has paralleled the increase in humanism’s onslaught. What is humanism? It is the current and prevalent philosophy of life that teaches that man can choose right and wrong without any reference to God. Man does what is right in his own eyes, making humanism completely opposite to a Christian philosophy of life. The Christian world view emphatically states that moral values are defined only with reference to God, and these values are found only in the Bible. The only reason why divorce is a growing problem in the “Christian” community is because humanism’s hideous disease has infected it. The term “Christian” covers a large spectrum of differing beliefs in modern Christendom. Many of these beliefs hardly deserve to be called Christian. There are numerous churches with pastors who openly scoff at the idea of an inerrant Bible that speaks authoritatively to every facet of life. Instead of proclaiming “Thus saith the Lord,” they proclaim, “Thus saith the secular psychologist.” To receive marriage counseling from these pastors is absolutely no different than receiving it from the blatantly anti—Christian humanist counselors. Actually, these churches have adopted the humanist’s world view.

The following story is an example of humanist infiltration into modern Christendom. This author once knew a woman who had separated from her husband for an unbiblical reason, and she was firmly intent on a divorce. She had left her church and had joined another church. When the pastor of her first church contacted the pastor of this other church explaining to him that this woman was under church discipline for this serious sin, the second pastor said, “What business is it of yours what goes on between this couple?” Is there any wonder that people are floundering in their sin? The voice they are hearing from their spiritual shepherds is Satan’s voice, not God’s.

The professing Christian church is in desperate need for a revival. Our culture is reaping the natural consequences for having embraced a humanist world view. The Church is to boldly proclaim God’s authoritative instructions for life. For the most part, this voice has been virtually silent. When the Church repents of her own spiritual adultery and returns to her own husband (Jesus Christ), then she can truly be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The Church must proclaim only what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. The church must renounce all allegiances to humanist views about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Only the Bible speaks authoritatively and correctly concerning divorce and remarriage. Man was created in God’s image to reflect God’s glory; therefore, only God, as revealed in Scripture, can deliver man from his problems and enable him to live a meaningful and productive life.

II. THE NEED FOR CAREFUL BIBLICAL STUDY

Even in the evangelical Christian church that adheres to the inerrancy of Scripture and that seeks to authoritatively proclaim God's truth, there is need for careful biblical study regarding divorce and remarriage. Some emphatically insist that God does not allow remarriage after any divorce unless one of the spouses dies. Some churches forbid any divorced man from ever holding church office. Are these views biblical? The answers to these views are immensely important to those involved. Perhaps you, the reader, have been divorced, and you wonder if you can biblically remarry. Maybe your church has told you that you can never remarry, which depresses you. Perhaps you desire church office and manifest godly traits in accord with I Timothy 3; however, you have been told that you can never hold church office because of a divorce in your past. You are perplexed and confused.

One of the greatest needs in evangelical churches is for church leaders to have a good grasp of Scriptural teaching on divorce and remarriage. Because fifty percent of American marriages terminate in divorce, the likelihood of a divorced person joining the church is almost assured. How are these divorced persons to be counseled so that Scripture is not denied? How are divorced persons to be counseled before joining a church? How are ministers to counsel divorced persons who desire remarriage and want the minister to perform the ceremony? These questions are not trivial. The spiritual well-being of the individuals, the purity of the church, and the honor and glory of God are at stake. The main purpose for this book is an attempt to unravel the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage. It is to give clarity to those who are confused. It is to challenge church leaders to exhort and to warn those who are divorced and those whose marriages are near collapse to submit to the Bible's teaching before they make a terrible mistake.

III. THE DEFINITION AND NATURE OF DIVORCE

Before defining and discussing the nature of divorce, we should stress God's perspective on the issue. God has ordained the marriage bond and has chosen to use the family as a means of fulfilling His purposes. God says He hates divorce (Mal. 2:14-16). Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce in certain circumstances only because of the hardness of men's hearts (Matt. 19:8). Thus, God's permission for certain divorces is a permissive decree of God whereby He chooses to regulate the sinful actions of mankind. Though God permits certain divorces, this does not condone the sin which led to the divorce, nor do biblical grounds for divorce necessitate one to divorce a spouse. The innocent spouse can forgive and preserve the marriage. God never intended for divorce to be an option (Matt. 19:4-8). What is a divorce? It is the separation and termination of marital obligations. Some of the most prominent biblical words indicating divorce are: "to loose from"; "to put away"; "to send"; "to release or dismiss." It is important to understand the nature of a divorce so that we do not misunderstand Scripture and counsel people incorrectly. There are Christian leaders who frequently speak of persons being divorced yet being still married in God's eyes. This view is not biblical.

One New Testament word used with reference to divorce is "*chorizo*." One place that it is found is in Matthew 19:6. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." Divorce is the subject matter that Jesus and the Pharisees are discussing. This Greek word occurs regularly in bills of divorce in ancient papyri; therefore, "*chorizo*" is often used with reference to divorce. In I Corinthians 7:10, 11, the wife is urged not to "separate" from her husband. If she does separate she is exhorted to remain unmarried. It is clear that "separate" means to be divorced; otherwise, the exhortation to remain unmarried is meaningless. Her separation has put

her into a state of being unmarried. In I Corinthians 7:11b, the husband is admonished not to “leave” his wife. The Greek word for “leave” is a different word than “separate.” However, the meaning for “leave” is the same. This word implies a divorce as well.

The guiding principle is: **DIVORCE ACTUALLY BREAKS A MARRIAGE.**

Some insist that those who are divorced for unbiblical reasons are still married in God’s eyes. Yet, the Bible indicates that a divorce unequivocally breaks the marriage bond regardless if the divorce was unbiblical. Even when a couple divorces for unbiblical reasons they should be married in God’s eyes, this does not change the reality that the divorce terminates the marriage. The grounds for the divorce are unbiblical, but the divorce itself is still a reality. Counselors must recognize this fact lest they violate the Scripture. As long as two persons are married, marital obligations are still in force. One such obligation is that of regular sexual relations. If it is true that divorced persons are still married in God’s eyes, then God expects these persons to perform their marital duties. Therefore, counselors would have to urge these divorced persons to engage in sexual relations, but to do this is to encourage one kind of fornication (sex between those who are not married). Divorce does terminate a marriage both from man’s and God’s viewpoint.

IV. THE EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT TEXTS

We now turn our attention to those biblical passages concerning divorce. By examining these major passages, we shall discern the governing principles concerning divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

“When a man takes a wife and marries her; and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.”

This passage reflects God’s permissive decree to regulate the sinful actions of men, namely divorce.

Among the Jews there arose two differing schools of thought concerning the meaning of this Mosaic legislation. The difference in belief revolved around the meaning of verse one, especially the meaning of the phrase, “he has found some indecency in her” (NASB). Rabbi Shammai interpreted the phrase to mean unchastity or adultery. Rabbi Hillel interpreted the phrase much broader to include virtually anything the husband found displeasing in his wife.

What is the meaning of “has found some indecency in her?” Is the indecency merely a personal dislike of the husband, or is indecency a biblically shameful act, justifying the permission for a divorce? The Bible is always its best interpreter. Both Jeremiah 3 and Isaiah 50 give us the clue. Jeremiah 3:1 states, *“God says, if a husband divorces his wife, and she goes from him, and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; yet you turn to Me, declares the*

Lord.” It is obvious that God uses Deut. 24:1-4 as the basis for His declaration against Judah. Jeremiah 3:8, 9 states, “*And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear: but she went and was a harlot also. And it came about because of the lightness of her harlotry, that she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.*” Isaiah 50:1 states, “*Thus says the Lord, Where is the certificate of divorce, by which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.*”

It is evident from these passages that the indecency of Deuteronomy 24:1 refers to a heinous sin - one which gave the husband justifiable cause to divorce his wife. We will see that Jesus, in his discourse on divorce, will use the term “fornication” as a synonym for “indecency.”

The governing principle of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is that once a man has divorced his wife, and she has become the wife of another, the man can never remarry his former wife, even if the second husband divorces her or dies. The reason is that the woman has become defiled with reference to her first husband.

The guiding principle is: **DIVORCED COUPLES CAN NEVER REMARRY EACH OTHER ONCE EITHER ONE REMARRIES ANOTHER PERSON.**

We must always remember that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is neither condoning nor commanding divorce. It is merely regulating the sinful actions of mankind. The legislation makes the procedure for divorce difficult in order to discourage divorce.

Matthew 5:31, 32 and Matthew 19:3-9

“And it was said whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal, but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery” (Matt. 5:31, 32).

“And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?’ And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said ‘for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother; and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.’ They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery’” (Matt. 19:3-9).

It is advantageous to examine both of the Matthew passages together. Jesus addressed the abuse of Deuteronomy 24 by the Scribes and Pharisees, and He emphasized the real intent of God’s Law. Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees emphasized the “bill of divorce,” Jesus emphasized the sacredness of the marital bond. It was customary for the Jews to interpret the Mosaic legislation in accord with their loose principles. The Pharisaical abuse is seen in their distortion of the actual reading of the Deuteronomy passage. In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” This is not what Deuteronomy 24:14 said. Their statement, “for any cause,” is not in the passage. This distortion reflects their lax approach to divorce. In Matthew 19:7, the Pharisees insist that Moses commanded divorce.

Again, nowhere did Moses ever command a man to divorce his wife. Jesus correctly interpreted the law by saying that Moses permitted divorce because of man's hardheartedness. The Pharisees exaggerated the exception in Deuteronomy 24, but Jesus stressed the principle undergirding the legislation - that of the sanctity and permanency of marriage.

In Matthew 19:4, 5 Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 which informs us of the divine institution and sanctity of marriage. In Matthew 19:6, Jesus stressed that marriage was intended to be a permanent bond that no man was to separate. Jesus explained why the Mosaic Law was given despite that "from the beginning it had not been this way." The law was given due to man's hardness of heart. When God ordained the marriage institution in Genesis 2, divorce was not even envisioned. Sin had not yet entered the world. With man's fall into sin, his nature became corrupted. Man's heart would be inclined to self interest. Spouses would not honor the marriage covenant, thereby committing acts that violated that bond. Husbands and wives would then be inclined to terminate the marriage. Divorce was an inevitable consequence in a fallen world. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not contradict Genesis 2:24, but it merely is an extension of it to handle further circumstances in a fallen world.

Rather than refuting any portion of the Old Testament law, Jesus confirmed every detail of Deut. 24:1-4. The Pharisees had ignored the sole ground which justified a man to divorce his wife. The cause for the husband's disfavor could not be just anything, but according to Deut. 24:1, it had to be "something indecent." Jesus totally agreed with the Mosaic Law. In opposition to the Pharisee's loose view of divorce, Jesus restricted divorce.

There are serious effects for those who divorce on unbiblical grounds. Jesus said that a man who divorced his wife for unbiblical reasons caused her to commit adultery, and anyone who married this woman committed adultery (Matt. 5:32). In Matt. 19:9, Jesus said that a man who divorced his wife for unbiblical reasons and married another woman committed adultery. Committing adultery is no minor offense. It carries serious consequences not only for this life but also for one's eternal destiny.

An important question is: How is a wife who is unjustly divorced caused to commit adultery? Our English translation of Matt. 5:32 can be misleading. The Greek grammar states not what the woman becomes but what she undergoes or suffers. This wife is put into a position of temptation. She is tempted to remarry another man. To do so would make her an adulteress. The reason that an unbiblical divorce can cause divorced persons to be guilty of adultery is because God does not honor the divorce from His vantage point; these persons should still be married; hence, any remarriage of these persons to another person constitutes marital unfaithfulness, which is adultery. In this context, adultery is seen as a sexual sin with a person other than the one with whom they ought to be having sexual relations. While a divorce actually breaks a marriage and its obligations, divorced persons have no biblical warrant to be in a divorced state. They are obligated to be reconciled.

Matthew 5:32 indicates that any man who marries a woman who is divorced for an unbiblical reason is guilty of committing adultery. The man is guilty of adultery because he is marrying a woman who, from God's perspective, should still be married.

Matthew 19:9 describes the consequences to the man who divorces his wife for an unbiblical reason and remarries another woman. He has committed adultery.

With regard to Christ's teaching on divorce, there are two issues that need further development. How many biblical grounds are there? And, what is the precise meaning and scope of "fornication?"

How Many Grounds For Divorce Are There?

According to Jesus, there is only one biblical ground — that of fornication. Any other ground is unbiblical and illegitimate from God’s perspective. It is important to stress that there is only one ground for divorce which applies to all people. The words “everyone” (Matt.5:32) and “whoever” (Matt. 19:9) should be quite clear. Jesus’ restriction for divorce applies to every human. There are several reasons for believing this. First, the words “everyone” and “whoever” should be understood in their obvious sense unless the context clearly limits their meaning. There is nothing in the context of these passages which would limit the meaning of these words to only a particular group of people. Second, Jesus’ teaching on marriage was based on the creation ordinance of God, which applies to all humans. And third, Jesus was speaking to the condition of man’s sinful heart, which of course applies to all humans.

The reason for stressing only one ground for divorce is because there are those who advocate two legitimate and biblical grounds for divorce — that of fornication as Jesus taught and that of desertion as Paul taught. This view sees no contradiction with Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching on divorce. To avoid any contradiction, it is believed that Jesus’ teaching applied only to believers in a covenant context while Paul’s teaching applied to believers married to unbelievers. This line of argumentation sees Jesus and Paul addressing different divorce grounds to two different situations. This author believes that the above interpretation for two different grounds for divorce is not biblical and is a straining of the biblical texts. One does not need to believe in two separate grounds for divorce in order to prevent any contradiction between Christ’s and Paul’s preaching. The solution is to simply see that Paul views desertion within the scope of fornication as taught by Jesus. This line of thinking is further developed in another section of this book. There is no clear and unmistakable evidence to insist that Jesus and Paul were speaking of two separate divorce grounds. We must accept at face value the clear admonition of Jesus — there is only one ground for divorce – that of fornication.

The Meaning and Scope of Fornication

The Greek word that Jesus used in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9 was “*pornea*,” meaning “fornication.” Translations that render this word as “adultery” can be misleading. Fornication and adultery are not synonymous terms. Fornication includes adultery (marital unfaithfulness), but it is not restricted to it. Since Jesus correctly interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-4, it is correct to say that the “indecent” thing or “uncleanness” in Deuteronomy is the same as “fornication.” A careful word study of both terms reveals the similarity. In Deuteronomy 24:1, the key Hebrew words are “*erwath dabar*.” These words are translated in the King James Version as “some uncleanness;” in the New American Standard as “some indecency;” and in the New International Version as “something indecent.” In *Brown, Driver, and Briggs’ Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* we find the following meanings given to “*erwath*.” A common translation for this word is “nakedness.” This nakedness often implies a shameful exposure (Gen. 9:22-23). The word was used to forbid all kinds of incest (Lev. 18:7-18). It referred to whoredom (Ezek.16:36-37; 23:18). If one consults *Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance* by Zondervan, one will see the above usage of “*erwath*” as well. The word “*dabar*” is translated as either “some,” “something,” or as “thing.” Therefore, the combination of these two Hebrew words conveys an “unclean thing.”

It is obvious that the Hebrew word “*erwath*” had a focus on sexual immorality. But is this word limited to only sexual misconduct? The word is used to refer to perversity (I Sam. 20:30),

to a dishonor for authority (Ezra 4:14), to public shame (Isa. 20:4), and to human excrement left in Israel's camp which defiled the place (Deut. 23: 13-14). When God saw the "indecent" thing in Israel's camp, He would turn away from the people. Thus, God is repulsed at the sight of any "uncleanness." Brown, Driver, and Briggs' Lexicon also refers to "*erwath*" as an "indecent or improper behavior," citing Deuteronomy 24:1.

Thus, we have seen that the words "*erwath debar*" translated as "something indecent" or as "some uncleanness" in Deuteronomy 24:1 are commonly used throughout the Old Testament as something which is truly repulsive. The evidence from the context is that these words indicate an indecency that God forbids.

Since we said that the terms "indecent" and "fornication" were virtually the same, let us now examine the use of "fornication" in both the Old and New Testaments. It is interesting how the Septuagint, (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), translates the Hebrew word "*zahnah*" as "fornication." Let's examine the Old Testament's use of fornication.

Just as the words "something indecent" referred to all kinds of sexual sins, so does the word "fornication." It refers to adultery (Hosea 2:2) and to whoredom (Gen. 38:24). Like "something indecent," the word "fornication" also entails sins that were not specifically sexual sins. In Numbers 14:33, the sons of Israel were made to suffer forty years in the wilderness because of their parents' "fornications." We know that the sins referred to here were this generation's unbelief in the promises of God and their constant complaining. It was their grievous complaining of God's anointed leadership and their stubborn refusal to obey the clear command of God in conquering Canaan that brought about the wrath of God. In Isaiah 1:21, Jerusalem became a fornicator or harlot because of her great sins. What were these fornicating sins? Jerusalem had lost a true sense of justice, having become murderers, having debased the currency, having rebellious rulers who took bribes, and having forsaken the cause of the widows and orphans. A similar list of fornicating sins is found in Hosea 6:6-10. In Ezekiel 43:7-9, the sins of the nation are said to be that of fornication.

Though these sins of God's covenant people were couched in the imagery of a harlot, it is important to note that the specific sins that are said to be fornicating sins are not restricted to mere sexual sins.

A similar use of "fornication" is found in the New Testament. The New Testament word for fornication is "*pornea*." This word refers to incest (I Cor. 5:1), to whoredom (I Cor. 6: 15-16), and to homosexuality (Rom. 1:27; Jude 7). Even though the primary use of "*pornea*" focuses on sexual immorality, it is not solely restricted to sexual sins. "Fornication" represented all sorts of abominations by the great harlot in Revelation 17. In Hebrews 12:16, Esau is said to be a fornicator for having sold his birthright for one meal. Esau represents those who are guilty of profane apostasy. In his commentary on Hebrews, R.C.H. Lenski says the following about this passage:

The writer at once explains 'fornicator' by adding 'profane one' and by explaining what he means by this by giving an example, 'as (for instance) Esau.' We often use 'or' in the same way for the very purpose of excluding misunderstanding. 'Or' means that 'fornicator' is not to be understood in the physical sense but in a spiritual one, i.e., as the sin of 'a profane one,' an 'unhallowed one.' Both terms carry forward the ritual connotation of contamination, which is so abominable to Jewish ears. 'Fornicator' emphasizes all the implied vileness from which the readers would recoil; and 'profane one,' which is made alternative by 'or,' brings out the idea that the person referred to is

a fornicator in the sense of caring for nothing that is sacred or holy, treating it as secular or common.

The significance of our brief word study of “something indecent” as found in Deuteronomy 24:1 and that of “fornication” is to demonstrate two major points. First, these two terms are virtually synonymous in their meanings. Hence, when Jesus was correcting the Pharisaical abuse of the Mosaic divorce legislation, it is evident that Jesus’ use of the word “fornication” corresponds with the “indecent thing” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Second, since “fornication” is not restricted to only sexual sins, the grounds for divorce which Jesus permitted are not restricted to only sexual sins either. What other sins would be categorized as fornicating sins, justifying biblical grounds for divorce? Though there are several sins that would be seen as fornication, this does not mean that all -- of these sins are biblical grounds for divorce. It is only those fornicating sins that are a direct assault against the marriage covenant. These sins are elaborated in subsequent sections of this book.

The major principles set forth in Matthew 5 and 19 are:

- (1) FORNICATION IS THE ONLY BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE.
- (2) REMARRIAGE TO ANOTHER PERSON BY ANY SPOUSE WHO IS UNBIBLICALLY DIVORCED CONSTITUTES ADULTERY.
- (3) MARRIAGE TO AN UNBIBLICALLY DIVORCED PERSON CONSTITUTES ADULTERY.

Mark 10:9-12

“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. And in the house, the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.”

There are several differences between Mark and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ discourse on divorce. In the Mark account the exception clause, “except for fornication,” that is found in Matthew is missing. We must assume that the exceptional clause is operational; otherwise, Jesus would be made to contradict Himself. The other difference between Mark and Matthew’s version is that Mark speaks of the wife divorcing her husband. The reason for the difference is due to the audience for which the Gospel accounts were primarily written. Matthew wrote predominately for the Jews, while Mark wrote for the entire Greek speaking world, which obviously consisted of mostly Gentiles. It was so rare for a Jewish wife to divorce her husband that the Law made no explicit provision for it. However, among the Gentiles, such an occurrence was not rare. Mark leaves no doubt that an unbiblical divorce by either the husband or the wife carries profound consequences. Spouses who divorced for an unbiblical reason and remarry another person are guilty of adultery.

V. IS IT BIBLICAL TO REMARRY AFTER DIVORCE?

Most evangelicals agree that the Bible warrants divorce in some instances, but there is division regarding the issue of remarriage. Some argue that remarriage is never allowed until one spouse dies, and any remarriage before then is sinful. Others argue that remarriage of divorcees is acceptable in certain circumstances while both are still living. It is extremely important which

view is correct. To call “sin” what God permits is a grievous error, causing harm not only to the divorced persons but also to the church at large. On the other hand, to boldly proceed with actions that are contrary to Scripture is as equally harmful. Which view is correct? Careful study of the Bible is needed to discern the truth. There are several pertinent passages dealing with remarriage.

Matthew 19:9 and Remarriage

As noted earlier, this passage clearly informs us that the only Biblical ground for divorce is for one spouse to be guilty of fornication. A man cannot divorce his wife for any other reason and marry another without committing adultery. Since this is true, the opposite must be true. A man who has legitimate grounds to divorce his wife can marry another without committing adultery. The exception phrase, “except for fornication” applies not only to the phrase, “whoever divorces his wife” but also to the phrase, “and marries another.”

The guiding principle is: ALL PERSONS BIBLICALLY DIVORCED MAY BE REMARRIED WITHOUT THE GUILT OF ADULTERY.

Romans 7:1-3 and Remarriage

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.”

The marriage state is used as an illustration in this passage. As the death of a husband frees the wife from the law of her husband, so is the believer in union with Christ freed from bondage to the Law by the death of Christ. Even though the marriage illustration is only incidental to Paul’s main purpose, the illustration is nonetheless true.

The marriage bond is indissoluble as long as either spouse lives. God intended marriage to be for life. For a woman to be married to another man while her former husband lives constitutes an act of adultery. But, if a woman’s husband dies, then she is free to remarry.

One might ask, “How does Romans 7:1-3 relate to the Matthew 5 and 19 passages?” The Romans passage implies that any remarriage of a divorcee to another while their former spouse is living is forbidden. The Romans passage mentions nothing of an exception. Unless we think that Scripture is contradictory, we must reconcile these passages. We must remember that in Romans, Paul is not giving a dissertation on divorce and remarriage. Paul is using marriage as an illustration of another spiritual truth. His teaching concerns a general view of the marriage state. Marriage is intended to be for life, and generally speaking, only the death of a spouse frees the other to remarry. This truth must be seen within the framework of the exception clause of Matthew 5 and 19. The innocent spouse of a divorce (based on a biblical ground of fornication) has a right to divorce and remarry, even though the guilty spouse is still living.

We can see the truth of Romans 7:2-3 as operative in the case of those persons divorced for unbiblical reasons. Such persons are commanded to remain unmarried and to be reconciled lest they be guilty of adultery. Though the marriage bond is actually broken by the unbiblical

divorce, God considers the divorcees as those who should still be married. This is true as long as both divorcees are living. Only the death of one of the spouses frees the other from the command to be reconciled.

The guiding principle is: UNBIBLICALLY DIVORCED PERSONS COMMIT ADULTERY IF THEY REMARRY OTHER PEOPLE AS LONG AS THEIR FORMER SPOUSE IS LIVING AND STILL UNMARRIED.

I Corinthians 7:10, 11 and Remarriage

“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.”

Paul is reemphasizing what Jesus had taught. Jesus had emphasized the sanctity of marriage, and that divorce was only permitted in the Law because of man’s hardheartedness. God intended marriage to be for life. In I Corinthians 7:1-11, Paul must be referring to an unbiblical divorce by either spouse. The divorced persons are commanded to remain unmarried so that they can be reconciled and that they may not be guilty of adultery by remarrying another person. When persons are divorced for biblically justifiable reasons, there is no command, especially for the innocent spouse, to remain unmarried and be reconciled.

The guiding principle is: UNBIBLICALLY DIVORCED PERSONS MUST REMAIN UNMARRIED IN ORDER TO BE RECONCILED TO THEIR FORMER SPOUSE.

I Corinthians 7:12-16

“But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him. Let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her; let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”

We must be very careful not to misinterpret the phrase, “*But to the rest I say, not the Lord.*” Paul is not saying that his inspired teaching is any less authoritative than Jesus’ teaching. All Scripture is inspired of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Paul is merely stating that Jesus never taught on the subject matter that Paul will address in I Corinthians 7:12-16. Hence, this passage is inspired, and it is to be obeyed.

Paul is dealing with mixed marriages -- marriage between Christians and non-Christians. This mixed marriage occurs where one of the spouses has been converted to Christianity. The Scripture forbids Christians from marrying non-Christians (I Cor .6:14-18; I Cor. 7:39).

Paul admonishes the Christian spouse not to divorce the unbelieving spouse because of differing religious commitments. If the unbelieving spouse is content to live with the Christian, the Christian is not to divorce the unbeliever. Though the marriage is strained because of the differing religious commitments, the marriage itself is not defiled. In verse 14, Paul indicates that the unbeliever is sanctified through the believing spouse. The children are said to be holy

because of the believing spouse. Some clarification is needed. First, the word “sanctified” basically means “to be set apart.” It is obvious that an unbeliever cannot be sanctified in the same sense as the believer. The Christian is sanctified by the atoning work of Christ credited to his account and by the regenerating and continual working of the Holy Spirit in his life. The unbeliever is “set apart” to a position of being regularly exposed to the Gospel and to the Holy Spirit’s influence. The children of the marriage are said to be holy because they are in covenant relationship with God through the Christian parent. Paul exhorts the Christian spouse not to think that his/her marriage is defiled, thereby justifying a divorce.

However, if the unbelieving spouse is not content and decides to divorce the Christian spouse, the Christian spouse is not to prevent the divorce (v.15). The Christian is “*not under bondage in such cases.*” This means that the Christian is free to remarry without committing adultery. This phrase “*not under bondage*” agrees with Romans 7:2 where the woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives. In I Corinthians 7:15, Paul says that the desertion of the unbeliever is biblical grounds for divorce.

If a non-Christian spouse divorces the other partner, Paul nowhere exhorts the Christian to remain unmarried in order to be reconciled as he did in I Corinthians 7:10-11.

The guiding principles are:

- (1) CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TO DIVORCE AN UNBELIEVING SPOUSE IF THE UNBELIEVING SPOUSE DESIRES TO REMAIN MARRIED.
- (2) CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TO PREVENT A DIVORCE IF THEIR UNBELIEVING SPOUSE DESIRES A DIVORCE.
- (3) DESERTION OF A SPOUSE CONSTITUTES BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE.
- (4) SPOUSES THAT ARE DESERTED ARE FREE TO REMARRY WITHOUT FEAR OF COMMITTING ADULTERY.

I Corinthians 7:39

“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”

Paul reaffirms what he said in Romans 7:2-3. Marriage is intended for life. Though the exception clause is not mentioned here as in Matthew 5 and 19, we must assume that this passage is to be understood in light of the biblical grounds for divorce. Since Paul is addressing the Christian community, any remarriage of a Christian must be to another Christian as explained by “only in the Lord.”

The guiding principle is: REMARRIAGE OF CHRISTIANS MUST ONLY BE TO OTHER CHRISTIANS, ASSUMING THEY ARE FREE TO REMARRY.

The Association of Fornication with Desertion

Since Paul recognizes desertion as legitimate grounds for divorce, we need to understand this truth in light of Jesus’ divorce teaching. In a previous section, we emphasized Christ’s admonition that there was only one justifiable grounds for divorce — that of fornication. We gave reasons for rejecting the view that there are two different biblical grounds for divorce. Since there is only one justifiable cause for divorce, which is fornication, desertion must be seen as a

general type of a fornicating sin. We noted earlier that the term “fornication” is not restricted to sexual immorality, but it can refer to other abhorrent behavior. Obviously, the act of desertion is one such behavior.

There is good biblical evidence that desertion was seen as an act of fornication. Judges 19:2 states: “*But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.*” We noted previously that the Hebrew word for harlot in this text is “*zahnah*”, which is the word for fornication in the Septuagint Bible. There is no conclusive evidence that the concubine was guilty of physical harlotry because the Levite tenderly pursues her to bring her back. The death penalty was the norm for those who were caught in the physical act of harlotry and who were properly convicted before the civil authorities (Deut. 22:20-21). The concubine’s desertion can be seen as an act of harlotry.

Question 139 of the Westminster Larger Catechism states: What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment? Desertion is said to be one of those sins listed in the answer. The proof text that is given is that of I Corinthians 7:12-13. It is significant that the framers of this historic document saw desertion as within the scope of the command not to commit adultery.

Desertion is a very serious sin. Desertion not only violates the seventh commandment, but it violates the sixth commandment (Thou shall not kill) as well. One of the sins forbidden under the sixth commandment in question 136 of the Larger Catechism is “the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life.” The essence of desertion is the deliberate abandonment of one’s spouse. Practically speaking, desertion is a type of death of a spouse. The deserter has no intentions of honoring marital obligations and does not care what happens to the deserted spouse. To abandon a spouse is a type of killing.

Thus, the act of desertion is a heinous, wicked sin, which falls under the general scope of fornication. Since Jesus said that there was only one legitimate grounds for divorce and since Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit pictured desertion as just divorce grounds, then desertion must be seen as a type of fornication.

Is Wife Beating Within The Scope Of Fornication?

The answer to the above question is extremely important. Unfortunately, wife beating is a growing problem in this country. It is even a problem in “Christian” marriages. Again, the church must be prepared to give accurate and godly counsel to these battered wives. Does wife beating constitute biblical grounds for divorce? The only way that it can be a legitimate ground is for wife beating to be within the scope of fornication, which is the only ground that is permissible.

We have seen that there are those who insist that fornication is restricted to only sexual immorality of various sorts. According to this view, wife beating is obviously not biblical grounds. Counselors who adopt this view often tell the battered wife to separate herself from the abusive husband, and even call the civil authorities. However, she does not have biblical divorce grounds. Under these circumstances, she is called to suffer by remaining married to this abusive husband.

There are several reasons to reject the above view. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that habitual wife beating does fall within the scope of fornication.

In previous sections, we showed that “fornication” encompasses more than just sexual sins. It involved abhorrent and wicked behavior. We have just seen that desertion is a type of

fornication. We shall demonstrate that habitual wife beating can easily be viewed as a fornicating sin.

It is helpful for us first to understand the essence of the marriage bond. Marriage is a covenant between two persons, binding them to certain obligations. Marriage is a covenant which God witnesses (Mal. 2:14). What is involved in the essence of this marriage covenant? In Genesis 2:24, we see that the covenant involved 1) the leaving of father and mother, 2) the cleaving to one another, and 3) the becoming of one flesh. We get an idea of what it means to honor the marriage covenant from Ephesians 5:28-31. Paul informs us that husbands are to love their wives sacrificially just as Christ loved the church (verse 25) and to love their wives as their own bodies. Why? It is because the couple is one flesh. This love is seen by nourishing and cherishing one's wife just as one nourishes and cherishes his own body (verse 29).

What specifically violates the marriage covenant? Sexual relations with another besides one's spouse violate it, and a refusal to give conjugal rights violates it. The marriage covenant is the divine institution for the proper expression of the man and woman's natural sexual desires (I Cor. 7:2, 9). In fact, regular sexual relations is part of the marriage covenant (I Cor. 7:3). The Scripture is clear that each spouse has authority over the other's body (I Cor. 7:4). Willful refusal of sexual relations with a spouse is a defrauding of the rights of the other. Exodus 21:10-11 states that a denial of conjugal rights frees the defrauded wife from the marriage. One would ask, "Why is the refusal of giving conjugal rights such a serious sin?" It goes back to one of the purposes of marriage — to avoid sexual immorality (I Cor. 7:2). To refuse conjugal rights tempts the other spouse to look elsewhere for this fulfillment. Moreover, this refusal is a blatant act of desertion.

We have noted earlier that the "leaving of father and mother" is an essential part of the marriage covenant. One leaves one's parents in order to cleave to one's spouse. Therefore, to abandon or desert one's spouse constitutes a violation of the marriage covenant. It is a fornicating sin. Obviously, the man who deserts his wife does not nourish and cherish his wife as his own body. Living together is essential to the marriage covenant. This is why any counsel for married couples to separate for a period of time in order to work out marital problems is not only ungodly counsel, but it violates the essence of the marriage covenant. We should now have a better idea why the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards views desertion as a sin forbidden in the seventh commandment. Desertion violates the essence of the marriage covenant. A pertinent passage is I Timothy 5:8, "*But if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.*" For a man to desert his wife exposes his wife to physical harm by depriving her of her basic necessities of life. The marriage covenant is violated when one spouse does not cleave to the other. This word "cleave" has tremendous import. It denotes clinging to someone in love and loyalty. For example, Ruth clung to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). The men of Judah clung in loyalty to David during Sheba's rebellion (I Sam. 20:2). Professing believers are to cling to their Lord in obedience (Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Joshua 22:5; 23:8).

For a man to cleave to his wife entails a nourishing and cherishing of his wife as his own body. I Peter 3:7 tell us that a husband is to dwell with his wife in a considerate way as with one who is a weaker vessel. He is to treat her with delicate care.

Is habitual wife beating a violation of the marriage covenant giving biblical grounds for the abused wife to divorce her husband? It surely is. It is hard to imagine that the desertion of a spouse by committing adultery is essentially any different than deserting one's wife by regularly beating her up. How is the blatant violation of the seventh commandment any more heinous a sin

than a blatant violation of the sixth commandment? Why would one violation be biblical grounds for divorce and the other not be biblical grounds?

The reason we use the word “habitual” is significant. The habitual beatings reveal a character trait and a normative lifestyle in that marriage. The regular physical abuse is literally jeopardizing the life of the wife. If the sin of desertion causes one to be viewed as worse than an unbeliever, how much more a heinous sin is the sin of attacking the very life and well-being of one’s wife. According to Ephesians 5:25, husbands are to love their wives to the point of sacrificing their own lives just as Christ sacrificed His life for the church. The habitual wife beater is the exact opposite. According to Ephesians 5:28-29, a husband demonstrates that he does not hate his own flesh by loving his wife through nourishing and cherishing her. What man would habitually inflict physical harm to himself who values his own life? The habitual wife beater is a wicked man who cares nothing for the physical life of his wife. Does he not think that his repeated beatings can kill his wife! His sin is a fornicating sin, which gives biblical grounds of divorce to his abused wife.

Despite the obvious fact that habitual wife beating is a blatant violation of the marriage covenant there are those who insist that if the husband has not committed actual sexual immorality against her, then she must suffer by remaining married. This is where this position does serious harm to the innocent.

Let’s consider the problem that this position poses for biblical counseling to the abused wife. Suppose a Christian woman presents undisputed evidence to her church that her husband regularly beats her. She has come to the point that she is fearful of her own life. Suppose the husband is not repentant, or he cannot avoid manifesting these wicked outbursts of anger. If she does not have biblical grounds for divorce, what counsel can be given to her? She could be counseled that she has a biblical right to self defense, and if her husband begins to beat her, she can use lethal force to protect herself. It seems odd that the woman has biblical grounds to kill her husband in self defense yet she does not have biblical grounds to divorce him. This abused wife could be counseled to separate from her husband and contact the civil authorities. The problem with this counsel is that the Scripture nowhere warrants separation. This counsel is advocating separation while remaining married. Remember, married couples have duties they are bound to perform. By denying the woman a biblical right to divorce, we have a strange and unbiblical anomaly. She is to remain married, but she cannot perform any marital duties.

If one does not see habitual wife beating as the sin of fornication thereby justifying biblical grounds for divorce, then surely one must picture wife beating as the sin of desertion, which most acknowledge to be biblical grounds. Desertion is more than just packing one’s bags and leaving home. Desertion is a blatant act of depriving one’s spouse of their marital rights. The right to physical protection (not to be beaten) is one such right.

Let’s suppose a husband commits a murder which leads to his imprisonment for life. Is this ‘man’s wife doomed to remain married to him simply because he did not commit sexual infidelity? Must she wait until he dies in prison before she is freed to remarry another? Some would say she must suffer in this situation. But why must she? This man has deserted his wife, which gives her biblical grounds for divorce. The moment this man irresponsibly committed this felony, he committed an act of desertion against his wife. How can this man provide for his wife while in prison? In a very real sense, he is already dead to her. This is why desertion is a type of death of a spouse. We know according to Romans 7 that the death of a spouse frees the living spouse to remarry.

Returning to the issue of wife abuse, we must conclude that habitual wife beating breaks the essence of the marriage covenant, which is the sin of fornication, which is the sin of desertion, and which constitutes biblical grounds for divorce for the abused wife.

The guiding principle is: HABITUAL WIFE BEATING CONSTITUTES THE SIN OF FORNICATION AND DESERTION THEREBY GIVING BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE.

Remarriage of the Guilty Person in a Biblical Divorce

We have deduced from examining pertinent passages that remarriage is permissible for the innocent spouse. By innocent, we mean that this person was not the one guilty of fornication. It is clear that the innocent spouse is free to remarry. What is not so clear is the status of the guilty spouse. Since the divorce was on biblical grounds and knowing that divorce decisively ends a marriage, does the guilty party have freedom to remarry? Or, is this person punished by never being allowed to remarry for life? We must be very careful that we do not violate Scripture, go beyond Scripture, disrupt the church, and seriously jeopardize the lives of those involved. There is no explicit indication from any of the relevant passages on divorce and remarriage that the guilty party is permanently forbidden to remarry.

The only passage that deserves some close examination is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In previous sections, we noted that the husband had biblical warrant for his divorce because of his wife's "uncleanness." The passage teaches that if the divorced woman remarries another she can never return to her former spouse even if her second husband died. To return to her former husband is said to be an abomination. It can be argued that the reason the woman can never return to her former husband is because being the guilty spouse of a divorce she can never remarry anyone. Her defilement is due to her remarrying after her divorce. Let's examine this perspective to determine its validity.

The Deuteronomy 24 passage definitely asserts that the divorced woman (who was the guilty party) cannot return to her first husband if she has subsequently remarried another. It is clear from the context that the emphasis is upon the relationship of the divorced woman with her first husband. Verse 4 on two occasions emphasizes this point. The verse says, "*that her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she had been defiled for that is an abomination before the Lord, . . .*" The words "former" and "again" are important. The emphasis is not whether the woman can ever remarry anyone, but it is that she cannot remarry specifically her first husband. It is noteworthy that the passage does not specifically condemn the guilty spouse for remarrying another man after she was handed her bill of divorce by her first husband. If a guilty spouse cannot remarry anyone, then one would think that the Scripture here would have explicitly said so. But it doesn't. One cannot even find a clear implied inference that the guilty spouse can never remarry anyone.

The stress in Deuteronomy 24 is that the guilty spouse can never return to their former spouse if they have remarried another. An examination of Jeremiah 3:1 reveals that the stress is upon the return of the guilty spouse to her former husband. Just as a divorced woman, who is guilty of "some uncleanness," cannot return to her former husband, neither can Judah, who is guilty of harlotry, return unrepentant to Jehovah. To reemphasize, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is not prohibiting for life the remarriage of the guilty spouse to any person. It is only restricting remarriage to their former spouse if they have remarried another.

How has the divorced woman been defiled? And why is her return to her former husband said to be an abomination? Since the text does not elaborate on this point, it is difficult to precisely determine the reasons. We know from Scripture that marriage is a divine ordinance which was meant to be permanent. God expects marital faithfulness. As Scripture states, a man and a woman become one flesh through sexual relations in marriage (Gen. 2:24). Sexual relations by any spouse with any other is a defilement of the marriage covenant. God intends for the one flesh bond to be permanent as long as each spouse is alive. We know from Jesus' teaching that divorce was only permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts. Though God permits the dissolving of the marriage under certain circumstances, God's original design is still the permanency of marriage. When a spouse commits fornication, defilement has occurred. As we have noted elsewhere in this book, having legitimate grounds for divorce does not mandate the innocent spouse to divorce the guilty one. The innocent can forgive the guilty party and seek to restore the marital bond. However, if the innocent spouse opts for divorcing the guilty spouse, there are some permanent consequences for this action. There can never be a remarriage between the two once the divorced spouse marries another. This second marriage has defiled this person with respect to his/her former spouse. Obviously, this second marriage involved sexual relations. To return to a former spouse means that one comes back tainted with having become one flesh with another. Remember, God's creation design is for marriage to be permanent and for sexual relations to only occur between these two persons for a lifetime. The divorce, even though permitted by God, should never have occurred. It only took place because of the hardness of men's hearts. We can see that the Mosaic divorce legislation, though permitting certain divorces, actually seeks to curb divorces. One had better think twice about divorcing a spouse even if there is a just ground because one might not be able to remarry that person.

There is another compelling reason why we cannot accept the view that the guilty spouse can never remarry anyone. To argue this is to argue for permanent celibacy. Nowhere does the Bible command persons to practice celibacy when there is no existing marital bond, and when there is no command to be reconciled to a spouse divorced for unbiblical reasons. The biblical norm is for unmarried persons to be married.

Consider the situation of a person who was the guilty spouse of a divorce because he was an unbeliever who didn't care what Scripture taught. Suppose this person becomes a Christian and repents of his sin that caused his divorce. If we adopt the view that he cannot remarry for life, then we have denied this man the privilege of setting up a godly home with a Christian woman. This illustration is not based upon sentimentalism, which never is to be our guide for biblical counsel. The illustration is based on carefully understanding the relevant Scriptural data. We must never forbid what the Scripture does not command us to forbid. We must never demand a life of permanent celibacy for those who are under no biblical command to be reconciled to a former spouse.

Surely, the Bible teaches one view or the other. Either guilty parties are free to remarry or they are not. As difficult as it may be, the church must diligently strive to understand the truth. We live in a society where there are plenty of persons who are in this category. The church must give biblical answers regarding such matters in order to give godly counsel.

There are several conservative theologians who agree that in some instances remarriage is permissible for those who were the guilty spouse in a divorce. Charles Hodge, in his systematic theology, states:

It has been earnestly objected to the doctrine that adultery dissolves the marriage bond, that both parties, the guilty as well the innocent become free, and either

may contract a new marriage. If this be so, it is said, that all that a man, who wishes to get rid of his wife, has to do, is to commit that offense. He will then be at liberty to marry whom he chooses. To this it might be a sufficient answer to say that the objection bears rather against the wisdom of the law, than against the fact that it is the law; or in other words, the objection is against the plain meaning of the words of Christ (Hodge Vol. 3, 393).

The commentator R.C.H. Lenski, in his commentary on Matthew 19:9, has said the following:

Whatever the cause, a disrupted marriage is a disrupted marriage. So Paul treats the class of disruptions that came within his experience, I Cor. 7:15, and permits the innocent to remarry. As regards the guilty one who causes the disruption, the way of repentance is surely open also for such a sinner as it is for any other who has caused an irreparable wrong to another (Lenski 735).

John Calvin makes these observations regarding Matthew 19:9 in his New Testament commentary:

Many expositors have interpreted this clause very badly. They think generally and confusedly that it commands celibacy always after a divorce, so that if a husband puts away his adulterous wife, they must both of necessity be celibate thereafter (Calvin 247).

Concerning the remarriage of the guilty party, John Murray has said:

In the event of divorce for adultery the marriage has been dissolved. It is for that reason that the innocent spouse may remarry. But if the marriage has been dissolved, it is difficult to see on what ground the contracting of another marriage on the part of the guilty divorcee could be considered adultery. What constituted the prior act of infidelity, an act of adultery, was the fact that the marriage was still inviolate. But once the marriage has been dissolved there is a very different relationship. And we must remember that in the case of divorce for adultery it is by divine warrant that the marriage is dissolved. The parties are no longer man and wife. If so, it is difficult to discover any biblical ground on the basis of which to conclude that the remarriage of the guilty divorcee is to be considered in itself an act of adultery and as constituting an adulterous relation (Murray 100).

The evidence points to the fact that the guilty party of a biblical divorce can remarry. There is no explicit nor implicit evidence to warrant prohibiting for life such a remarriage.

The guiding principle is: REPENTANT GUILTY SPOUSES FROM A BIBLICAL DIVORCE CAN REMARRY WITHOUT SINNING.

VI. A HUMANISTIC VERSUS A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

In America the predominant philosophy of life is that of Humanism. The view that moral uprightness is what is good for me has infiltrated the professing Christian church. The rampant

increase in divorce and the multitude of broken lives and shattered homes are the result of humanistic teaching. As noted earlier, the great need is a revival in the Christian church. The church must throw off the shackles of all ungodly thought and proclaim from the highest hill the truth of God's inspired and inerrant Word.

Because of humanism's influence, what the civil government allows for divorce often is not what the Bible allows for legitimate divorce. It is incumbent for the Church to insist on recognizing only Scriptural guidelines for divorce and remarriage. Simply because the state grants a divorce does not mean that God grants the divorce. God is the sovereign ruler over man; God is the final judge; and His Law is binding on all people. Those who trust in the foolish laws of men are doomed to bear the serious consequences of rebellion against God's Law. What matters is not what civil law may say but what God's Word says. To neglect the law of the sovereign God only brings ruin in this life and possibly for the soul for all eternity. Humanistic civil law grants divorce for virtually anything. Couples wanting a divorce can file for an uncontested divorce. One of the most common grounds today for a divorce is that of incompatibility or mental cruelty. A woman can merely insist that her husband no longer shows love to her and that is sufficient grounds for a divorce. A man can argue that his wife's constant nagging has become unbearable, and this is sufficient grounds for mental cruelty. The illustrations could be endless for all the excuses that are given to dissolve the bond that is meant to be permanent. Who cares that the couple swore oaths to God that they would love each other until death? It is a mockery to God what humanism's influence has done to the marriage institution.

Suffice it to say, we have demonstrated that the only biblical grounds for divorce is that of fornication. Because there is biblical grounds for divorce does not necessitate the innocent spouse to divorce the guilty one. There is nothing in Scripture that demands any marriage to be terminated regardless of the sins committed. Forgiveness can be granted by the innocent spouse.

The best way to avoid the problem of divorce is for sound biblical counsel to be constantly given, starting at an early age. This begins at the home with godly parents instructing their children. Godly counsel is further given by the faithful preaching of the Bible by God glorifying preachers.

The first area of godly marriage counseling begins with insisting on the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. People must be taught that the Bible is without error in every respect, and that it is the rule for faith and practice in every area of life. All our thoughts and emotions must be subjugated to God's Word. Godly counseling deplors the attitude, "I know what God's Word says, but I must do what makes me happy." One of the great crises today is the lack of an authoritative standard being held before the people. Church members must have it reinforced upon their consciences that God will not permit mutiny with regard to His Law. So many church members do not live their lives in total submission to God's Word. Therefore, when there are marriage difficulties, they are prone to rely on their feelings, not on what God says.

A second area of godly marriage counseling relates to the sanctity of marriage and the nature of the biblical family. Marriage is a divine institution that is meant to last a lifetime. A biblical marriage is the soil from which a godly family is nurtured. Marriage is society's fundamental institution. Godly counseling stresses what Jesus stressed. Marriage was not meant to be dissolved by man. Divorce was only permitted because of man's sin.

A third area of godly marriage counseling is the biblical command not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This is a command woefully neglected in today's Christian church. Many problems are caused in marriage resulting in divorces because of disobedience to this

biblical imperative. Church youth are not sufficiently being exhorted to heed I Corinthians 6: 14-18. Parents! You must never permit your child to date an unbeliever. Also, dating and marriage is not intended to be a mission field, meaning “I will date this girl in order to witness to her, or I will marry this man trusting that I can convert him.” So many divorces could have been avoided if this one biblical command had been obeyed.

A fourth area of godly marriage counseling revolves around the meaning and practice of marriage “separation.” The humanistic concept of “separation” is the voluntary decision of spouses to physically separate where one spouse moves out for a time. The purpose supposedly is to help the couples think things over, sort out their real feelings, and be free of marital tension. The old adage is believed by some, “if there is real love, then absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Unfortunately, this practice of “separation” is encouraged by some so called biblical marriage counselors. This practice is not only unbiblical, but it lends itself to greater numbers of divorces. Nowhere does the Bible justify the removal of either spouse for such purposes. As the biblical counselor Jay Adams says, “Modern separation settles nothing; it amounts to a refusal to face issues and set them to rest” (Adams 33).

As long as the marriage bond is intact, marital obligations are expected. One such obligation is that of regular sexual relations (I Cor. 7:2-4). I Corinthians 7:5 command spouses to stop depriving each other except for special times of prayer in order that they may not be tempted by Satan for their lack of self control. This humanistic separation places the couple in an unnecessary place of temptation. If the marriage difficulty centers on sexual matters to begin with, then separation will only compound the problem. Whenever there is sin that emotionally alienates couples, the biblical mandate is always reconciliation. The way to reconciliation is not by separating people. Separation only tends to solidify both persons in their own sinful thinking and emotions.

An example is helpful at this point. Probably every marriage has experienced heated arguments at some point. If not immediately settled, either one or both spouses may walk off in a huff. The result is the common silent treatment. How many couples can tolerate for any lengthy period such a situation while living under the same roof? If the couple is Christian, God convicts one or both of their sin and they reconcile. In other words, close proximity to an alienated person tends to facilitate eventual reconciliation. Humanistic separation only tends to deepen the problems. It often gives the person a false sense of peace, “Why I never had it so good.” They are then reluctant to pursue reconciliation. Godly counseling does not sanction such humanistic separation; in fact, it forbids it. How many divorces could have been circumvented if the couple had stayed under the same roof and then sought Christian marriage counseling?

VII. THE CHURCH’S COUNSEL TO DIVORCEES

There is no way for the Church to avoid dealing with divorcees, especially in our contemporary society. Pastors must be equipped to provide biblical counseling to these persons. Church leadership must be prepared to handle delicate divorce situations. The church leadership may be forced to do the unpopular thing in order to preserve the Lord’s honor and truly minister to all parties involved. It is not a matter of if the church must deal with divorcees; it is a matter of when. Pastor, are you prepared? Church leaders, are you prepared? Church member, are you prepared?

Church leaders must accurately discern every divorcee’s situation in order to faithfully present the Bible’s answer to his/her circumstances. First the church must be ready to minister to the emotional trauma that many divorcees experience. These persons often harbor extremely hurt

feelings and sometimes negative views of the marriage state. The church must rebuild in their thinking the godly view of marriage. There will be those persons whose spouses have committed fornication against them and wanted the divorce. The innocent party can be plagued with the feelings of failure.

The church will also have to minister to divorcees who have a guilty past. Suppose these persons were divorced as unbelievers but later became Christians. Some of these may still have tremendous guilt feelings, wondering if God has truly forgiven them even after they repented. Some of these wonder if God will further punish them. Some wonder if they can ever remarry. Perhaps some have been told by other churches that they cannot remarry, and they are confused and depressed. The church must be ready to effectively counsel those who have been divorced for unbiblical reasons and have not yet remarried. Church leaders must be faithful to admonish them of their responsibilities in this situation. Church leaders must warn them of the consequences of acting in an unbiblical manner.

One of the most painful and difficult tasks of church leadership is to discipline church members who are considering an unbiblical divorce, and who may divorce despite repeated warnings. One of the true marks of the church is that of church discipline. This is an area where so many evangelical churches are woefully failing. They are fearful of confronting sinners for one reason or another. Such church leadership is fearful that this type of confrontation would hurt people's feelings, could cause lost membership, and disrupt the perceived peace and unity of the church. Simply put, they don't want to "rock the boat." It is sad to see and to hear of such lack of church discipline in many evangelical churches. What these churches don't realize is that the honor and glory of God is assaulted, the Scripture is denied as the rule for faith and practice, and the persons that are sinning are left to wallow in their sin. What we neglect to do in the name of love is no love at all. Biblically speaking, it is heartless, cruel, and unloving to fail to discipline one who is going astray.

When there are persons who are considering unbiblical divorce, the church leadership must immediately adhere to the Matthew 18: 15-18 principle. The church must be willing to carry out the most serious church censure against unrepentant persons - that of excommunication. Proper use of church discipline not only preserves the honor of Christ, but it preserves the purity of the church, and it seeks to prevent persons from ruining their lives and families.

It is the responsibility of church leaders to carefully screen prospective church members. If a person is presently living in sin because of an unbiblical divorce, the church must be aware of this. The church must refuse to grant church membership to anyone who has not repented of their sin. Such a person would be making a mockery of the church and of God by taking church vows under these circumstances. If the person repents, then he/she must demonstrate the fruits of repentance by pursuing whatever course is necessary for their situation. This person may need to seek reconciliation with their former spouse. The church is to guide them concerning their biblical responsibilities. Another important area is for pastors not to be guilty of unlawfully marrying persons who are not scripturally free to marry. Pastors who are careless in screening who they marry can do immense harm to the church of Jesus Christ and to the parties that are married. Premarital counseling should be required for any couple desiring marriage by the church's pastor. The pastor must carefully determine whether there is a divorce in either of the couple's past and the circumstances surrounding the divorce. If the divorce was an unbiblical divorce, the couple may be under biblical constraint not to marry at this time. The pastor must carefully weave through all the details of the divorce in order to apply the principles as set forth

in this book. If a pastor marries a couple who are not biblically free to remarry, then he is guilty of contributing to adultery.

Another important concern of the church with regard to divorced persons is the status of divorced men holding church office. The church must be careful not to err in this regard. There are many evangelical churches that forbid any divorced man from holding church office, be it pastor, elder, or deacon. The proof text for this refusal is supposedly I Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6. These passages say, “*Now the overseer must be... the husband of but one wife.*” The argument insists that a divorced man who is remarried has had more than one wife; therefore, he is disqualified. The problem with this argument is that it misinterprets the passage. First, this argument proves too much. Not only would it exclude divorced remarried men but all remarried widowers would likewise be excluded, for they have had more than one wife. Second, if Paul wanted to say that one could never remarry or hold church office, he would have used the Greek word, “*gameo*.” The phrase would then have read “married only once.” Paul didn’t use “*gameo*” because he was not referring to how often one was married. Paul’s concern was not how many times he had been married but how many wives he had. Paul’s prohibition is against polygamy. Even though polygamy was tolerated in the Old Testament it was never the ideal. The creation ordinance was one man and one woman for life. Thus, church officers are to be exemplary of monogamous marriage.

Though we have established that a divorced man is not necessarily forbidden to hold church office, we still need to further pursue the matter.

A divorce man may still be disqualified for other reasons. I Timothy 3:7 states that a potential church officer “must have a good reputation with outsiders.” It could be that the circumstances of his divorce for years have damaged his reputation with the local community. On the other hand, God may have changed his reputation within the local community, or the man may have moved to a new community that knows nothing of his past. Concerning a divorced man desirous of church office, the church must inquire into the man’s reputation and then make a determination.

The church is to herald the truth of God. Divorce is a serious problem in our culture. There are many people confused and being led astray with false counsel. The church must be prepared to boldly set forth biblical guidelines on divorce and remarriage. The heralding church must trample the lies of humanism; it must regain its headship in our modern culture, and it must be that shining light on a hill.

VIII. MAJOR PRINCIPLES BRIEFLY STATED

1. Divorce actually breaks a marriage.
2. Divorced couples can never remarry each other once either one remarries another person.
3. Fornication is the only biblical grounds for divorce.
4. Remarriage to another person by any spouse who is divorced for unbiblical reasons constitutes adultery.
5. Marriage to a person divorced in an unbiblical manner constitutes adultery.
6. All persons biblically divorced may be remarried without the guilt of adultery.
7. Persons divorced for unbiblical reasons commit adultery if they remarry other persons as long as their former spouse is living.
8. Persons divorced for unbiblical reasons must remain unmarried in order to be reconciled to their former spouse.

9. Christians are not to divorce unbelieving spouses if the unbelieving spouse desires to remain married.
10. Christians are not to prevent a divorce if their unbelieving spouse desires a divorce.
11. Desertion of a spouse constitutes biblical grounds for divorce.
12. Spouses that are deserted are free to remarry without fear of committing adultery.
13. Christians that are free to remarry can only marry Christians.
14. Habitual wife beating constitutes the sin of fornication, and the sin of desertion, thereby giving biblical grounds for divorce.
15. Repentant guilty spouses from a biblical divorce can remarry without sinning.

IX. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES: CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are fictitious. Any similarity to real life situations is coincidental. Though they are fictitious, these situations probably do occur; this is why they are listed as applications of major principles. Working through these case studies should enable church leaders or any other biblical counselor to learn how to biblically think through a complex situation. The format is: the case study is stated, and this author's analysis is given with biblical references noted.

Case Study #1

Can a couple who has divorced in an unbiblical manner remarry each other if both have stayed unmarried?

Answer: Yes, they can and should seek to be reconciled. Since the divorce was unbiblical, both parties are under biblical command to be reconciled. Seeing that both have remained unmarried, they are free to remarry each other. (See I Cor. 7:10-11) This assumes both parties are Christians.

Case Study #2

Janice (a believer) marries an unbeliever and later realizes it was sinful for her to marry him; is she free to divorce him?

Answer: No, she cannot biblically divorce her unbelieving husband simply because of their differing religious commitments. She must remain married to him as long as he desires to remain married. (See I Cor. 7:12).

Case Study #3

Karen divorced her husband when she discovered that he had committed adultery. Later she meets Mark who is divorced as well. He had divorced his wife on grounds of incompatibility. Mark's former wife is still unmarried. Karen and Mark fall in love and want to get married. Can they?

Answer: Karen's divorce is a biblical divorce, freeing her to remarry. Adultery is fornication, and it is biblical grounds for divorce. Mark's divorce was an unbiblical divorce. Incompatibility is not biblical grounds for divorce. Being an unbiblical divorce, Mark is not to remarry anyone except his former wife. In fact, he is under a biblical command to be reconciled to his former wife. Since Mark's wife is still unmarried, she has not committed a provable act of adultery (her remarriage to another would be such proof which would give Mark legitimate

grounds for remarriage). Mark and Karen cannot biblically get married at this point. They must wait for either one of several things to occur. Either Mark's former wife must die, which would free him from his bond. Or, Mark's former wife gets remarried to another, which would be an act of adultery, seeing that she is under command to be reconciled to Mark. (See Matt.5:32; 19:9 Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7: 10-11). Such counseling to Karen and Mark would probably be hard for them to receive. They must learn that sin complicates life, and they must learn to obey God's Word. Karen and Mark must be warned by the church that for them to get married anyway would constitute adultery on the part of both of them. To flagrantly disobey Scripture and refuse to heed the church of Jesus Christ would expose them to serious church censure.

Case Study #4

Marsha (an unbeliever) divorces her husband (a believer) on grounds of incompatibility. Marsha remarries another man. She subsequently becomes a Christian and later her second husband dies. She realizes that she should not have divorced her first husband. Marsha wants to remarry her first husband. He has remained unmarried. Since both are now Christians, can Marsha remarry her former husband?

Answer: Marsha's divorce was an act of desertion. Desertion is an act of fornication, and it constitutes biblical grounds for divorce for her husband. Since she was an unbeliever wanting a divorce, her husband was not to prevent her. Marsha's remarriage to another man seriously complicated the situation. Even though the death of Marsha's second husband freed her to remarry, it freed her to remarry any other except her former husband. The fact that her former husband has remained unmarried is irrelevant. She is considered as defiled with reference to her first husband despite having become a Christian. (See I Cor. 7: 15; Deut. 24: 1-4).

Case Study #5

Bob divorces his wife who had committed adultery. Can he remarry another? Can she remarry another?

Answer: Yes, Bob is free to remarry another because adultery is biblical grounds for divorce. Yes, his former wife is free to remarry. As noted earlier, there is no explicit nor implicit prohibition against the guilty party remarrying after a biblical divorce. (See Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

Case Study #6

Barbara divorces her husband who is guilty of homosexuality. Is she free to remarry?

Answer: Yes, Barbara is free to remarry. Homosexuality is the sin of fornication, which is a biblical ground for divorce. (See Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

Case Study #7

Carolyn (an unbeliever) divorces her husband (an unbeliever) on unbiblical grounds. Carolyn remains unmarried and becomes a Christian some time later. She realizes the sin of her divorce. Her former husband is still unmarried, and she wants to remarry him. Can she?

Answer: Carolyn and her former husband's divorce was unbiblical, meaning that they are under mandate to be reconciled. Having remained unmarried, she is still free to remarry her former husband in one sense, since he had remained unmarried. However, being a Christian, she is under mandate to marry only in the Lord. If he is still an unbeliever, she cannot remarry him. Why would she want to be unequally yoked? Biblically, she is forbidden to marry him (See I Cor. 7:10, 11; 7:39).

Case Study #8

Joe divorced his wife when she deserted him. Joe later meets Milly who is divorced. Milly divorced her husband for habitual wife beating. In fact, her husband was arrested for this. Joe and Milly want to get married. Can they?

Answer: Joe's divorce was biblical seeing that desertion is biblical grounds. He is free to remarry. Milly's divorce is also on biblical grounds, as is noted in a previous section in this book. Yes, they are free to marry one another.

Case Study #9

Henry (a believer) divorces Wilma (an unbeliever) on unbiblical grounds. Later, Henry realizes he sinned in divorcing her on unbiblical grounds and wants to reconcile with her and be remarried. Can he?

Answer: No, Henry is not to divorce his unbelieving spouse as long as she is content to remain with him. Though he is technically under command to reconcile to her, he is forbidden to marry a non-Christian. She must become a Christian in order for him to remarry her. (See I Cor. 7:12; 7:39).

Case Study #10

Billy and Bonnie are both believers and are having marital problems. They are convinced that "love" has died in their marriage. Billy has gone so far as to hire a lawyer to engage in divorce proceedings. At this point, what should their church do?

Answer: First, the church must give them sound marriage counseling, assuring them that there is no problem that Christ cannot overcome. They can have a good marriage if they are willing to obey Scripture. During this counseling, the church must warn Billy and Bonnie not to divorce, for this would be a grievous sin. Billy must be told to immediately terminate divorce proceedings. He has no biblical grounds for divorce. The couple must be warned that if they do refuse to heed this biblical counsel and do divorce, then they will be subject to excommunication from the church. It is important that the church deal with this situation quickly before the couple actually secures a divorce. Ample time must be given to the couple to repent and be reconciled. (See I Cor. 7:10-11; Matt. 18:15-18).

Case Study #11

Sally and Tom are professing believers. Tom divorces Sally on the grounds that her nagging has gotten unbearable. Both remain unmarried. Tom is approached by the church elders who rebuke him for his sin; they admonish him to repent and be reconciled to Sally. Tom refuses to repent. At this point what should the church elders do? Is Sally free to remarry another? If Tom repents, can he remarry Sally? What happens if Tom is willing to remarry Sally, but Sally refuses to remarry him? Are Tom and Sally free to remarry others?

Answer: Tom's divorce from Sally is unbiblical. Nagging is not the sin of fornication. Being an unbiblical divorce, both are compelled to reconcile. They are free to remarry since both have remained unmarried. Tom's refusal to repent of his sin forces the church elders to excommunicate him. This act ecclesiastically declares him to be an unbeliever. Sally is not free to remarry another; she is still obligated to be reconciled to Tom. However, now that Tom has been excommunicated, Sally cannot even remarry Tom at this point. If Tom repents and has the censure of excommunication removed, then he should seek reconciliation with Sally. If Tom desires to remarry Sally, but she refuses to remarry him, then she still is not free to remarry

another. Moreover, Tom is not free to remarry another. Both are under Scriptural mandate to reconcile. (See Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 7:39).

Case Study #12

Harry and Mandy are both professing Christians and members of a church. Harry divorces Mandy for unbiblical reasons. Harry comes to realize his sin and desires to be reconciled with Mandy, who has remained unmarried. However, despite repeated attempts by Harry to reconcile with his wife and the church's repeated admonitions to Mandy to be reconciled, she refuses to be reconciled. Is Harry free to remarry another person?

Answer: According to I Corinthians 7:10-11 both are mandated to be reconciled after an unbiblical divorce. This situation is complicated by Mandy's refusal to be reconciled. At this point, the church must begin ecclesiastical discipline against Mandy. If she stubbornly refuses to repent and refuses to remarry Harry, then she must be excommunicated. This act places her in the state of being an unbeliever. This now presents a whole new scenario. According to I Cor. 7:12-15, believers are to remain with unbelievers as long as the unbeliever wants to remain married. However, if the unbeliever deserts the believer, the believer is now free to remarry. Actually, the fact that Mandy refused to be reconciled to her former husband constituted an act of desertion on her part. This now frees Harry to remarry another without sinning.

X. CONCLUSION

Marriage is a divine institution that no man is to put asunder. In response to the loose views of divorce in his day, Jesus reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage. He reiterated that the Mosaic divorce legislation was permission because of man's sinful heart. God chose to regulate the sinful actions of men in a fallen world. Yet this permission had stringent requirements. The only legitimate ground was that of fornication. In every way, divorce was discouraged. Even the legitimate grounds for divorce did not necessitate the divorce. Nowhere does Scripture command divorce under any circumstances.

Divorce is a very serious social problem in America. The rampant increase of divorce is deplorable. The increase in the professing Christian church is even more disgusting. There are "Christian" churches that not only sanction unbiblical divorces, but there are some churches that even encourage unbiblical divorces. The pastors of these churches often don't even recognize the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. They couldn't care what the Bible says on divorce. They have bought the humanist perspective "hook, line, and sinker." They are daily contributing to adulterous marriages, and contributing to the demise of others. This author cannot even begin to express his attitude toward these wolves in sheep's clothing. They not only are a disgrace, but they will surely bear the wrathful judgment of God.

The true Christian church must regain its preeminence in our culture. It must boldly proclaim God's truth. Pastors must be courageous and not buckle under the pressure of church members who know not the Scripture. Pastors must be equipped to handle divorce situations. They must refuse to marry individuals not biblically free to remarry. Church leaders must exercise church discipline against the unrepentant when necessary.

The issue of divorce and remarriage is an extremely crucial issue. People must know what the Scripture teaches. Ignorance of and flagrant disobedience to Scripture can and will bring ruin. If you profess Christ and flagrantly disregard the Bible's admonitions and obtain an

unbiblical divorce, you have committed a grievous sin. If you further aggravate the situation and remarry another person; you are now guilty of adultery. To behave this way causes one to seriously doubt the genuineness of your profession of faith. A genuine Christian does not practice sin (I John 3:6-9). No adulterer has eternal life abiding in him (I Cor. 6:9-10). Yes, you may run from your church that recognizes your sin and find a church that will receive you with open arms; however, you can never run from the truth and from the Lord God. He is your judge, not man! But praise God that there is forgiveness with Jesus Christ for all who repent. There is no sin too great for God's forgiveness in Christ. Though your divorce may still carry certain consequences the rest of your life, you can be assured that your guilt can be erased. It is the hope of this author that God will use this book to preserve marriages, to call the sinful to repentance, to give church leaders clarity in their biblical counseling, and to give honor, praise, and glory to Jesus Christ.

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