THE BIBLICAL TEACHING
ON
DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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PREFACE

There are two things that characterise the Lord Jesus and should characterise all who have His spirit. They are love and forgiveness. As His life was being taken away He prayed, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” As Stephen was being stoned to death, he prayed, “Lord, do not lay to them this sin.” The sin in both cases was murder. Both were prepared to forgive their murderers. Is the sin of adultery greater than murder? Jesus commanded Peter to forgive seventy seven times. The truly born-again Christian will forgive their murderer, love their enemy, and pray for their salvation. The unborn ‘Christian’ will behave like a man of the world and seek justice through the courts of this world.

This work has been written as a guide for all of Christ’s true followers who have been hurt by some unseemly and distressing behaviour by their partner. Jesus’ immediate response was, and is, to forgive the wrong and love the wrong-doer. He says to all who show remorse, “Go, and sin no more. Neither do I condemn you.” That is a hard example to follow, and many Christians turn their back on the idea of forgiveness and seek out counsellors who will offer a more attractive solution, one that will punish the offender. If you cannot forgive, then you do not have the Spirit of Christ, and if you do not have the Spirit of Christ, you are not a Christian. If this is your position, then it is time to have a deeper look at what you thought a Christian was.

Included are the following sins that must be forgiven, (1) adultery, (2) desertion, (3) abuse, (4) hard-heartedness, and (5) neglect. A well known rabbi in Jesus’ day taught (according to some) that each of these five categories (plus others) qualified for a divorce. He spoke the language of commonsense. Along came Jesus and taught the people to forgive these and all wrongs, and be reconciled to the wrong-doer. This was not commonsense. But that is the difference between rabbi Hillel and rabbi Jesus. The Pharisees’ advice was this-worldly (intuitive, naturalistic); Jesus’ advice was other-worldly (counter-intuitive, spiritual). The Pharisee preached, “Love your neighbour, and hate your enemy.” Jesus preached, “Love your enemy.” In every department of their theology, Jesus had an opposite point of view to that of the Pharisee. Where the Pharisee kept the letter of the Law, Jesus kept the spirit of the Law. “Whoso looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already in his heart.” And so it was in their appreciation of marriage and their attitude toward its break-up. The Pharisee could see dozens of reasons for breaking up a marriage. Jesus saw none. The rabbis used Scripture to grant divorce certificates. Jesus used Scripture to invalidate such certificates. The majority of Christian counsellors think Jesus got it wrong, and the rabbis got it right. The proof is in the number of divorce certificates held by many of His followers and prominent church leaders.

The core reason why Jesus could not accept the break-up of any marriage is that God makes the bond and only God can undo the marriage bond. To undo the bond is to usurp God’s prerogative.

The second reason why Jesus could not accept the break-up of any marriage is that it is incompatible with forgiveness. In the Lord’s Prayer He taught that we should ask God for the forgiveness of our sins on the grounds that we had forgiven others their sins against us. It would be a denial of the principle of forgiveness to make an exception for the sin of fornication or adultery. It is inevitable that where hate abounds, divorce abounds.

Jesus’ teaching on the nature of the ‘born-again’ experience, and the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of imparting a new heart and a new spirit to all His followers means that the low life of the Mosaic period is a thing of the past, and that included Moses’s endorsement of the common Near Eastern practice of divorce. Divorce is now incompatible with having the Spirit of Christ.

The third reason why Jesus could not accept the break-up of any marriage is that marriage is the supreme analogy of selfless love between a man and a woman, and between Christ and His Bride Church. God is love and He showed that—in the sacrifice of His Son for an ungrateful world. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

It is with regret that I hear of Christians becoming followers of pre-Christian, Jewish rabbis and taking advantage of the divorce courts of the ‘god of this world’ (Satan) to end their God-bonded unions. The god of this world is delighted to see Christians enter his divorce courts to end their marriages. He knows that divorce plays into his hands, because the Christian who divorces for adultery will soon end up being an adulterer himself through a second marriage. Satan will get two adulterers for the price of one certificate.

What does a divorce certificate reveal about you?

First, the act of divorce is the act of an unforgiving person. Its possessor says, ‘I could not bring myself to forgive you, so I had to divorce you.’ This can never be spoken by a person who has
the Spirit of Christ dwelling within them. The divorce certificate, therefore, certifies that you have an unforgiving spirit. With such a spirit you ensure that God cannot forgive you your sins.

Secondly, the divorce certificate certifies that you do not care for the salvation of the person you were married to. The Spirit teaches that the Christian should remain in their marriage in order to win their adulterous or unbelieving partner over to Christ (1 Corinthians 7:16). Separation may be forced upon the Christian, but the marriage bond can only be broken by death (Romans 7:1-2; 1 Corinthians 7:39). A wife is for life.

Thirdly, and sadly, the divorce certificate certifies that you do not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within you. Without Him living within you, you will not be with Him in heaven. He and Stephen forgave their murderers. You do not have this same spirit.

Fourthly, I view the possession of a Divorce Certificate as the possession of a spiritual Death Certificate. It certifies that you hate your enemy, that is, you hate your marriage partner, and hate is of the Devil. By agreeing to a divorce you are giving your partner the go-ahead to sleep with another partner. You will be held responsible for this permission (Matthew 5:32). The sin of his (or her) second marriage will be laid at your door.

Finally, you got your Divorce Certificate from Satan, not from God, and not from Christ. Satan has a vested interest in breaking up every single marriage that takes place in the world, because in doing so, he is usurping the place of God, who alone can separate what He has bonded. God uses death, not divorce, to end all marriages.

What does a divorce certificate reveal about you to other Christians and your local church?

The possession of a divorce certificate will tell the truly spiritual churches of Christ, and their spiritual leaders, a lot about you, and about your relationship with the Lord Jesus. It reveals that you do not have the Spirit of Christ within you (so why are you taking Communion?).

It reveals that you are not prepared to forgive certain kinds of sins; that there are exception clauses in your idea of forgiveness (so why do you think Jesus has forgiven you?).

It reveals that your mindset is no different from that in the unbeliever; that you behave as someone who has more in common with the world than you have with Christ (so why do you think you are a Christian?).

Finally, it reveals ignorance of what your Saviour has revealed about the sanctity of marriage (so why are you so ignorant? Have you left off reading God’s Word?).

Christians, who are in an obedience relationship with the Lord Jesus, know that obedience is the test whether they truly love Him. “If you love Me, you will obey My commands.” If you are ignorant of Jesus’ commands, and claim to be a Christian, and are taking Communion, and yet are actively seeking to divorce your partner, you bring shame on your local church. Whoever takes Communion “in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body blood of the Lord.” You compound your sin of seeking a divorce by taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy and unspiritual state. Those who do this bring judgment on themselves, “not discerning the Lord’s body.”

A divorce certificate does not just divorce you from your partner, it also divorces you from your God. The two things go together. Your divorce certificate is also your spiritual death certificate. If you would choose life with Christ, then the sooner you tear it up and return to your forgiven, adulterous partner, the sooner you will have Life within you once again. No adulterer will enter or inherit heaven, and no one in a second marriage, whose first spouse is still alive, will enter or inherit heaven. Be rid of your second marriage, terminate it, if you would see Jesus again, and if you truly desire to enter the Kingdom of God as a born-again believer.

Many claim to be Christian and write books on Christian marriage who would drag down the Elect to the level of rabbinic exegesis, claiming that Jesus taught that divorce was not a sin against God. These do not have the Spirit of Christ. To live out Christ’s theology without effort requires nothing short of Christ Himself indwelling him. If it requires effort, then something is wrong. It should come naturally. If the teaching does not come naturally and easily, then the person should examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, or only claim to be. The one who has experienced Christ will know the doctrine whether it be from God or whether it be from man (John 7:17).

Possibly the most frequently asked question is: Is the act itself of getting a divorce a sinful act? I have, therefore, devoted Letter 9 (section 9.9, below) to a detailed answer to this question. Remarriage can only occur after a death, not after a divorce. Divorce, as a legitimate state, is not recognised in God’s ordering of His world, any more than sin is. There is life after death, and there is a wife after death.

A divorced wife is a spiritually dangerous and a polluting force. Jesus endorsed this view when he stated that any one who marries a divorced woman is committing adultery. It is the fact that
she has had sex with two living men that constitutes her an abomination, not the rightness or wrongness of the
grounds of her divorce. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ grounds for divorce. Divorce itself is wrong in
principle. God is consistently adamant, under both Covenants, that a woman cannot sleep with two,
contemporary men. God’s abhorrence has not changed. Practising homosexual men and women, and
remarried divorced men and women, are in the same category of abominable persons in His sight.

We have become so used to seeing an exception of some kind in Matthew 19:9 that one
Christian writer who has written books and articles on divorce asked me, Can you think of any way
of understanding the verse without an exception clause? In all his writings he assumed that Erasmus
got it right and that even if we discard Erasmus’s addition of εἰ somehow he believed Jesus made an
exception to permit divorce for fornication, and consequently he followed the KJV translation ‘except
for fornication’ in all his writings. This is typical of modern day exegesis. Many cannot think outside
the box that Erasmus has shut them into.

To the question, Can you think of any way of understanding the verse without an exception
clause? the answer is Yes. And here is the translation, ”who, for instance, may have divorced his
wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he
becomes adulterous.” Every Jew knew that if a wife committed a sexual offence she was stoned to
death or strangled (Jn 8:1-11; Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). Every Jew knew that a wife could only be
divorced for a non-sexual offence (cf. Deut 24:1-3). The former is a ‘for fornication’ offence; the latter
is a ‘not over fornication’ offence. The Jews were well aware of the two categories, so when Jesus
pointed to those husbands who got a divorce for a ‘not over fornication’ offence, the Jews knew this
covered every possible offence that a wife could commit apart from fornication, which was punished by
death not divorce. In this way Jesus comprehensively excluded divorce for fornication and He
excluded divorce, ‘not over fornication.’ He made no exception for fornication because that offence was
covered by the death penalty. It was as if Jesus had said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife for a non-death
penalty offence and marries another commits adultery.’

The key to understanding any verse of Scripture is to place oneself in the era and culture in
which it was written. If we place Jesus in our era and culture then divorce is automatically expected
and granted for adultery. If we place Jesus in His own era and culture then the death penalty is
automatically expected and granted for adultery. There was no option to divorce her for adultery in
Jesus’ era and culture. It is difficult for Western writers to adjust to Jesus’ era and culture and plant
their feet firmly in His era, and view things from Jesus’ perspective, and this accounts for their
inability to ‘read’ Jesus, and where He was coming from.

But the Pharisees who asked the question knew exactly what Jesus meant and were
astounded that He dismissed Moses’s divorce certificate as null and void. His disciples knew exactly
what Jesus meant and concluded, ‘If the case is so [divorce cannot dissolve a marriage] it is not
advantageous to marry,’ because they instantly recognised that a husband is burdened with a wife for
life with no prospect of getting free from her should she turn out not to be the helpmeet he thought
she would be. And even if she turned out to be the perfect wife, his interests are divided between
pleasing his wife and pleasing the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35).

Marriage belongs to this world, not to the next. “The time is short,” noted Paul, “so that from
now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none” (1 Cor 7:29). Paul, as ever,
sought to fix the mind of bachelors and married men on serving Jesus exclusively, and encouraged
them to be locked on to Christ’s will for the good of the Church.

Marriage, it has been observed, is not all that it is cracked up to be. Better, thought Jesus and
Paul, to be free of it, if you can. ‘Are you a single, unmarried man, do not seek a wife,’ has behind it
the motive of giving all your time, money, and talents to serving the Lord Jesus to the exclusion of
any other hobby or interest, because He bought you with the price of His blood. This thought is not
far away in the two pastoral sections of this work, especially in cases where the Christian has been
deserted by their partner, who might even be a professing Christian. Enforced singleness can be used
to the advantage of the Lord Jesus, and that thought should be paramount in the lives of all, single,
‘divorced,’ or married.

The wife pleases when she does her husband’s will.
The husband pleases God when he does Christ’s will.
Christ pleases God when He does God’s will.

This hierarchy of headships brings all things under God’s control. Every married couple must
be made aware of this headship arrangement otherwise there will be clashes of wills and disorder
will follow to the displeasure of God, who is Head over all things.

It is the prayer of the author, that this work will open the door to the knowledge of God’s will
about your marriage, and the evil of getting a divorce through the divorce courts of the ‘god of this
world’ (Satan), and that as a result of coming into the light of the true knowledge, you will be able to
guide others away from divorce and toward the Lord Jesus in this adulterous and evil generation.
INTRODUCTION

One of the strongest arguments against divorce is the unanimous practice of the Church from the Apostolic age to the Protestant Reformation. As soon as the Lord Jesus’ followers heard of Jesus’ absolute ban on divorce they acted on it. Divorce was the opposite of what God intended for all marriages. That, for most Bible-believing Christians, determines the issue. This work takes that practice seriously. It also examines the thinking of Jesus—the theology—that gave rise to that practice.

The Church of God received the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ directly from Him in oral form, and the Apostles and Jesus’ followers had time, during His earthly ministry, to be absolutely certain what He meant by each of His statements, and to work out the practical implications of His teaching on divorce and remarriage before the Gospels were written down. The earliest Gospel to be written down was probably Matthew, which, by tradition, is reputed to have been written down fifteen years after the ascension.

Out of their personal interaction with the Lord Jesus came a clear, unambiguous application that was never seriously challenged for the first 400 years by any authoritative Christian teacher/leader.1 As a result, a definite pattern of behaviour (called ‘traditions’ by Paul) characterised the whole Christian Church, throughout the Roman Empire, whereby divorce was not permitted for any reason, not even for adultery or fornication. The break with Judaism was complete and final. The Torah was just a shadow of the good things to come to God’s people, but it could neither take away sins, nor change the heart of those sacrificing live animals. This first covenant God took away in order that He could establish the second covenant—the one Jesus made with ‘many’ in its place (cf. Hebrews 10:1, 9). The old, Mosaic covenant, became obsolete the moment Jesus said, “It is finished.”

The so-called ‘Pauline Privilege’ (1 Corinthians 7:15-16) was always understood to mean that if an unbelieving partner took the initiative to separate (or get a civil divorce) from a Christian partner, then the Christian partner must stay single in the hope that the unbelieving partner would come back again, even if the unbeliever remarried in the meantime.

After the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of a new priesthood of which He is its undying, great High Priest, offering a better Covenant between God and Man,2 and replacing the external Mosaic Law (Hebrews 7:12, 18, 22; 8:6; 10:9) with an internal law written in the minds and upon the hearts of all those born-again of the Spirit of God, divorce was abolished by God completely when the Old Covenant was replaced with the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:9), there being now no grounds whatsoever for divorce, for either Christian or non-Christian, because of the one-flesh nature of the union. This was firmly understood by the Church up until the Protestant Reformation, which then branched off and introduced divorce for adultery and desertion for the first time as a teaching of the Lord Jesus (which is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith [1648]).

This work is in nine parts with eight appendices. Part 1 sets out the way in which the Reformed Churches were misled by Erasmus into branching off from the unambiguous teaching and universal practice of the Church up until the Reformation. Part 2 sets out the theological foundation of love-headships that govern all relations between men and women, between men and Jesus, and between Jesus and God, who is head over all things. Part 3 develops Part 2 to show how authority structures are used by God to establish unity and order in Christ’s Church. Part 4 gives an overview of history to show that God hates divorce. Part 5 covers Moses on divorce and remarriage. Part 6 covers Jesus on divorce and remarriage. Part 7 covers Paul on divorce and remarriage. The next two parts deal with pastoral issues. Part 8 sets out guidelines for Christian counsellors on how to handle divorce situations given that divorce cannot dissolve any lawful one-flesh union. Part 9 presents the author’s replies to questions put to him. The work ends with some concluding remarks.

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1 Gordon Wenham and William Heth have argued the case for a return to the doctrine and practice of the Early Church. According to them, in the centuries following the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world, the Church’s unanimous view was ‘no remarriage following divorce,’ and ‘divorce’ was interpreted as separation and not a dissolution of the marriage. See Gordon J. Wenham & William E. Heth, Jesus and Divorce: Updated edition (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997). The first dissenting voice appears to be Ambrosiaster (366-383).

2 About 600 years before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, God promised that He would replace the Mosaic Law with a New Law (Jer 31:31). Hebrews 8:13 points out the logic of God promising to bring in a ‘New Covenant.’ A New Covenant automatically makes the first one obsolete as regards saving those from the wrath of God who are in it (Hebrews 10:9; 7:12).
Appendix A sets out a selection of Bible translations which still support Erasmus’s false teaching on divorce and remarriage. Appendix B explains the author’s method for translating the aorist subjunctive in Matthew 19:9. Appendix C presents a critique of a view advocating the use of Old Testament laws to obtain a divorce between Christians, and between Christians and non-Christian spouses. Appendix D presents textual notes on Matthew 5:32 & 19:9. Appendix E gives Erasmus’s commentary on the divorce texts. Appendix F sets out the case for the superiority of the Majority Greek Text. Appendix G is a study of the corrections in Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69, or 8505 in von Soden’s apparatus), one of which reproduces Erasmus’s ‘exception clause’ in the margin at Matthew 19:9. Appendix H deals with the witness of Clement of Alexandria.

Sometimes it is possible to get lost in the fog of debate, so here is a kind of literary compass that you should read over a number of times to get a good grasp of where this work is taking you.

TRUTH No. 1: No civil, legal, religious, cultural, or State divorce is valid in the eyes of God. This includes all human divorces that have taken place on planet Earth since Adam and Eve sinned. Not a single one of them severed the one-flesh union of a lawful marriage. They all took place without God’s permission. They were all unilateral decisions, as they are to this day, and will be to the end of time.

TRUTH No. 2: Only God can end a lawful marriage. His only instrument is death, never divorce. The very act of getting a divorce is itself a sin if the person getting it believes it dissolves their first marriage, and it is a sin even if they never remarry after divorcing their partner.

TRUTH No. 3: All remarriages are adulterous relationships while both spouses are alive. Consequently a divorced person is still married to their first, lawful, one-flesh partner, irrespective if either or both spouses remarry. God only recognises the first marriage as a legitimate relationship.

TRUTH No. 4: Reconciliation was deliberately made impossible by God as a punishment for divorce under the Law of Moses, but it is highly desirable under Grace. Second marriages, following a divorce, must be undone (retracing the legal steps if necessary). Divorced-and-remarried persons will not enter the Kingdom of God if they do not obey Jesus’ command, “Go and sin no more,” and get out of their second marriages.

GENERAL TRUTH: Remember that all human divorces (including Moses’s) are play-acting, that is, nothing happens as far as God is concerned, so the first wife, or husband, will have to go through the charade of ‘playing the system’ to undo their bogus divorces in order to get free, and return to their first partners (if possible, otherwise they must remain unmarried to another person).

The divorce certificate has no greater value than a piece of toilet paper. God hates divorce. We underestimate the gravity of this sin to our eternal regret. Flee divorce as you would flee a remarrying. Flee the divorce court as you would flee the brothel, for both bring spiritual death to all who enter them to satisfy their passion and hard-heartedness.

Everything that follows in this work, from obscure textual discussions to fine-tuning the Christian marriage to reflect the will of God in all its glory through the doctrine of love-headships, is intended to uphold these compass truths.

The whole of the debate on divorce and remarriage boils down to these two statements, and we must choose between them. One or other of them is false.

(A) If there is no exception in Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness, then there is no exception in His teaching on divorce. (McFall’s choice)
(B) If there is an exception in Jesus’ teaching on divorce, then there is an exception in His teaching on forgiveness. (Erasmus’s choice)

Every scholar and reader of this work comes under one or other of these two statements.

A thumbnail sketch of the path taken by pro-divorce proponents is as follows:
- Matthew permits divorce for fornication (including adultery)
- Mark, Luke and Paul must give way to Matthew
- Paul permits divorce for desertion
- The Synoptic Gospels must give way to Paul
• The Synoptic Gospels and Paul can be presumed to permit remarriage following a divorce
  The result is that desertion and fornication are biblical grounds for divorce.
• Others add that the Old Testament permits the causes of divorce to be widened on the basis of
  Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Exodus 21:10, thus taking the Church back into rabbinic Judaism.

A thumbnail sketch of the path taken by anti-divorce proponents is as follows:
• Matthew rules out divorce for all causes, because fornication was a death penalty issue
• Mark and Luke agree with Matthew and rule out divorce for any cause among Romans, Greeks, and Jews
• Paul permits only separation, not divorce, for desertion
• The Synoptic Gospels and Paul agree, and do not permit divorce for fornication or desertion
• The Synoptic Gospels and Paul agree that remarriages can only follow the death of a spouse
• The admissibility of Mosaic and Rabbinic divorce discussions to modify Jesus’ absolute rejection of
  divorce is rejected on the grounds that He is the Messiah, and the new teacher of Israel
  The result is that Jesus, the Son of God, rules out divorce on any grounds, including fornication, desertion, or any other ground found in the obsolete Torah, or in the irrelevant rabbinic developments. His teaching is unique, and stands apart from all other religions (including rabbinic Judaism) and philosophies, and is vastly superior to all of them.
• Only the complete transformation of the human spirit can enable the natural man to rise to the level
  of spirituality that will equip him to embrace the teaching of Jesus on love and forgiveness, otherwise he falls back into Mosaic religion or humanism

  All remarriages after the death of a spouse are lawful.
  All remarriages after the divorce of a spouse are unlawful.

On these two statements hang the entirety of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage.
PART I. ERASMUS’S INFLUENCE ON THE DIVORCE TEXTS

1.1. WHAT GREEK TEXT DID THE REFORMERS USE TO REDISCOVER THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL?

This is a crucial question, because if the early Protestant Reformers followed a Greek text that was not the Universal (Byzantine) Text used by the Early Church, and which had been transmitted faithfully from their day up to the time of the Reformation, then the application of their core doctrine of sola scriptura (‘Scripture alone’) would become a trap, because they would latch on to a faulty copy of God’s Word and attribute to it the inspiration and infallibility that only belongs to the original text and its faithful copies, of which the Byzantine (majority) text is the purest.

It is a fact of history that the only widely available printed Greek New Testament available to the Reformers up until the printing of the Authorized Version in 1611 were Erasmus’s five editions of the Greek New Testament (continuously modified very slightly by subsequent editors). Erasmus flooded the European market with his five cheaper editions, all of which had his faulty, variant reading at Matthew 19:9. The fault was that he added an extra Greek word in Matthew 19:9 which completely altered Jesus’ teaching on divorce.

The original Greek text read: “not fornication [which was punished by death],” so that Jesus condemned every known excuse to divorce a marriage that the rabbis could think of, besides fornication, because that particular sin had a death penalty attached to it (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). The rabbis could not give ‘fornication’ as a grounds for divorce, because, they and Jesus, knew that God had decreed the death penalty for adultery.

If Jesus had in mind that some reputable rabbis were granting divorces on the grounds of adultery, which was illegal, then Jesus ruled out anything below fornication, which, for these rabbis, would have been unchallengeable grounds for the death penalty for the woman if they could have exercised it under Roman occupation in Jesus’ day (cf. John 7:53–8:11). Jesus excluded the teaching of two influential rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, both of whom (we are told) agreed that divorce could be obtained for sexual misdemeanours, such as fornication, even though this was explicitly ruled out by God.

It was harder to obtain a divorce through rabbi Shammai, who insisted (we are told) that Deuteronomy 24:1-3 referred only to sins of a sexual nature, and that a man could not divorce his wife for every trivial reason. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, handed out divorces for all sexual misdemeanours but also for ‘any other cause’ (cf. Matthew 19:3) that a husband might nominate, even something as trivial as his wife burning her husband’s dinner. (See sections 6.2., 6.4. and 5.3. below for a fuller treatment of the difference between these two rabbis and Jesus.) Of course, rabbi Hillel was not advocating anything new. This was the practice of Hebrew culture from the time they came out of Egypt under Moses’s leadership right through to Jesus’ own day and beyond His day.

3 The Roman Catholic church published the Complutensian Polyglot in 1522 in a limited and very expensive edition. Being a product of the R.C. church it was unlikely to be trusted by the Reformers.

4 Deuteronomy 24:1 has “the nakedness of a matter.” Shammai reversed the words and read it as “a matter of nakedness.” This allowed him to believe that the term ‘eruvat referred to adultery/fornication, and so in this way he defined, and so restricted, the meaning of ‘eruvat to cover just sexual sins. It was in this way that Deuteronomy 24:1 became a Trojan horse in rabbinical literature, because an unscrupulous rabbi could smuggle into 24:1 a restricted meaning that suited his scruples or doctrinal position by playing around with word order, or by exploiting the various facets of meaning that most words have.

5 Shammai transposed the Hebrew words ‘eruvat dãbãr to dãbãr ‘eruvat and so changed ‘exposure of a matter,’ to ‘a matter of exposure.’ And not a few Christian leaders and writers have been duped by him, misunderstanding Yahweh’s metaphorical use of the term ‘eruvat ‘nakedness,’ in Deut 24:1, which they have taken literally.

6 The Jewish historian, Josephus (born about the time of Jesus’ death), in his biography (Life) tells us, without any regret, “About this time I put away my wife, who had borne me three children, not being pleased with her manners.” The grounds for his divorce constituted an ‘eruvat dãbãr, so no change there since the time of Moses. He also tells us that divorce was the prerogative of the husband only; the wife had no authority to divorce her husband (Antiq. Bk 15, §259; cf. Mishnah, Gitín ix. i-3). It was a male-dominated, one-way system that went right back to Deuteronomy 24:1-3, so no change there since the time of Moses. Rabbi Akiba (born about 150 years after the death of Jesus) said that a man could divorce his wife if he found a younger woman, which he based on a literal reading of Deut 24:1,
Now Hillel and Shammai had no authority to alter God’s law. God decreed the death penalty for adultery, and for women who were not virgins on their wedding day, and for other sexual misdemeanours, which all came under the general term ‘fornication.’ These rabbis were usurpers. If Jesus agreed with these rabbis to alter God’s law, and introduce divorce for fornication, then He is as guilty as they are in departing from God’s law. If Jesus is a law-breaker then He is a sinner like Hillel and Shammai. If He is a sinner then He cannot die for the sins of others; He can only die for His own sins.

It is imperative that conservative-evangelical scholars defend the sinlessness of Jesus in fulfilling the Law of God, because only by a perfect keeping of the Law of God could Jesus obtain the righteousness demanded by God, and it is this perfect righteousness that becomes the possession of all who become the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Erasmus turned Jesus’ teaching on its head, because his new Greek text read: “except for fornication.” This alteration had Jesus agreeing with Hillel and Shammai that fornication was a legitimate grounds for divorce in His Church. This was a humanist response to a social evil in Erasmus’s day. In his opinion, the death penalty was too harsh a punishment to inflict on the poorer classes, and since he believed that God sanctioned divorce as an institution, he assumed that a compassionate Jesus would allow divorce in the case of fornication/adultery.

Sadly, many Christians today prefer to follow the commonsense opinion of Erasmus and believe that a compassionate Jesus would allow divorce in the case of fornication, adultery, cruelty, and desertion. These Christians will latch on to any text or pretext that will support their private instinct of what is ‘sensible’ and appropriate in the eyes of the man of the world.

Like Shammai and Hillel, and like Erasmus, God’s standard is judged to be too high, by these Christians. They let all Christians off the hook by teaching that Jesus is being unrealistic, and an idealist, in expecting every marriage to be for life. We are told that His feet are not on the ground, that He does not understand human nature. We are told He never married, so what would He know about the stresses and strains that wives have to endure? In this way, these Christians lay aside Jesus’ teaching as impracticable, and fall back on the rabbis, and their commonsense approach to marital problems and the irretrievable breakdown of some marriages.

In comparison to Erasmus, Jesus is a hard man; Erasmus is a gentle man. Jesus is unbending; Erasmus is flexible. Jesus is intolerant; Erasmus is tolerant. Jesus is dogmatic; Erasmus is open-minded. Jesus is indifferent; but Erasmus is very compassionate. Erasmus appeals strongly to the instincts of the unregenerate Christian; Jesus appeals strongly to the renewed mind of the regenerate Christian.

Divorce for adultery was never God’s will from the beginning. Jesus claimed that He came to fulfil every jot and tittle of the Law, and not to do away with it, or alter it, until He had fulfilled it. Only after He had kept the law fully and obtained the righteousness that comes from keeping it perfectly was it done away with, as a means of obtaining the righteousness that God demanded of every Jew.

When Jesus, therefore, ruled out sexual misdemeanours as grounds for divorce among His followers, He thereby condemned Hillel and Shammai’s interference and alteration of His Father’s law, if this is the backdrop to the Pharisees’ question in Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:3. Jesus’ condemnation of divorce for non-fornication issues7 (and we can envisage Him wagging His finger at them) set His divine teaching apart from their human, commonsense compromises. In Jesus’ Kingdom, forgiveness is the rule, even the forgiveness of the sin of adultery and fornication. There is no exception clause in Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness. Jesus said, if you forgive men their trespasses then His Father would forgive them their trespasses. There is no exceptive clause in this statement.

1.2. WHERE DID ERASMUS GET HIS FAULTY TEXT FROM?

7 Jesus’ statement, ‘not over fornication’ is a content-identity phrase, and means the same as ‘for all non-capital offences.’ This blanket ban ruled out divorce for any cause, because, according to the Law, the sin of fornication was covered by the death penalty. The Pharisees asked a legal question, and Jesus gave them a legal reply, which they hadn’t bargained for! We could re-word Jesus’ legal argument as, “whoever divorces his wife for a non-capital offence and marries another commits adultery.”
There is a very late Greek manuscript, Codex Leicestrensis (Caesarean Text), dated to the 15th century, which has in its margin a correction to its own faulty main text at Matthew 19:9. The faulty main text consisted of the exemption clause in Matthew 5:32 being imported into Matthew 19:9 where it replaced the so-called exception clause in that verse. However, in trying to restore the original clause of Matthew 19:9 in the margin, a later owner or collator of the codex added the small Greek word ei (‘if’) before the negative mh (‘not’) to change the text to read ‘except’ (in Greek ei before mh becomes ‘except’). It has been generally assumed that Erasmus consulted this codex during his stay in Cambridge, England, between 1511 and 1514. The question is, Did Erasmus see this marginal reading and incorporate it into his first edition, or, did someone else use Erasmus’s printed text (or a later edition of it) to insert it into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69)? The latter is the case, as I shall show below.

Who was the first to add ei (‘if’) to the inspired Word of God? The answer is clearly Erasmus himself. To date there is not a single, extant Greek manuscript that contains the word ei in its main text at Matthew 19:9. Its only appearance to date is in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis. It has always been assumed by textual scholars that Erasmus saw the marginal reading in Codex Leicestrensis and that he copied it from there into his main text. This assumption was based on the belief that the marginal reading pre-dated Erasmus’s 1516 edition.

Scholars should have left open the possibility that the marginal correction in Codex Leicestrensis was copied from Erasmus’s printed text (or a later edition of it) into Codex Leicestrensis, and not the other way round. However, to prove this either way, it would have been necessary for them to examine every marginal correction to see how many are found only in Erasmus’s printed text and in the margin of the codex. This work was never carried out until the author did so.

There are 154 corrections by the second corrector in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis, and the writing of the codex can be dated to around 1468. Now if Erasmus saw this codex about 1513 this leaves just about 50 years in which someone could have inserted these 154 corrections. Unfortunately, we do not have a full list of the owners of the codex during this period. It is likely that it was in the possession of the monks of Greyfriars Abbey just outside Cambridge when Erasmus saw it.

What apparently Erasmus did find as he travelled around Europe were manuscripts, such as those reflecting the text of Family 1 and Family 13, which imported the exemption clause of Matthew 5:32 into 19:9. Now 5:32 is a context-specific exemption clause. The mischief was caused by importing it into 19:9, where it did not belong, and was out of context. This particular variant reading may have led Erasmus astray, plus Jerome’s ambiguous Vulgate translation.

1.3. HOW DID THE FAULTY READING GET INTO THE REFORMERS’ BIBLES?

This we do know. It was through Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), the Dutch humanist. He was not a Reformed Christian by any means. He was a priest in the Roman Catholic Church and was even offered a cardinal’s hat in the last years of his life. But, like the Reformers, he became disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on a number of issues, one of which was their insistence that Jesus did not permit divorce or remarriage. The Roman Catholic taught that:

The bond of marriage cannot be dissolved on account of the adultery of either party; and that neither, not even the innocent, who has not given cause for the separation, can, while the other party lives, contract another marriage; and that adultery is committed by the husband

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8 Appendix G is given over to a study of the marginal corrections in this manuscript.

9 Both families of mss belong to the Caesarean text-type. Erasmus had no acquaintance with codex Vaticanus (Egyptian text-type) when he drew up his first edition in 1516. When he became acquainted with it later on, he thoroughly despised it, and refused to admit any of its non-Byzantine readings (not that he called them that) into his text. He made one exception in a later edition where he thought ‘Clauda’ might be changed to ‘Cauda’ in Acts 27:16, which spelling is found only in Vaticanus (and marked with one of Supelveda’s umlauts).

10 This error is found mainly in the Caesarean Text (family 1 and family 13), to which Codex Leicestrensis belongs (MS 69 is an f13 text), but also in codex Vaticanus.

who divorces his wife and marries another, and by the wife who divorces her husband and marries another.\footnote{12 Council of Trent. See Hector Davies Morgan, The Doctrine and Law of Marriage (2 vols; Oxford: W. Baxter, 1826), Vol. II. 207-08. The Reformers held that marriage was dissolved by adultery and by wilful desertion, and Erasmus was in full agreement with these causes.}

Erasmus was extremely angry at this insensitive dogmatic stance of his church over this teaching. He believed that divorce was justified in the case of adultery,\footnote{13 See Erika Rummel, Paraphrase on Mark. Volume 48 of the Collected Works of Erasmus (Robert D. Sider, Gen. ed.; Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 122-23; Dean Simpson, Paraphrase on Matthew. Volume 45 of the Collected Works of Erasmus (Robert D. Sider, Gen. ed.; Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 104-105; 269.} so when he came to produce the first published edition of the Greek New Testament, he deliberately chose the small Greek word \(\epsilon\iota\) (\(\epsilon\iota\)) and inserted it before \(\upsilon \eta \) (\(\upsilon \eta\)) in Matthew 19:9 to allow divorce for adultery, despite the fact that the three Gospel manuscripts which he used did not contain the Greek word \(\epsilon\iota\).

It is impossible to do any theology in the New Testament without encountering textual variants, and this invariably leads to a consideration of the four main textual families. The four main families are the Byzantine, Caesarean, Egyptian and Western. The Caesarean is an off-shoot of the Byzantine (Majority) Text, and the Western is an eclectic text made up of the Egyptian (Minority) Text and the Caesarean Text. So, basically, there are two main texts, the majority Byzantine text, and the minority Egyptian Text. (See Appendix F for the case for the superiority of the Majority Text.)

We can illustrate the discrepancies between the Majority and the Minority texts by examining the English translations of Matthew 19:9.

1.3.1. The English translation of the two main Greek texts of Matthew 19:9

There is a debate going on between supporters of the Nestle-Aland Greek text of the New Testament, which represents the minority Egyptian text, and the Majority Greek Text which lies behind the Textus Receptus of the Authorized Version. When Westcott & Hort drew up their minority text they relied mainly on one Egyptian manuscript, Codex Vaticanus. Later, this was given some support when Codex Sinaiticus was discovered. Nevertheless, the Westcott-Hort/Nestle-Aland text is based on just two manuscripts and fragments of papyri which survived in the dry condition of Egypt. Vaticanus and Sinaiticus differ from each other in thousands of places (see Appx. F), and both were ‘dead’ manuscripts, having never been copied. The Majority (Byzantine) Text, on the other hand, has been the text in continuous ‘live’ use in the Church universal. There are over 5,500 manuscripts supporting its text in the Gospels. Some idea of the gulf between these two competing texts can be seen in their translation of Matthew 19:9.

**Majority Greek Text** (Byzantine) Matthew 19:9: Now I say to you that whoever shall dismiss his wife—not over fornication—and shall marry another, he commits adultery.\footnote{14 In effect, Jesus is saying, “for every cause which is not covered by the death penalty.” The sin of fornication/adultery was deliberately chosen by God to be punished by death, and only by death. Divorce was never an option, and it is not included in Deuteronomy 24:4, which covered only non-capital causes. Hence Jesus used the phrase ‘not over fornication’ to encompass all causes not involving the death penalty, whereby men divorced their wives. The Jews understood the will of God, that all adulterers were to be killed. It was an act of disobedience not to carry out this law. It was even worse if they permitted adulterers to remarry, because then they would multiply the sin of adultery.} And the one who marries one divorced commits adultery.\footnote{15 Up to this point, Codex Sinaiticus supports the Majority Text. It has omitted the last part of this verse as does Bezae and Leicestrensis, but Vaticanus and the Caesarean Text agree with the Majority Text at this point.}

**Minority Greek Text** (Vaticanus, Bezae, Leicestrensis) Matthew 19:9: Now I say to you, whoever shall dismiss his wife—apart from the matter of fornication, he makes her to commit adultery. And whoever shall marry one dismissed, he commits adultery.

\footnote{16 This can be paraphrased as: “Now I say to you that who, for example, divorced his wife—not on the grounds of any infidelity on her part, which would have been punished by death—and married another woman, he is an adulterer.” (See Appendix B.)}
Vaticanus and Bezae agree to make Matthew 19:9 conform to Matthew 5:32, and by doing so they removed any suggestion that a man could get a divorce on the grounds of fornication. Note that the underlined words: “apart from the matter of fornication, he makes her to commit adultery” is a translation of the text of Matthew 5:32, which was carelessly (or deliberately, due to a misunderstanding) imported into Matthew 19:9, where it replaced the original text, which read as the Majority Text does: “not over fornication.” This mistake is found in the Caesarean Text, Codex Leicestrensis, and in Vaticanus (but not in Sinaiticus, which supports the Majority Text at this point).

However, the Nestle-Aland Greek text agrees with the Majority Text translation as far as the first occurrence of the words ‘commits adultery.’ Thus the Nestle-Aland reads: “Now I say to you that whoever shall dismiss his wife—not over fornication—and shall marry another, he commits adultery.” However, following Sinaiticus, it omits the next sentence, “And whoever shall marry one dismissed, he commits adultery” due to a copying error known as homoioteleuthon (meaning, ‘same ending’), or, more likely, because the sentence was redundant, and the elimination of redundancies is a feature of the Egyptian text-type. However, the omitted sentence is present in Codex Vaticanus, which supports the Majority Text at this point.

In Codex Leicestrensis, a later owner of the codex (post-1658, see below), realising there was a mistake in the main Greek text of Matthew 19:9, attempted to put the correct Greek reading for Matthew 19:9 in the margin, opposite the place where the blunder occurred in the main text (see the scans below). He used a printed text that had accepted Erasmus’s addition, as all editions did right up until Albert Bengel in 1734. The only editions in the Textus Receptus tradition to reject Erasmus’s addition were J. J. Griesbach (1777) and C. F. Matthaei (1788).

Of course, the Roman Catholic Complutensian Polyglot (CP)17 did not have Erasmus’s addition at Matthew 19:9, and two editors, Arias Montanus (1583) and Joseph Scaliger (1620), preferred to follow the CP text. S. P. Tregelles, in 1834, using his evidence-based Greek text, was the first, modern textual scholar to reject the Erasmian addition; and every subsequent, academic edition, followed his lead. But by 1834 the damage to the institution of marriage had been done, and Protestant churches were committed in the sixteenth century to the institution of divorce as a way to end broken marriages. We would expect divorce to be institutionalised in the world, where Satan rules, but not in Christ’s Church, where His teaching should prevail.

Erasmus altered Jerome’s Latin text to suit his teaching on divorce

Not content with changing the Greek text, Erasmus also changed the Latin Vulgate, which was the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church from the time of Jerome (c. AD 420).


By changing ‘fornicationem’ to ‘stuprum,’ Erasmus widened his exeptive clause from the specific sin of fornication, to the general, catch-all phrase of anything that gives ground for ‘dishonour, disgrace, defilement, unchastity, debauchery, lewdness, and violation,’18 all of which are

17 The Complutensian Polyglot had been completed in 1514, two years before Erasmus issued his first, much cheaper edition. However, the pope delayed the release of the Greek New Testament until 1520 (actual release was in 1522), which was unfortunate, because it allowed Erasmus to flood the market with his faulty Greek editions of his own New Testament. In any case, it is unlikely that the RC church would have reissued a cheaper version.

18 The Latin could have used excepta ‘except’ here in place of nisi, but it didn’t. The Jerusalem Bible (1968) reads: “Now I say this to you: the man who divorces his wife—I am not speaking of fornication—and marries another, is guilty of adultery.” This is a loose paraphrase. If the intention of the translation was to isolate fornication as not being a grounds for divorce, then this would fit Jesus’ teaching. But others could interpret the paraphrase to mean that fornication was a ground for divorce, which appears to be the way Erasmus preferred to read his Vulgate text, and so he brought the Greek into line with the Latin text by the addition of ei.

19 This new latitude was probably an attempt to draw on the latitude given by Moses, (but not by God) in Deut 24:1-3, to allow husbands to divorce their wives ‘for every cause,’ not just fornication (see Matthew 19:3). Deut. 24:1-4 was abolished after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Divorce is incompatible with the ‘new heart and the new spirit,’ consequently ‘hardness of heart’
the meanings given to *stuprum* in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Suddenly, Erasmus offered divorce not just on sexual grounds (i.e., for fornication), but for any cause that gave rise to dishonour or disgrace, which may not necessarily be sexual, such as abuse, neglect, desertion, or anything that a partner feels angry about. This brought Erasmus’s teaching into perfect alignment with the teaching of rabbi Hillel (who, apparently, used Deut 24:1-3 and Exod 21:1-10 as his base texts).20

The Reformers did not spot the addition made by Erasmus, because handwritten copies of the Greek New Testament were very rare in those days. Everyone took for granted that Erasmus had been faithful to the handwritten Greek copies that he had used to produce the first published edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. He produced five editions of his text (in 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, the last being in 1535, the year before he died). In none of them did he correct his mistake at Matthew 19:9, even though by 1535 he had become aware of, and had consulted, many more manuscripts, including the Complutensian Polyglot, which was published by Erasmus’s own church in 1520. Erasmus used it to make about one hundred corrections in his third edition.

Erasmus could not have failed to note that the Complutensian edition did not have his addition of *et*, but he deliberately ignored it, because Jerome’s Vulgate seemed to support his view. Unfortunately, only 600 expensive, but beautifully bound copies of the Complutensian were published in Spain, and a consignment of these went down with the ship carrying them to Italy. By the time the Complutensian was sold out in 1522, Erasmus says that he had sold 3,300 copies of his first two editions by 1522, and there was a demand for a third edition.21

*The Reformers were a victim of their own doctrine of Scripture*

What ensured that Erasmus’s faulty addition would not be removed was the aura of sanctity that was given to the *Greek original*. The sanctity with which the Reformers endowed Erasmus’s Greek New Testament is understandable, and with his text (and fresh Latin translation) they compared every doctrine of the Roman Catholic church to see if it agreed with Scripture. What did not agree with the teachings of their Greek text they threw out as not obligatory on any Christian.

The work of examining the truth of Scripture, as practised by the Roman Catholic church, could only be done against the Greek text that Erasmus had bequeathed to the anti-Catholic movement in Europe, and it was out of his Greek text that the great Reformation Confessions of Faith were drawn up, resulting in the fatal error of departing from the universal teaching of the Apostolic Church on the question of divorce and remarriage.

The mistake of the Reformers was not discovered, so that once their new, and unbiblical, doctrine of divorce had been set in stone in their Confessions of Faith, it would have resulted in a loss of face for the Reformation Churches to have to acknowledge that they had been duped by the humanist Erasmus into departing from this particular doctrine of the Early Church. It would have been too humiliating for the Reformers to have to apologise to the Roman Catholic church for having departed from the Truth, so the issue was silently swept under the carpet. It appears to be a case of Disraeli’s advice, ‘Never retract, never explain, never apologise.’

The Council of Trent declared, ‘The bond of matrimony cannot be dissolved ... and even the innocent one ... cannot contract another marriage during the lifetime of the other’ (Can. VII, quoted from Hastings, 1935:275).22

Joshua was duped by the Gibeonites, and the inspired author put the blame for this on Joshua and his elders because “they asked not counsel at the mouth of God” (Josh 9:14). The Bereans are commended for not taking on trust the teaching of the apostle Paul. They took the precaution of comparing his teaching with the inspired word of God (Acts 17:11). The lesson God would teach any church leader is that he should make doubly sure that any movement away from what the Apostles taught and practised is not the result of being duped or misled.

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20 Erasmus changed his view on the causes of divorce between 1516 (*fornicationem*) and 1519 (*stuprum*). *Stuprum* covers non-sexual misdemeanours in addition to sexual ones. From 1519 onwards he uses *stuprum*.

21 According to J. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall 1973, p. 114) he has no reference that either Shammai or Hillel ever used Exod 21 to argue for divorce for neglect. It would seem that they found enough reasons in the two grounds of (A) indecency, and (B) hate, to get all the excuses they needed to obtain a divorce.


Because the new Reformation doctrine on divorce and remarriage had been settled on the basis of Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, no future editor or reviser could, or would, remove Erasmus’s addition. To this day, the Reformation Churches have covered their eyes and have refused to believe that they were duped by Erasmus’s deliberate alteration of the Greek text. See Appendix A below for a list of versions still supporting Erasmus’s false doctrine, despite the fact that these same English versions have rejected his underlying Greek text.

It was not the work of pioneering, conservative evangelicals, desiring to get back to the purest form of the original autograph texts, that finally got rid of Erasmus’s deliberate addition to Matthew 19:9. Rather, it was left to the thorough-going, scrutiny of the evidence of the manuscripts by liberals and radicals to get rid of it.

Now while it was left to liberals, radicals, and humanists to discover and uncover Erasmus’s understandable mistake, and while all shades of non-evangelical textual scholars are now in agreement in not including the Erasmian addition in any modern critical edition of the Greek New Testament since 1834 (Tregelles), a strange thing has occurred in English translations, namely, not a single, major English translation has departed from Tyndale’s translation of Matthew 19:9, which accurately reflected Erasmus’s opinion of what he thought Scripture taught. Every modern English translation retains Erasmus’s doctrine while at the same time rejecting his Greek text. What a strange, schizophrenic situation!

While there has been a slight shift among conservative evangelical scholars engaged in textual criticism to recognise the damage that Erasmus did, and to remove his addition, there has been no movement at all to remove the new teaching that his addition brought into existence in any major English translation. The English Standard Version (2001) is claimed to be an ‘evangelical translation’ but it translates Matthew 19:9 as: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” The term ‘except’ is taken directly from Erasmus’s εἰ μὴ (εἰ μὴ) and is not a translation of the two critical editions, namely the United Bible Societies Greek text and the Nestle-Aland 28th edition (2012). Both of these Greek New Testaments reject Erasmus’s addition, as does the Majority (Universal) Text.

The ESV translation would have been a financial disaster for the publisher if it had removed Erasmus’s exeptive clause and replaced it with the content-identity clause that Jesus used. No modern translation dare translate Matthew 19:9 according to the Greek text of the two critical editions and the two published Majority Texts by Hodges & Farstad,24 and Robinson & Pierpont.25 To do so would upset thousands of Christians who have remarried while their spouses were still alive, not to mention translators who are hardly likely to put their remarriage in the context of adultery.26 Such translators will be shielded by other members of the same translation committee who have not remarried, so as not to offend them. And so the compromise is perpetuated in every modern language translation to date. It is time for evangelicals to take their stand and not offend their Lord by persistently mistranslating His teaching as understood by the Apostles and the Early Church.

The reason for this refusal to depart from Erasmus’s humanist doctrine is that due to the confessional stand of the Reformation Churches, divorce and remarriage was introduced for the first time in the sixteenth century and it became so popular among the masses, that no major denominational church today can repeal it, and go back to the original teaching of the church as retained by the Roman Catholic church to the present day.

Indeed, individual, independent churches today, even though many of them recognise that none of our present English translations is an accurate translation of any of the latest scholarly Greek editions of the New Testament (I include here the Majority and the Minority27 Greek texts, which are united on this textual issue) in respect of Matthew 19:9, they dare not preach against the Reformed/Erasmian teaching on divorce and remarriage. It is convenient to compromise the Truth and go along with the secular, ‘commonsense’ majority, because there may be financial implications and repercussions if they depart from the herd.

It is time for conservative evangelicals to acknowledge that the Reformers were deceived by Erasmus and to return to Jesus’ teaching on the subject. This is one clear instance where the Roman

26 Unfortunately, some well known Christian leaders are in this category such as Derek Prince, John Hage, Robert Schuler jr, Richard Roberts (Oral Roberts’ son), Hal Lindsay, and Joyce Meyer.
27 For example, the United Bible Society’s Greek New Testament, or the Nestle-Aland editions. These represent the minority Egyptian Text.
Catholic church retained continuity with the Early Church and where the majority of all Reformed Churches have branched off into error.

The implications of a return to the Early Church teaching on divorce and remarriage will have serious social implications throughout every nation. In England, for instance, it will result in the true Church of God having to acknowledge that the heir to the throne, Prince Charles, is living in an adulterous relationship with his second ‘wife,’ whose husband was still alive when he married her. The true Church would never have got involved in his marriage by giving it legitimacy through its Service of Blessing, with the Monarch present. If the Church had recognised that he was not in a God-pleasing relationship with a divorced woman, and had refused to give him its blessing, its correct action would have been denounced by the entire nation virtually, so it was expedient to bow the knee and buckle under the perceived political and social uproar that would have followed such a stand. As a result, the Church of England has taken a further, downward lurch into its own grave.

1.4. WHAT EVIDENCE HAD ERASMUS TO MAKE HIS ADDITION TO THE TEXT?

The answer is, none. We have over 5000 manuscripts of the New Testament today and over 2000 lectionary texts (viz., texts divided up for weekly and festival readings). Erasmus had a total of only seven manuscripts, and not one of them contained the whole of the New Testament. Three of them contained the Gospels, but in none of them does the small Greek word εἰ appear in the text at Matthew 19:9. It would appear that Erasmus deliberately inserted the addition on his own authority, or else he was influenced by Jerome’s Latin translation and decided to give it a Greek backing.

I give here some background to the emergence of Erasmus’ editions, because printing the Greek text of the New Testament was not high on the list of most wanted books when he was around.

Before the first Greek New Testament was printed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, more than one hundred editions of the Latin Bible were published, at least three editions of the Hebrew Old Testament, several of the Greek Psalter, and many editions of the entire Bible in German, French, Italian, and other languages. The Church, in this pre-Reformation era, was satisfied with translations.

The honour of printing the first Greek New Testament goes to Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1437-1517), the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, Spain. The New Testament was completed on 10 January 1514, and the final volume on 15 July, 1517, but Pope Leo X did not authorise its publication until 28 March 1520, when the manuscripts lent by the Vatican had been returned, and it does not appear to have entered the public domain until 1522. It did not use Codex Vaticanus.

Erasmus (1466-1536), a well-known humanist, but still loyal to the Roman Catholic church, was responsible for editing the Greek text that lies behind the Textus Receptus. He based his edition on seven (possibly eight) manuscripts.28

We have to distinguish at least three classes of MSS according to the use Erasmus made of them: (1) manuscripts used as the Greek base text for the first edition in 1516, as well as for those used for minor corrections of it; (2) manuscripts used to correct the Greek text in later editions; (3) manuscripts used for text-critical discussion in his Annotations.

In what follows, the manuscript numbers in parentheses are according to the Gregory-Aland numbering system.29 Erasmus used the following manuscripts:

Manuscript 69 (eap29) XV cent., Codex Leicestrensis. It had been assumed by scholars that Erasmus had consulted this MS during his stay in Cambridge University (England) between 1511 and 1514, and that he had got the text of his ‘exceptional clause’ of Matthew 19:9 from the margin of this manuscript. He very likely did consult this manuscript, which he mentions in his Annotations, but he did not see this marginal correction at that time, because it was inserted later. See section 1.5. Marginal Corrections in Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69).

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29 See Kurt Aland, Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter; 2nd ed. 1994).
30 The standard sigla for the contents of a MS is as follows: e = Gospels; a = Acts; c = Catholic or General Epistles (i.e., the epistles of Peter, James, Jude and John); p = Paul’s writings (including Hebrews); and r = Book of Revelation.
Manuscript 1 (eap) XII cent., Basle, Univ. Bibl., shelf mark A. N. IV. 2: little used.
Manuscript 1 (r) (2814), XII cent., Codex Reuchlini – Augsburg, Univ. Bibl., Cod. I.1.4.1: the only MS Erasmus had for the Book of Revelation; this MS served as the printer’s copy.
Manuscript 2 (e) (2), XI/XII cent., Basle, Univ. Bibl., A. N. IV. 1: this MS served as the printer’s copy.
Manuscript 2 (ap) (2815), XII cent., Codex Amerbachorum, Basel, Univ. Bibl., A.N.IV.4: this MS served as the printer’s copy.

Besides these seven MSS, Henk de Jonge lists an eighth used by Erasmus, namely MS 817, Basle, Univ. Bibl., A. III. 15: a 15th century copy of the Gospels. This MS was consulted for corrections (it is in fact a Gospel text with commentary by Theophylactus—Erasmus’s “Vulgaris”). All but one of Erasmus’s Greek MSS are now found in the Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität, Basel, Switzerland. The exception is MS 1 (r) (2814) of Revelation, which is in Augsburg, Germany.

The standard introductions (e.g., Metzger, Aland) mention the MSS used by Erasmus, but only one of these has been described and identified, MS 2 in the University Library, Basle (e.g., Metzger, p. 99; Plate XV; Aland, p. 4-5).

Other MSS used by Erasmus later on were:

- MS 3 (eap) Vienna, National bibliothek, Suppl. gr. 52. This MS was consulted for the 2nd ed. 1519. A manuscript from the Agnietenberg monastery, Zwolle (unidentified?). It was consulted for the 2nd edition.
- MS 61 (eapp) (Brittanicus or Montfortianus) (Dublin, Trinity College, A 4.21). The MS was said to be produced to put pressure on Erasmus to include the Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7) in his Greek New Testament, which he from the 3rd ed. 1522 onwards.
- MS 02 (B) (Codex Vaticanus). Readings (received from Bombasio and Sepulveda) are cited in the Annotations Editions – Aldine edition (1518), and consulted for the 3rd ed.

The Complutensian Polyglot. This was used in later editions (for the 4th and 5th eds) esp. for the Book of Revelation 22:16-21.

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31 This MS was deposited in the Dominican monastery near Basel a century before Erasmus used it. Very little else is known about its origin.
34 Erasmus borrowed this MS from Reuchlin. It was then lost until it was found in 1861 by Franz Delitzsch in the library of the princely house of Oettingen-Wallerstein. See his Handschriftliche Funde (2 vols.; Leipzig: Dörfling und Franke, 1861-1862). When Erasmus used it, he had no final leaf (containing the last six verses) so he translated the Latin back into Greek.
35 See also C. C. Tarelli, “Erasmus’ Manuscripts of the Gospels,” JThS 44 (1943), pp. 155-162; a brief supplement appeared in the same journal, 48 (1947), pp. 207-208. Tarelli specifies 5 MSS., all VIII cent. and later. They are MSS 1 (eap; XII), 2 (e), 2 (ap; XII), and E (07; ep; VIII for e & IX-X for p); he suggested that “Delta” (Codex Sangallensis [037]; IX cent.) might also have been consulted. MS 4 (ap; XV cent.) is also listed as one used by Erasmus. R. Swanson made a full collation of this manuscript in his series. See in particular, Reuben Swanson, New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Matthew (Pasadena CA: William Carey International University Press, 1995).
36 For some further literature on Erasmus and his Greek MSS see Henk Jan de Jonge, “Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum,” in Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 56 (1980), pp. 381-389 (p. 385: “The real reason which induced Erasmus to include the Comma Johanneum was... his care for his good name and for the success of his Novum Testamentum.”]. Jean Hadot, “La critique textuelle dans l’édition du Nouveau Testament d’Erasme,” in Colloquia Erasmiana Tauronensia, 1972, pp. 749-760 (p. 760: “Si l’on veut rester objectif, il faut situer l’oeuvre d’Erasme dans son cadre.”]. K. W. Clark, “Observations on the Erasman Notes in Codex 2,” in Studia Evangelica, Berlin 1959, pp. 749-756 (p. 752: “We should not attribute to Erasmus the creation of a ‘received text,’ but only the transmission from a manuscript text already commonly received to a printed form in which this text would continue to prevail for three centuries more.”]. See also Bill Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal 1 (Spring 1996) available at <http://www.dbts.edu/journal.html>
Reuben Swanson lists only the TR itself in support of Erasmus’s addition of εἰ in Matthew 19:9.37 This is no surprise. Erasmus appears to have used just seven manuscripts to compile the New Testament Greek text, only three of which contained the Gospels. They are MS 1 (12th cent.), MS 2 (12th cent.), MS 69 or Codex Leicestrensium (15th cent.), and possibly MS 817 (15th cent.). Swanson has collated the first three MSS, but he does not give any of them in support of the TR text. Rather, they support the omission of εἰ before μὴ in Matthew 19:9. However, Tischendorf notes that MS 69* (the asterisk indicates the first hand of the MS) reads parektos logou pornei, and a corrector (2nd hand) has added εἰ μὴ επὶ τὸ πόρευον in the margin. What has happened here is that the scribe of MS 69 (or in an earlier copy) has transferred parektos logou pornei from Matthew 5:32 into 19:9 by mistake,38 and the corrector has rightly tried to change it back to the original reading, but in so doing, he was copying the text of John Fell (1675) into the margin. It will be shown below that the marginal correction is post-Erasmus, and so Erasmus did not get his text from the margin of Codex Leicestrensium.

1.4.1. Tischendorf’s meagre evidence in support of Erasmus’s Greek text

Constantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874) gives the following evidence in support of εἰ μὴ.39 I give his textual apparatus as printed.

As printed:

item c (Gb Sz) praemisso εἰ cum minisc pauc Bas4th (Clem — libere, et quaecitur quorum spectet—352 χωρίς λογου πορν. εἰ50th πλὴν εἰ μὴ επὶ λογω πορν.).

Here is a translation and explanation of the evidence for the non-specialist.

item c = Erasmus’s editions,40 and all printed editions up to the Elzevir’s edition of 1624 (which would include the 1550 edition by Robert Stephens41).

(= Gb Sz) = the printed texts of Griesbach and Scholz (1827)

praemisso εἰ = prefix εἰ
cum minusc pauc = with a few minuscules42 Bas4th is a reference to Basil the Great (Basilius Magnus), bishop of Caesarea (AD 329-379), and “eth” (ethica) is a reference to Moralia in volume 2, pp. 230-323, Operum eius editionem Benedictinam curavit Iulianus Garnerius (3 vols; Paris, 1721-1730).

Clem532 is a reference to Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens Alexandrinus, fl. AD 189-215) and possibly to the edition of his work by Iohannis Potterus (Oxonii, 1715).43

532 χωρίς λογου πορν. = “without (the) matter of fornication.” Clement has this text in Potter’s edition, page 532.44 This Greek text is a modified form of Matthew 5:32.

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38 The same mistake was made by Bp.25D f13 (f13 includes MS 69) and part of f1.
40 Tyndale followed the second (1519) and third (1522) editions of Erasmus’s Greek text. It should be noted that the Complutensian Greek NT, which pre-dated Erasmus’s edition but published later than his, does not have εἰ, which was noted by Albert Bengel (Io. Alberti Bengelii, Apparatus Criticus ad Novum Testamentum, 2nd ed., prepared by Philippo Davide Burkio [Tubingae, 1763], p. 127).
41 This was published by F. H. A. Scrivener, Η ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΦΗΚΗ Νοευμ Τεσταμένου Στέφανον Α.Δ. 1550 (Cantabrigiae: Deighton, Bell et filii, 1877).
42 F. H. A. Scrivener, The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Text followed in The Authorised Version together with the Variations adopted in The Revised Version (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1881). Scrivener believed that Beza’s fifth edition of 1598 was the Greek Text followed most closely (but not faithfully) by the Authorised Version Committee (Preface, vii). It follows Erasmus’s text.
43 Albert Bengel has “cum pauculis mss” = with a few mss (Io. Alberti Bengelii, Apparatus Criticus ad Novum Testamentum, 2nd ed., prepared by Philippo Davide Burkio [Tubingae, 1763], p. 127).
44 Joannes Potterus (Bishop of Oxford), ΚΑΛΗΜΕΝΤΟΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΩΣ ΤΑ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΟΜΕΝΑ. CLEMENSIS ALEXANDRINÆ OPERA QUAE EXTANT (2 vols.; Oxonii, 1715).
45 The actual page is 533 in Joannes Potterus (Bishop of Oxford), ΚΑΛΗΜΕΝΤΟΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΩΣ ΤΑ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΟΜΕΝΑ. CLEMENSIS ALEXANDRINÆ OPERA QUAE EXTANT (2 vols.; Oxonii, 1715), vol. 1. 532-533.
et 506 πλὴν εἰ μὴ επὶ λογοὶ πορνής = “besides except on account of (the) matter of fornication.” Clement’s text can be found in Potter’s edition, page 506. This creative combination (or paraphrase) of 19:9 and 5:32 is unique to Clement.

1.4.2. Tregelles’s meagre evidence in support of Erasmus’s Greek text

S. P. Tregelles almost agrees with Tischendorf’s printed evidence. Note that 69 is the number given to Codex Leicestrensis. His evidence reads as printed:46

praem. εἰ κ. 69*. mg. (εἰ μὴ επὶ λογοὶ πορν. Clem. 506.)

Explanation of the evidence:

praem. εἰ = prefix εἰ (before μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας)
κ. = the common Greek Text (presumably all printed editions up to the Elzevir’s edition of 1624) has εἰ before μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας.
69*. mg. = MS 69 [Codex Leicestrensis] and a second hand (2nd corrector. 1st corrector is the original scribe) added: εἰ μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας in the margin. 69* (*=original text) read the text of Matthew 5:32, which MS B also has here, but not Sinaiticus, which agrees with the Byzantine Text here.
εἰ μὴ επὶ λογοὶ πορν. Clem. 506 = “except on account of (the) matter of fornication.” Tregelles has miss quoted what Clement actually wrote. Clement wrote πλὴν εἰ μὴ επὶ λογοὶ πορνεῖας, as printed by Iohannis Potterus (Oxford, 1715). Both Tischendorf and Tregelles failed to notice that Clement altered πορνεῖα (dat.) to πορνείας (gen.). See Appendix H for a fuller treatment of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) on the so-called exception clauses.

Now, given that Erasmus was a humanist, and he believed that the Matthean exceptive clause in 19:9 permitted divorce (dissolution of the bond and freedom to remarry) in cases of adultery, one wonders if his text was affected by his personal view on divorce and remarriage. He published his view on divorce in his Annotationes in the same year that he published the second edition of his Greek New Testament (1519). As noted above, his teaching on divorce was followed by all the Reformers and incorporated into the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1648.

It may be that the extremely abbreviated reference to what looked like an exemption of some sort in the three Greek words μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας, literally, ‘not upon [over] fornication,’ plus Erasmus’s instinct to give the innocent party the right to remarry, plus a misunderstanding of the context-specific exemption clause in Matthew 5:32, plus Jerome’s Vulgate translation, could have clouded his text-critical approach to the evidence at his disposal.

1.4.3. Tischendorf’s evidence against the replacement text of Vaticanus

Constantin von Tischendorf indicated that in Matthew 19:9 μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας was replaced with the text from 5:32, i.e., παρεκτὸς λογοῦ πορνεῖας, in the following MSS:

BD 1. 33. al† it† nec (c d ff† m excepta causa adulterii; e prater causam fornicationis; a b f ff† g1 h q nisi ob causam fornic. Item Aug excepta causa fornicat., nisi ex causa forn., nisi ob causam forn.; Tert† libris om μὴ επ. πορν., item Athenag 23) syr† sah cop Or† 647* (Clem† Iohannis λογοὶ πορν.) Bas† Chr (et † mono).

1.4.4. Tregelles’s evidence against the replacement text of Vaticanus

Matthew 19:9 μὴ επὶ πορνεῖας was replaced with the text from Matthew 5:32, i.e., παρεκτὸς λογοῦ πορνεῖας, in the following MSS:


Both the Nestle-Aland edition and the Majority Text omit τὶ before μὴ so that the addition can be confidently ignored as not part of the autograph text.47

1.5. MARGINAL CORRECTIONS IN CODEX LEICESTRENSIS (MS 69)

Manuscript 69 (dated XV century), known as Codex Leicestrensis (not to be confused with Codex Leicester, which was Leonardo Da Vinci’s notebook) is held in the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland (Long Street, Wigston Magna, Leicester, LE18 2AH).

MS 69 is a member of Family 13 (and this particular manuscript has been fully collated by Reuben Swanson. Family 13 and Family 1 belong to the Caesarean text-type.

The following image is a sample of the scribe’s writing, showing the marginal correction on the extreme right, which was intended to replace the underlined words. The underlining appears to be the work of someone other than the corrector. The correction is very neat and done with a steady hand. There are other instances of underlined text without any marginal correction in this codex, which suggests that whoever did the corrections did not do the underlining.

The original writing was done with a reed. The correction was probably written with a very fine metal nib.

1.5.1. Codex Leicestrensis Matthew 19:8-10

Note the small writing on the extreme right, in the margin of the MS. It should have read: μὴ ἔτι πορνεύῃ, but the correction (with the word εἰ) was added by a corrector who lived well after the time that Erasmus saw this manuscript.

The following is a transcription of the above scan:

THE UNDERLINED TEXT IS FOUND HERE IN SOME MANUSCRIPTS OF THE CAESAREAN TEXT, AND IN CODEX VATICANUS. IT DOES NOT REPRESENT THE ORIGINAL (UNIVERSAL) TEXT AT THIS PLACE

THE CIRCLED WORD εἰ IS NOT FOUND IN ANY EARLY MANUSCRIPT

This is the marginal text that was taken from the printed text of either Stephen Curcellus (1658) or John Fell (1675) and put into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis. This marginal correction was intended to replace the underlined text which had been imported from Matthew 5:32.

Below is a greatly enlarged negative view of folio 1 verso, showing the marginal correction at Matthew 19:9.

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42See Appendix D for textual notes on the Matthean exemption clauses.
Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest manuscript to contain the original text of Matthew 19:9.

The following is a scan of John Fell’s Greek New Testament for Matthew 19:9. Note the use of two styles of writing epsilon: ε and ε in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis and in Fell’s printed text. A comparison of ten printed editions of the Greek New Testament between 1516 and 1751 of the text: ει µη η πορνεια (showing the two styles of epsilon) reveals that these two styles of epsilon are found together only in Stephanus Curcellaeus (1658) and in John Fell’s Oxford edition of 1675.49

There are printed texts which switch between using the two styles of epsilon in the same edition but not in Matthew 19:9 itself. These are Froschouiana (a Bulgarian text, 1547), Simon Colin[aeus] (1534), Henry Stephens (1587), and Arias Montanus (1583). The rest, including John Mill (1710) and J. J. Wetstein (1751), use only one style of epsilon throughout, namely, ε, when not written as a ligature.

John Fell’s Greek New Testament (1675)

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49 The printer of Fell’s edition used the text of Curcellus as his base text, as a comparison of the printed forms, particularly the use of Greek ligatures, reveals. Rarely, does Fell disagree with the text of Curcellus.
In this instance the tail of Fell’s Rho in πορνεία is a straight line, but there are many instances where he used the curled tail as in Matthew 19:15 on the right.

This peculiar tail to Rho is found occasionally in Colinaeus (1534), Froschouiana (1547), 30 Elzevir (1633), and Schmichi (1658), but it is not found in R. Stephens (1551), Montanus (1583), H. Stephens (1587), Bezae (1598), Scaliger (1620), Mill (1710), or Wetstein (1751).

Scan of Matthew 19:9 in Stephanus Curcellus’s Greek New Testament (1658)

* ει ' μη ἐπὶ πορνείαν,

When did the corrector of Codex Leicestrensis do his work?

Verse numbers did not exist in Erasmus’s day. They first appeared in Robert Stephens royal edition of 1550. So, whoever did the corrections lived after 1550, and as Erasmus died in 1536, he could not have known about verse numbers. The clue to the date of the corrector is given at Acts 10:45 where the corrector has put a note in the margin.

The corrector’s abbreviated note in the left-hand margin reads: Δείπηι Ἐκ τοῦ κεφ. Ἰδ. στχ. αζ. This translates as: ‘Missing. Out of chapter 14, verse 17.’ The corrector has inserted a marker (Λ) after πιστοὶ to note the exact place where four chapters of Acts are missing. The missing section runs from Acts 10:46b to 14:17a, which totals 11,778 letters in the Majority Text.

Folio 174 (which is the next complete page of Codex Leicestrensis following this gap) contains an average of 38.9 letters per line and there are 38 lines to a page. If we divide the total of missing letters, 11,778, by the average letters per line, 38.9 letters, this gives 302.8 lines, and divided by 38 lines per page, gives 7.97 pages missing between 10:45b-14:17a. Now, eight pages made up a single quire, which means that a whole quire of text was lost from the exemplar behind Codex Leicestrensis. This means that the present Codex Leicestrensis was made from a copy that was identical to it in page layout, and with the same number of lines and words per page. But the mistake also means that Acts 10:45a must have been the last line in the exemplar for the error to occur. It would appear that whoever copied out MS 69 from this faulty exemplar was unaware that eight pages of text had dropped out of the exemplar.

What is significant for dating the marginal correction at Matthew 19:9 is that the person who made all the marginal corrections in Codex Leicestrensis has also written the marginal note at Acts 10:45 and at Matthew 19:9.

This means that all the marginal corrections were not seen by Erasmus, and crucially, it means that the marginal correction at Matthew 19:9 is not the work of Erasmus, neither did he see it. Rather, someone inserted Erasmus’s text into the margin. Now, since no Greek New Testament manuscript exists with Erasmus’s addition of εἰ it is certain that Erasmus is responsible for adding εἰ at Matthew 19:9.31

30 Cambridge University Library, shelf no. Hhh584. It appears to be a Greek Orthodox edition. The publisher is: Tigvri in Officina Froschouiana, 1547. It has no verse numbers or divisions.

31 The addition of two letters to the text of Matthew 19:9 is on a par with the addition of one letter by the Arians to the text of the Synod of Nicea. In the latter case they added the letter -i- to the Latin term homoioiusion ‘of one substance,’ to read homoioiusion ‘of like substance.’ The difference meant that Jesus did not exist before the creation of the world, and that He was the creation of the Father, and ‘of like substance’ with Him.
Jackson’s letter reads:

Combe, that Jackson sent to Wetstein has not survived. Two included 1748 Wetstein, means that all the marginal corrections were in place by 1751 when Wetstein records their existence. (which are all by the same hand) were done before 1751. Wetstein chose correct MS 69. However, there is a misprint in Fell who reads 69. It would appear that this is the reason for the underlining of 69 in MS 69. If so, then this would identify Fell’s printed text as the one being used to correct MS 69.

However, the collator did not do this work in a systematic way, but was selective in what he chose to correct. The corrector is only interested in ‘significant’ differences (with a few exceptions) between his printed Fell text and what is written in Codex Leicestrensis. This accounts for the small number of corrections that he has introduced into the margin of the codex. There are two pieces of information that point to the marginal corrections in Codex Leicestrensis being in existence before 1751 which is the date of Wetstein’s edition. On two occasions Wetstein gives the first hand reading under ‘a prima manu,’ and it so happens that the alternative reading is the correction in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis, which proves that the corrections (which are all by the same hand) were done before 1751.

The proof that the marginal corrections were made before 1751 lies in Wetstein’s lack of reference to ‘a prima manu,’ the ‘first hand’ of MS 69, to distinguish it from the marginal corrections. There are only two oblique hints to the presence of the second corrector’s corrections in the margin of MS 69 in Wetstein’s apparatus (List B). The two cases are:

Mark 10:19. The correction is recorded in Wetstein as: μη ἀποστρέψῃς] — (= missing) 69. a prima manu.

Luke 6:1. The correction is recorded in Wetstein as: δευτεροπρωτω] — (= missing) 69. a prima manu. By recording ‘a prima manu’ this implies that another hand had inserted the missing text, which could only have been what was added by Rev. John Jackson or one of his co-collators. This means that all the marginal corrections were in place by 1751 when Wetstein records their existence.

However, the fact that only two of the 154 corrections are mentioned, and that indirectly, by Wetstein, who used John Jackson collated lists of deviations from John Fell’s text (lent to Wetstein in 1748 by Cesar de Misey), suggests that the 154 corrections were known to be late. Wetstein’s apparatus contains evidence of Jackson’s fuller collation of Codex Leicestrensis with John Fell’s text, which goes well beyond the 154 selected corrections in Codex Leicestrensis.

If the 154 corrections in List B pre-dated Jackson’s collation, then Jackson would have included the 154 corrections in the collation that he made available to Wetstein. Why are there only two indirect references to these 154 corrections to MS 69 in Wetstein’s apparatus? The solution must be that they were the work of Jackson himself or a later collator. Unfortunately, the actual collation that Jackson sent to Wetstein has not survived.

The question arises, How long before 1751 were the 154 corrections inserted?

Fell’s 1675 edition was used as the collating text to record differences with Codex Leicestrensis: the external evidence

That John Fell’s text was used as the collating manuscript is borne out by a letter written by John Jackson and printed in A Catalogue of the Books in the Town Library, Leicester (Leicester: Thomas Combe, Junior, [1835], 48pp.). See page 45 for a transcription of Jackson’s letter and the catalogue entry describing John Fell’s 1675 volume, Novi Testamenti Libri Omnes, Gr. 8vo. Oxon. 1675.

Jackson’s letter reads:

The N.T. herewith sent contains all the Readings of the Leic. MS. the many Transpositions are marked with numeral Letters set over the words, as 1, 2, 3, &c. The readings were taken out of the MS. itself, by the Gentlemen who assisted me in collating it. I desire you to take care of the Book, and to return it at your convenient opportunity, as I directed in my letter to you.”

(Signed) “J. Jackson.
The collation in the margins of Fell’s 1675 edition appears to have been abstracted from it because in the catalogue of the library of Cesar de Missy, whose library was sold in 1776, there was the following article—

It is not known what happened to this first collation, which was made by John Jackson (1686–1763) and William Tiffin (1695/6–1754).

For a fuller account of Jackson’s 1728 collation of Codex Leicestrensis, see Appendix G.

**Conclusion**

It would appear that some time after John Fell published his edition in 1675 someone did a collation of his text against the text of Codex Leicestrensis, and he noted in the margin of MS 69 any differences (154) that caught his attention. It is likely that the persons responsible for the marginal corrections in Codex Leicestrensis were Rev. John Jackson and his helpers.

### 1.5.2. Codex Leicestrensis Acts 9:5b–6a

(Note that the style of writing below is the same as the marginal addition in Matthew 19:9, so that they were added by the same scribe.)

The purpose of the next scan is to show that the words in the AV (Acts 9:5b-6a) are found in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis and in Erasmus’s main text in all his editions.

“[it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Ἄνεπεμπήσας ἐκαθαρίας τῶν ἀγορασμῶν, ἀπολογίαν ἔθετο παρακάτω τοῦ ἧμερος ἡμέρας." And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him,

This suggests that the corrector has written Erasmus’s text into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis just as we saw in the case of ει in Matthew 19:9. This is another case where Erasmus’s text has been transferred to the margin of codex Leicestrensis via John Fell’s 1675 Oxford edition.

The scan below shows the marginal correction in Codex Leicestrensis to Acts 9:5. This correction also appears in the text of Erasmus’s first edition of his Greek New Testament, where it remained through all five editions. Indeed, it was never removed from any of the Greek editions leading up to the Authorized Version (KJV) in 1611. It is present in Beza’s 1598 edition, which is thought to have been the edition behind the King James Bible. It is certain that Erasmus’s text entered the margin of Codex Leicestrensis via John Fell’s 1675 Oxford edition.

THE TEXT OF ACTS 9:6 SHOWING THE ADDITION IN THE MARGIN

CLOSE-UP OF THE ADDITION TO ACTS 9:5 IN THE MARGIN
(Note the use of two styles of writing epsilon: ε and ε.)

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The text of Acts 9 reads as follows:

Acts 9:4 καὶ πέσον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκουσαν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ: Σαοῦλ Σαοῦλ, τί με διώκεις?

Acts 9:5 εἶπεν δὲ τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δὲ ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁν σὺ διώκεις.

At this point MS 69 adds in the margin the following words: σκληρον σοι πρὸς κεντρα λακτιζειν. τρεμων τε και βασιλων εἰπε, κύριε, τι με θελεις ποιησα και ο κυριος προς αυτον.

These twenty Greek words replace ἀλλα at the start of verse 6. Von Soden gives some manuscript and versional support for the addition, but it is unlikely that Erasmus had access to these sources. The words σκληρον σοι πρὸς κεντρα λακτιζειν may have been borrowed from Acts 26:14.

Acts 9:6 ἀλλα ἀναστηθηκα και ειςελθε εις την πόλιν και καληθησαν σοι ο τι σε δει ποιην.

The King James Bible reads: Act 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

The underlined text is found only in Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69), and only as a marginal correction. We have noted above that all the marginal corrections in MS 69 were added much later than Erasmus's final edition, and in fact were taken from later, printed editions of his text, notably from John Mill's 1675 edition.

There is a grammatical error in the Greek in that the verb εἶπεν has been omitted after 'Lord.' Even though Erasmus discovered no other manuscript between 1514 and 1535 that had this addition of twenty words, he doggedly retained it in all five editions. He knew of the Complutensian Polyglot, which does not have this addition. It is likely that Erasmus took vv. 5b-6a from the Latin Vulgate and used Acts 26:14 for his Greek translation of it.

1.5.3. Codex Leicestrensis Acts 10:6 showing the addition in the left-hand margin

The following scan is a third example of borrowing Erasmus's text and inserting it into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis.

CLOSE-UP OF THE ADDITION TO ACTS 10:6 IN THE MARGIN
(Note the use of two styles of writing epsilon: ε and ε.)
The text reads: οὐτός λαλήσει τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν “this one will say what you ought to do.”
The note reads, οὗτος λαλήσει τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν. When Erasmus translated the Vulgate back into Greek he, naturally, added soi after λαλήσει (cf. Acts 9:6). But the corrector has not included soi after λαλήσει.

Acts 10:6 reads: “He lodges with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea; this one will tell you what you ought to do.” The underlined text is found only in Erasmus’s text, from where it was written into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis, and it has remained in the Textus Receptus to this day.

It has been suggested by others that Erasmus created this Greek text by translating the Latin Vulgate back into Greek, and this is very likely since there is no extant Greek manuscript that has this addition. After Fell (1675) had published his text, one of the owners or collators of MS 69 adjusted the text of the codex to accord with the current TR text (i.e., Fell’s text). This would account for all the marginal corrections in Codex Leicestrensis agreeing with Erasmus’s text.

Von Soden does not record the marginal note at Acts 10:6 in MS 69, presumably because he could not find another manuscript to support it.

For his first edition Erasmus used four Greek manuscripts containing the Book of Acts. These were MS 1 (XII cent.), MS 2 (XII cent.), MS 4 (XV cent.), and MS 69 (Codex Leicestrensis)(XV cent.). Only in MS 69 do the two unique readings in Acts 9:5b-6 and 10:6 occur, but they occur only in the margin. Today, no critical edition of the Greek New Testament includes these marginal readings, and this includes the two, independent reconstructions of the Majority (Byzantine) Text.

In place of this note, von Soden has recorded four manuscripts (200, 382, 502, 466) that have transferred a copy of Acts 11:14 to here. The additional text reads, ὁς λαλήσει μήματα πρὸς σέ ἐν οἷς σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ [πασὶ] ἐκοσ ἑαυτῷ, which is, as you would expect, identical to 11:14.

1.5.4. Codex Leicestrensis Acts 8:37

Erasmus inserted the whole verse of Acts 8:37 into his text. It reads, “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” This verse is familiar to the English reader through the Authorized Version, but it should be deleted from God’s Word because, according to Scrivener, Erasmus acknowledged “that he found it not in his Greek copies, save in the margin of a single one.”

The New King James Version (1994) retains the 1611 King James reading, which is not done from sound principles of textual criticism, but out of fear and anxiety. We still await an English version based solely on the Universal (Byzantine) Text, which will be fearless and honest in its translation policy to translate from scratch what is before it. There are enough qualified conservative-evangelical scholars and resources around today to begin the task of producing a New Authorized Version (NAV) and scrapping the old Authorized Version completely. Christ’s Church requires a new translation which avoids using inclusive-language designed to appeal to humanists and

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F. H. Scrivener, Six Lectures on the Text of the New Testament and the Ancient Manuscripts which contain it (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co. / London: George Bell and Sons, 1875), p. 73. Von Soden lists six mss which contain Acts 8:37. These are E, 1739, 1891, 945, 323 and 88. MS 8 (6th cent.) is the earliest Greek ms to contain this verse, but Erasmus did not use any of these six, because none of them conforms to Erasmus’s Greek text. He certainly did not know of MS 88 because this contains the Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7-8) in the margin (added in the 17th cent., according to Metzger [1968:101]), which Erasmus claims he never saw in any manuscript. He inserted the Comma Johanneum in his 3rd edition (1522) after a Franciscan friar in 1520 produced a Greek copy which had it. Because these verses are found in Jerome’s Latin Vulgate it is very likely that this friar inserted the verses into his Greek manuscript in order to trick Erasmus into including them in his next edition. And the plan worked!
feminists alike, and it deserves a translation which brings out the essence of the original languages in readable English.

1.6. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ERASMUS AND THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS

Frobenius, a printer in Basle, Switzerland, suggested to Erasmus of Rotterdam, that they get a Greek New Testament printed ahead of the Alcalá (called Complutum in Latin) edition. It was done in a hurry, in six months, in fact, and printed on 1 March 1516, and dedicated to Pope Leo X. It, like the Complutensian, was a diglot with two columns per page, Greek and Latin (Erasmus’s own translation, not the Vulgate).

It is now known how he went about his work. In order to get it finished as quickly as possible, he gave the printers (Froben of Basle) three manuscripts which he had in his possession, namely codex 2* (Gospels), codex 29* (Acts and Epistles) and codex 1* (Revelation); and he used a few other manuscripts (1°F, 4°F, 7°F) to make some minor alterations to the text.44 The only manuscript he had for the Book of Revelation did not contain 22:16-21. He translated the Latin Vulgate of these missing verses back into Greek for the printer!

Erasmus’s printed New Testament had many grammatical mistakes and printer’s errors. But it was this work that was to become the foundation of the ‘Textus Receptus.’ Five editions did not improve it very much despite the fact that he says he made a careful revision of the original work. These ‘improvements’ only corrected the worst of the printer’s errors and his textual corrections introduced as many new errors as it removed older ones, according to some reviewers. The corrections were as follows: 2nd edition: 400 changes; 3rd edition: 118 changes;45 4th edition: 100 changes (90 in Revelation); 5th edition: 4 changes. Erasmus’s third edition introduced 1 John 5:7-8 on the basis of a sixteenth century manuscript (minuscule 61). Luther used Erasmus’s second edition for his 1521 German translation.56

The Textus Receptus (hereafter TR) had its beginnings in Erasmus’s third edition (1522) which Robert Estienne (1503-1559), better known as Robert Stephens, used as the basis for his 1546 edition. His third edition (1550) became famous as the Royal edition. It was the first Greek New Testament to contain a critical apparatus in the side margins. There he gave the variant readings of Ximenes’s (1514) edition (= Complutensian Polyglot), and fifteen other MSS, including the 5th century Codex Bezae (D/05) and the eight century L (019). In his last edition (1551) he set out his Greek text alongside two Latin translations (Vulgate and Erasmus) and introduced our present-day chapter and verse divisions on a journey between Paris and Lyons. His last edition rests for the most part, on the fifth edition of Erasmus (1535) and the Catholic Complutensian Polyglot. All “the corrections made by Stephens to the text of Erasmus are to be found in the historical books of the New Testament, whereas the Epistles and Revelation stand just about in the same form as the edition of the critic of Rotterdam [Erasmus].”57

Théodore de Béza (1519-1605), better known as Beza, was the friend of the reformer, John Calvin. His text is essentially the same as Stephens fourth edition (1551).

The TR came about through the work of Bonaventure Elzevir and his brother’s son, Abraham, in 1624. It simply reproduced the first edition of Beza (1565). In the Preface to the second edition were the words, “Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus.” Hence the name Textus Receptus (TR), which became part of orthodoxy in Europe.58

46 Martin Luther (1483–1546) introduced divorce for desertion (1 Cor 7:15), the ‘Pauline Privilege,’ and failure of a wife to perform normal conjugal relations (1 Cor 7:3-5), the ‘Reverse Fornication’ divorce, and other new causes to divorce a wife. Soon moral logic took over and a rash of new grounds for divorce soon appeared especially through men like John Milton (1608-1674), Philip Melanchton (1497-1560), Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), and Martin Bucer (1491-1551). Deduction took over, and one false conclusion led to another. Source: Joseph A. Webb & Patricia L. Webb, Divorce and Remarriage: The Trojan Horse Within the Church Whom Shall We Then Believe? (Xulon Press, 2008), pp. 47-59.
while in Britain, Stephens’s edition of 1550 acquired this authority. There are only 287 differences between these two Greek New Testaments.³⁹

Between 1633 and 1831 the majority of the editions of the Greek New Testament were very similar to Stephens’ third edition (1550) in England, and to the Elzevir’s second edition (1633) on the Continent. Elzevir’s second edition (1633) boasted that ‘here is a text which is received by all.’ The modern attitude toward the ‘received text’ (i.e., the Majority Text) is that it is ‘a text which has been received but which can be no longer received.’

The 1873 Oxford edition of the Textus Receptus is a reprint of the 1828 edition, which is based on John Mill’s, Novum Testamentum Graecum (Oxon. 1707), which is based on Stephanus’ 1550 edition. The 1873 edition is now used to represent the standard text for the Textus Receptus, because it has removed all the obvious printing and scribal misspellings, etc.

Today the conservative-evangelical should use the Majority Text for all textual work. Every hand-copy of a manuscript will have accidental errors, but these can be recognised by collating every known copy of the Majority Text ranging from the 6th century to the 15th century. From this collation it is possible to recover the text of the original writings. See Appendix E.

1.7. CONCLUSION: The date of the correction of Codex Leicestrensis

It was shown under §1.5.1. that the corrections in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis could not have been inserted earlier than 1550 when verse numbers were introduced into the Greek New Testament for the first time. Erasmus died in 1536, so he did not see the marginal corrections in the codex. The quest then became a matter of detective work to find out from an inductive study of the corrections themselves what printed edition was used to correct the codex.

All of the printed editions of Erasmus’s text and the printed editions of Elzevir’s text (under different editors) are so close that it is extremely difficult to find differences between them that would show up in the margin of the codex. We noted that the handwritten form of the marginal correction at Matthew 19:9 narrowed down to either Curcellus (1658) or John Fell (1675). To decide between them it was necessary to collate all the corrections in Codex Leicestrensis and compare them with the texts of Curcellus and Fell. Disappointingly, there was not a single correction in Codex Leicestrensis that was found in Fell but not in Curcellus, or vice versa. Consequently, it was not possible, on these meagre results, to settle the issue over which printed edition was used to correct the codex. However, the corrector can be narrowed down to someone who used either Curcellus’s 1658 edition, or Bishop John Fell’s 1675 edition.

We can conclude, however, that Erasmus did not see any of the 154 corrections in the margin of the Codex made by the second corrector (List B, in Appendix G). The only corrections he would have seen were the 40 made by the first hand of the Codex (List A, in Appendix G). Consequently, Erasmus did not get his reading of τι μη in Matthew 19:9 from Codex Leicestrensis, which is a significant finding.

All things considered, Erasmus must made up the Greek text himself because he wanted to impose his theology on the text, and he succeeded in duping the Reformers to fall for his new doctrine. The Reformers had a weakness, because they were prone to latch on to any difference they could find between Scripture and Roman Catholic doctrines and traditions, and Erasmus handed them one such difference on a plate, and they fell completely for it. The result is that today we are living out the legacy of their error, and most Christians are content to retain Erasmus’s new doctrine because so many relatives and friends have fallen for it, and they are not prepared to give up being a disciple of Erasmus, to follow Christ Jesus, who will not tolerate any remarriages after a divorce.

Jesus did not come to re-educate the fallen mind of man, nor did He come to bring out the best in human nature, nor did He come with a new philosophy. He came to destroy human nature, to destroy human knowledge, to destroy human ethics, and everything else that is human, because nothing ‘human’ will enter the Kingdom of God. Unless a person dies to self and crucifies all that is human in their fallen nature they cannot move forward to receive the Spirit of Christ, and without the Spirit of Christ, no such person will enter the Kingdom of God. The word ‘death’ must be written over human nature, and be lived out as a reality, if we are to receive a new nature, a new heart, a new spirit, a new mind, and for all things to become new.

Those who counsel divorce to Christians are still living within their old nature, and operating out of that old nature, while professing to have the new nature of Christ. They have not known a born-again experience, nor known the transforming change that Christ brings. They are still strangers to these spiritual experiences, yet profess to be mature Christian marriage counsellors. These

counsellors are cute enough to know how to avoid being caught out and will indulge in smooth talk, seeming to teach Christ’s doctrine of full forgiveness for all sins, but really pandering to human commonsense, if the wrongdoer does not want forgiveness.

Both Jesus and Stephen unilaterally forgave their murderers. When you strip away the religious language in those books that advocate divorce for Christians, you are left with the same advice that you would get from an unbelieving Marriage Guidance Counsellor. It differs very little from the low-level, sub-standard that Moses’s generation lived at. A Christian who looks more to Moses than to the Lord Jesus for his teaching on divorce, will never live out the Christian life as he should. They are defective, if not deaf, Christians.

The issue is not whether Jesus was for or against divorce. The issue is whether divorce is compatible with being a Christian, and compatible with the Spirit of Christ living in the body of each believer. If His presence within the believer does not make divorce obsolete as a concept, and totally irrelevant, then something is seriously wrong with the claim that Christ is residing in that person. You cannot hold to divorce and hold to forgiveness at the same time. They are opposed one to the other in the new nature.
PART 2. THE FOUNDATION OF LOVE-HEADSHIP AUTHORITY

The Biblical doctrine of Headship

The Holy Spirit taught that the headship of Adam rested on four factors. The order of the Creation; the origin of the woman; the order of the Fall; and the order of the New Creation. There are three crucial texts that must be taken into account in any discussion of the subject. The central texts are:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:7-10

7 ἀνήρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν, εἰκὼς καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ηδὲ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός εστιν. (8) οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀνήρ ἐκ γυναικός, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἄνδρος. (9) καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίστη ἄνηρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα. (10) διὰ τούτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνή ἐξουσίαν ἐχεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τούς ἀγγέλους.

7 On the one hand, man, indeed, ought not to cover [or: hide] the head, being the image and glory of God, but on the other hand, the [woman ought to cover the head because] woman is man’s glory. (8) For man is not of woman, but woman [is] out of man. (9) And also, man was not created on account of the woman, but woman on account of the man. (10) Because of this the woman ought to have authority upon the head on account of the angels.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33b—37

1 Ως εἰς πάσας ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων, (34) αἱ γυναῖκες ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις συγκέιναι, οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται· (35) ἀλλὰς λαλεῖν ἀλλὰ ὑποτασσόμεθα. (36) καθὼς καὶ—ὁ νόμος λέγει. (33) ἡ γὰρ ἀρσενικὸς ἐπερωτάτωσαν, ἀλλὰ λαλεῖν ἐν ἑκκλησίᾳ. (37)

1 As in all the assemblies of the saints (34), your women in the assemblies—let them be silent. For it has not been permitted to them to speak, but to subject themselves, as also the Law says [teaches]. (35) And if anything they are wishing to learn, in [the] house of their own men let them question; for it is a disgrace to women—in an assembly—to speak.

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60 The Majority Greek text plus γυναικεῖα συγκέιναι. Other mss (κοπ.66) have it.
61 To substitute the terms ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ for ‘man’ and ‘woman’ would not make sense in this text as is attempted by J. Winandy, “Un curieux casus pendens: 1 Corinthians 11:10 et son interprétation,” New Testament Studies 38 (1992) 621-29. For example 11:11, “Yet the wife is not apart from the husband, nor the husband apart from the wife in the Lord; for just as the wife is [created] from the husband, so also the husband is [born] through the wife.”
62 See Appx A for 36 translations of 14:33b-35.
63 The Majority Greek text has τοιοῦτος ‘yours’ following ‘womens’; other mss (κοπ.66) omit it.
64 The Majority Greek text has ἐπιτρέπομαι (perf. ind. pass., from —ἐπιτρέπω.), meaning, ‘it was [and still is] permitted’; a few older mss (κοπ.66) read: ἐπιτρέπεται (3 sg. pres. indic. pass., from —ἐπιτρέπω.), meaning, ‘it is permitted [now].’
65 The Majority Greek text reads ὑποτασσόμεθα (pres. infin. mid.), a few older mss (κοπ.66) read: ὑποτασσόμεθα (3 pl. pres. imper. mid.). The Middle voice is in meaning much closer to the Active than to the Passive. It is something the women are to do, rather than something done to them by others.
66 The Majority Greek text reads the plural here, γυναικεία, ‘women’.
67 This is the word order in some older mss (mainly the Egyptian tradition). The Majority Greek text reads: γυναικείαν ἐν ἑκκλησίᾳ λαλεῖν. The transposition of the phrase ‘in [the] church’ brings out a difference of emphasis. In the Majority Greek text the meaning is: ‘for a shame it is to women in [the] church to speak.’ This suggests that it is not a shame if they speak outside the church. The alternative text reads: ‘it is a shame to woman to speak in church.’ This puts the emphasis on gender; whether young or old, single or married, females are not permitted to speak in church.
1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15

(11) γυνὴ ἐν ἱπποσίᾳ μαθητεύτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ. (12) διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ ὡς ἡπτρέπῳ ὁ θεὸς ἀνθρώποις, ὅλα ἔστω ἐν ἱπποσίᾳ. (13) Άδαμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, ἐπὶ Εὐα. (14) καὶ Ἄδαμ ἦταν ημαστηθής, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατήθησά τι ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν. (15) σωματεύεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείωσων ἐν πίστει καὶ ἁγάπῃ καὶ ἁγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης.

(11) Let a woman in quietness learn in all subjection. (12) And a woman to teach I do not permit, nor to rule a man, but to be in quietness. (13) For Adam was first formed, then Eve. (14) And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, having been thoroughly deceived, into transgression came. (15) And she shall be saved [as she goes] through the [cursed] child-bearing, if they remain in faith, and love, and sanctification with seriousness.

2.1. THE TEACHING OF HEADSHIP RESTS ON THE ORDER OF CREATION

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For [here is the theological reason] Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:12). Adam was the first human being formed in the image of God. From him emanated the entire human race including Woman. “The first reason is that the order of creation of man and woman (Adam and Eve) is expressive and determinative of God’s order of relationship and authority. The one formed first is in His image and likeness, the one formed after and from him is to remain in a loving and obedient relationship to him.”

Waltke noted from his study of the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 that:

The order of creation, which is set forth in these two accounts, stands behind the order of redemption, which is represented in the rest of Scripture. For example, the Fourth Commandment (Exod. 20:8-11) to refrain from work on the Sabbath is based on the first creation account that God ceased his own work on that day (2:2-3). The Seventh commandment (Exod 20:14) to not commit adultery is founded on the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden according to the second account (Gen 2:18-25). The Sixth Commandment (Exod 20:13) protects innocent life because every life is created in God’s image (Gen 1:26-28; cf. 5:1-3; 9:6).

Moreover, our Lord aimed to recapture for his church the Creator’s original intention for marriage (Matt 19:3-9), and the Apostle Paul based on these accounts his arguments concerning the roles of women in the home and in the church (1 Corinthians 11:3-12; 1 Timothy 2:12-15).

In sum, the Bible is a story of Paradise lost in the first Adam and being regained in the

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68 See Appx B for 36 translations of 2:11-15.
69 The Majority Greek text (with some exceptions) reads: γυναῖκι δὲ διδάσκειν.
70 See the footnote on this unique word in Appx B.
71 The Majority Greek text plus B reads: ἀπατηθῆσαι (1st aor. pass. ptc. fem. acc. sg. fr. ἀπατάω) as against other MSS (κ.Α) which read as the UBS4 text (fr. ἐξαπατάω). The MT means, ‘to be self-deceived, mistaken’, whereas the UBS4 form means, ‘to be deceived thoroughly’ (Liddell & Scott).
72 For a further exegesis of this text see 4.3.10. M. F. Stitzinger, “Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship” (Grace Theological Journal 2 [1981] 23-44). This is the clearest explanation of Paul’s use of Genesis 1-3 that I have consulted. Another helpful work is that by Ann L. Bowman, “Women in Ministry: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” BibSac 149 (1992) 193-213. She notes (pp. 203-04) that Paul was not simply referring to two verses taken from Gen 2-3. Instead he was using a common rabbinic method of referring to the Old Testament, a method known as summary citation. An example of a single statement recalling an entire story is Luke 17:32, ‘Remember Lot’s wife’ (Gen 18:22—19:26). If Paul were referring to a specific verse he would quote it. For a comprehensive listing of introductory formulas of Old Testament scriptures see Bruce Metzger, “The Formulas Introducing Quotations of Scripture in the New Testament and the Mishnah,” JBL 70 (1951) 297-307; cf. also J. A. Fitzmyer, “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament,” NTS 7 (1960-61) 299-305. For Paul’s rabbinic technique of exegesis see Anthony J. Hanson, Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology (London: SPCK, 1974), 136-257.
Second. The Garden of Eden symbolically represents the ideal culture that was lost and that Moses restores in the Law and that Christ restores more perfectly in his church through the Spirit. These accounts present what is normative for the role of women in “worship.”

. . . male authority in the home and in the Church is founded on the order of creation and reinforced in the order of redemption as presented in both the Old and New Testaments.

Is it not plausible to assume . . . that had he [God] intended equality in government he would have formed Eve and Adam at the same time and have said, “It is not good for the man or the women to be alone, I will make them to be helpers suitable to each other”? If he had wanted a matriarchy, would he not have formed Eve first and created the husband to be a suitable helper to his wife?\(^7\)

Waltke rightly recognizes the importance of the two Genesis accounts of the creation of mankind for the restoration of God’s original plan for mankind, which both Jesus and Paul point up in their uncovering of the new life lived according to the Spirit. It is worthwhile, therefore, spelling out some crucial, theologically laden facts about these two accounts.

God formed Adam on the sixth day of creation as His master-piece.\(^5\) He was created to rule and control the earth, and this is reflected in his physical and psychological make-up. He was not only created in the image of God but created to reflect that image in his control over the earth. He was born a controller, a governor, a king, a leader. Taking the Genesis story as a whole, we cannot fail to notice a being of singular nobility and endowed with phenomenal powers and attributes; a being who towers high above all other creatures, in fact, their king and their crown. He bowed to none, all were subordinate to him. He showed his dominion over them by giving to each of them a name.

Unlike any other creature God made, Adam was the first “son of God” (Luke 3:38); the first who was made in His image.\(^6\) To him was given dominion over all His world before He created woman (Gen 2:15). Man was created with the primary purpose of governing the creation that God had made.\(^7\) He was given the authority and ability to accomplish what he had been assigned to do. Woman, on the other hand, was created with a totally different primary function in mind, namely, to fulfill a need in Man’s desire for company. She was designed and formed specifically (in her whole constitution) to be a fit companion for Man. Her role was a supporting one. It was never intended that she do anything but help him to achieve his ends. Their roles were different, fitting, beautiful and complementary because of their love for one another.\(^8\)

The apostle contrasts the two glories that man and woman display.

Of the man he says that he is the “glory of God,” but of woman he says that she is the “glory of man,” (verse 7). As verses 8 and following seem to indicate, this evaluation is based on the more immediate creation of man by God and the creation of woman from and out of man. Thus, the man will reflect the one who directly created him and thus,


\(^{75}\) Baldwin (op. cit., p. 17), having rejected the literal account of woman’s creation, declares that man and woman were created like the rest of creation, “by the word of God”.

\(^{76}\) Some have tried to undermine Paul’s foundation by pointing out that in the order of creation there is a climax in Genesis I leading up to the creation of mankind on the sixth day, and since Woman was created last she is superior to Man. Stitzinger (op. cit., pp. 28-30) has replied to this notion.

\(^{77}\) It has been suggested that Adam’s privilege or chronological primacy in creation is linked with the Old Testament concept of primogeniture. In the Old Testament the firstborn son received a number of specific privileges. First, he succeeded his father as head of the family and leader of the family worship (Dt 21:15-17)(See R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961], I:42, 53). The rabbis affirmed this in the Mishnah (Baba Batra 8:4; 5; Bechoroth 8:1, 9, 10). Second, he received a ‘double portion’ of the inheritance. Paul was possibly asserting that Adam’s status as the oldest carried with it the leadership fitting for a firstborn son. Jesus was given the title ‘firstborn among many brothers’ (Romans 8:29); ‘firstborn from the dead’ (Colossians 1:18); ‘firstborn of all creation’ (Colossians 1:15), and so He inherits everything now. It seems to me that inheritance through headship rather than through primogeniture explains the case of Adam and Christ best.

\(^{78}\) It is a feature of those who reject Paul’s teaching to play up Gen 1 and play down Gen 2, or treat them as contradictory and so of little or no value today.
also, the woman will inevitably reflect and be the glory of the one from whom she was created, namely man.79

Stitzinger has noted five signs of Man’s headship in Genesis 2. First, in 2:7 man is created prior to woman. Second, Man is called “adam” (2:20), a term that is used to cover Eve and all their offspring. Third, Adam was invested with the position of leadership, authority and responsibility to keep the Garden before Eve was created (2:15).80 Fourth, God prepared Adam for his leadership role by having Adam name the living creatures (Gen 2:19-20) before giving him his bride.81 Fifth, Adam’s leadership role is emphasized by his need of a helper (2:18-20). Up until this point Adam’s helper/companion had been his superior—God, now God supplied him with a human helper who would not threaten him by being superior or equal in physical strength, but a perfectly formed “weaker vessel”82 who would respond to his love and his need for companionship.

Waltke having examined the two stories of creation came to the conclusion that:

the situation represented in these first two chapters of Genesis is regarded as normative for humanity in the rest of Scripture. This ideal is not imposed on men and women but presented to help them understand their natures and the roles for which they were created. Their sexuality lies deeper than their physical characteristics to reproduce, but in their very embodiment as human beings, in the way they view the world and in the way they are perceived.83

2.2. THE TEACHING OF HEADSHIP RESTS ON THE ORIGIN OF WOMAN

“On the one hand, a man ought not to cover his head, [here is the theological reason] being the image and glory of God; but, on the other hand, the woman [ought to cover her head [here is the theological reason] because] she is the glory of man.”84 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:7-9).85

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80 Woman’s sphere was “to keep home.” “He maketh the barren woman to keep home: and to be a joyful mother of children” (Ps 113:8, Book of Common Prayer [The Great Bible]).
81 J. A. Motyer, “Name,” in The New Bible Dictionary (ed. J. D. Douglas et al.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 862, observed that to give a name is the prerogative of a superior. Adam also gave Eve her name, and God gives Adam his name. He also gives names to all that He created. Naming is a form of control. The Israelites renamed the conquered Transjordan cities (Num 32:38). Pharaoh Necho asserted his control over Eliakim by renaming him Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:34). After the Lord gives Adam his bride, Adam tactfully uses the passive form of construction to give to her her generic name: “she shall be called Woman . . .” (Gen 2:23b). After the Fall, he names her “Eve” (3:20).
82 This terminology would seem to be Peter’s way (1 Pet 3:7) of stating the femininity of the woman in relation to the masculinity of the man in terms of a comparison with no disparagement intended (see G. Statlin, T.D.N.T., Vol. I, p. 491). John Knox (1505-1572), in particular, expounded this idea as an argument against female monarchs and matriarchs in his tract, “The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women” (see under 4.1.1.1.).
84 G. G. Findlay makes the observation that instead of saying woman was the ‘image and likeness’ of man he substitutes for ‘likeness’ the word ‘glory’ which is the word the LXX renders the synonymous Heb. term ‘form’ in Ps 17:15, God’s glory being His likeness; cf. Hebrews 1:3. Woman is the glory of man (ἀὑρισκόμενος), but not of the race (ἀὑρισκόμενος), but of the stronger sex. Paul does not say she is the ‘likeness of man’ because she is not man’s reflection, but his counterpart—not ‘like to like, but like in difference,’ wedded as ‘perfect music unto noble words.’ She partakes through him, of the image of God (Gen 1:27) (“The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,” in The Expositor’s Greek New Testament [5 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1897-1910], III, 873). D. J. A. Cline has shown that the ‘image of the deity’ stands for the powers of the deity, in a cuneiform text dated about 675 BC: “It was said to Esarhaddon, ‘A free man is as the shadow of god, the slave is as the shadow of a free man, but
Just as God is sometimes glimpsed taking counsel in the heaven, for example, “Let us make man . . . .”, and pictured as having communion with a Being of like nature,86 so He understands Adam’s solitariness and his need to commune with another being of like nature. He therefore resolved to alleviate his loneliness saying:

It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet [suitable] for him. . . . And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:18-23).

Adam’s words of joy on seeing his wife are the only recorded words of a human being before the Fall, when he had all his God-given powers in their full prime. He is able instantly and joyfully to recognise in her someone who was on the same level as himself as regards her humanity. She was not “man” like himself, so in this sense he did not see her as “equal” if by equal we mean identical in form. He saw her as the female counterpart to himself. But his words “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” are a penetrating insight into her equality with him as regards her person and worth. She emerged from him and her life was derived from his own life, and yet she was attractively “different” and “complementary.” In his words the Creator knew He had successfully completed His creation. She was the last of His works.

Eve, together with Adam, is given dominion over all living creatures (1:27-28). Both Adam and Eve are called “adam” in Genesis 5:2, so that it is clear that Woman is not inferior to Man in her moral nature, though of course she was designed at the root level to be subject to him: “Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . . . Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:23-24). It is not hard for a wife to submit to a husband who loves her like Christ loves the Church; and it is not hard for a husband to love a wife who submits as lovingly and as full-heartedly as the Church submits to Christ.

Woman was designed physically and psychologically to complement man and to be his perfect helper. Any disparagement of Woman, per se, is an attack on her Creator’s wisdom to equip her for a very specific role in Man’s life. Eve was not left in the Garden of Eden to find Adam, or left there for Adam to find her. When the Creator begins a work He completes it. When He finished creating her He brought her to Adam. She was never intended to be independent of him. The theological importance of the Creator bringing the Woman to the Man (and not vice versa) should not be under-estimated theologically. The “bringing” is an affirmation and extension of Man’s love-control. He named her, just as he named everything else in his world. She was now answerable to the king, he is like the very image of god” (“The Image of God in Man,” Tyndale Bulletin 19 (1968) 53-103, esp. p.84).

86 Robin Scroggs (“Paul and the Eschatological Woman,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 40 [1972] 283-303, esp. p. 301) appears to have found these verses too difficult to understand and retorts: ‘to modern readers the logic is blackly obscure.’ This does not give one much confidence in his handling of the passage or the subject. He appears to find almost everything too difficult for him in the passage. On 11:2-16 he says (p. 297): ‘In its present form this is hardly one of Paul’s happier compositions. The logic is obscure at best and contradictory at worst. The word choice is peculiar; the tone, preevil. All these difficulties point to some hidden agenda, hidden probably to the Apostle himself as well as his readers . . . .’ This statement is more a reflection on Scroggs’ ignorance of the passage than on Paul’s God-given wisdom. F. F. Bruce, likewise, did not know what Paul was talking about and so ignored his theological arguments, to the detriment of his case (“Women in the Church: a Biblical Survey,” Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship 33 (December, 1982) 7-14, esp. p. 11). For example he treats Paul’s principles based on Genesis as only ‘guide lines’ in one situation (Corinth) and should not be turned into laws binding for all time. He then overrides Paul’s teaching with his own rule-of-thumb, namely ‘whatever in Paul’s teaching promotes true freedom is of universal and permanent validity; whatever seems to impose restrictions on true freedom has regard to local and temporary conditions’ (p. 11). And who, we might ask, is to be the judge of what is ‘true freedom?’ This could be seen as a licence to permit gays and lesbians into positions of leadership otherwise we are infringing on their ‘true freedom’. Due to self-confessed ignorance of Paul’s theological foundation he dismisses any bar to women teaching or having authority over men in the church (p. 12).

86Cf. Isa 6:8; Gen 1:26; 3:22.
him as he was answerable to God in how they carried out His will to subdue the earth. In Packer’s words:

God . . . gave woman the role of “help meet” for man, and her fitness for it depends on God having made her a “side” of man which he would otherwise lack. So the way for men and women to be free and fulfilled is that in all their joint activities the psychological dynamics of the “help meet” relationship be maintained, and the woman be felt throughout to be helping men. Anything less would be more or less unnatural, and would issue in something less than contentment for both parties. This relational pattern matters most in marriage, the closest and richest of man-woman relationships, but it has some importance wherever men and women work together.87

Thus in the Genesis story we see that woman—perfect woman—was subject to her husband before she fell. So that even if men and women could be restored to their original states the wife would still be subject to her husband.

The Genesis account (2:21-22) of Woman’s origin establishes another important Scriptural doctrine, namely, the solidarity of the human race. The human species has descended from one man (Romans 5:18ff.). For if the sexes had two separate sources or origins, mutual contempt or envy or contentions over equality might have arisen. But God removed that possibility when He formed Eve from Adam and brought her to him to stay with him and to be subject to his perfect love and guidance. The world has never seen a more perfect marriage, nor indeed can it, for sin has separated man and woman beyond complete recovery of the Edenic state in this life (Gen 2:25b). Only when the Husband (Christ) comes for his Bride (the Church), who will be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, shall the redeemed Adamic family understand how perfect was the first human marriage. Every marriage is a shadow of what God once designed it to be.

We see, then, that in the origin and purpose of Woman in the original and perfect creation loving submission was a suitable and fitting element in her constitution.

2.3. THE TEACHING OF HEADSHIP RESTS ON THE ORDER OF THE FALL

“And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (1 Timothy 2:14).88

“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

“Unto the woman he [God] said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over [κυρίωσα] you” (Gen 3:16).

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88 See the fuller treatment of this verse under 4.3.10.

89 Some have understood the text to mean that woman would seek to dominate man. How this curse has worked itself out in secular society can be seen in Menander’s advice, “The wife ought always to take second place in speaking (legein), and the husband ought in all things to take the lead. For there is not a home in which a wife takes first place which has not been utterly ruined” (edition by A. Körte [1910], quoted from Quinn & Wacker, 1-2 Timothy, p. 225). Menander, the Attic poet, lived between 343 and 292 BC. It is interesting to note the Jewish attitude toward ‘headship’ in Jesus’ day as seen through the writings of Josephus and Philo. Josephus (Con. Ap. 2.201), ‘The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority (to kratos) has been given by God to man.’ Philo (Op. Myn. 167), ‘In the next place she tasted deprivation of liberty and the authority of the husband at her side, whose command she must perform obey.’ Others have pointed out as a truism of anthropology that male leadership is normative in every culture and that there is no evidence of matriarchy (see Bruce K. Waltke, “The Role of Women in the Bible,” CRUX 31 [no. 3, 1995] 29-40, esp. p. 36, who has a cross-reference to George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty [New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1981], p. 136.).
Paul uses the word “deceived” to refer to the whole account of the Fall. Adam also sinned, but Eve led the way and caused him to sin. Her initiative in breaking the commandment they both were under is an historical fact. Adam’s sin consisted not in his listening to his wife’s voice, for that was music in his ears (as any lover knows), but in not questioning her about the fruit and where she got it from. We do not know how she managed to persuade Adam to eat the fruit. He must have known what the forbidden fruit looked like. Paul does not develop this reason and we must be content with the brevity of his statement, which looks like a summary reference to something that Timothy was familiar with. One may logically infer that in citing this foundational incident Paul is telling Timothy that when the role established by God in His creative activity and order was reversed by Eve, it led to the break-up of a perfect creation.

It is of note that no cultural reason is given or even alluded to in this passage [1 Timothy 2:8-12], but rather the most basic foundational reasons which are always germane to men and women are given, namely, God’s creation order and the fall. Nothing more basic and binding could be cited. Paul thus follows the example of Jesus Christ in dealing with the basic question of the relation of men and women; he cites the Father’s basic creative action (cf. Matthew 19:3ff.).

In the text of Genesis the ultimate responsibility before God rested with Adam who allowed himself to be knowingly led astray by his wife. That Adam was responsible can be seen in Romans 5:12, because it was through him, and not through Eve, that sin entered the world. God recognised his headship by addressing His questions to him first, and not to Eve. God blamed him for listening/obeying the voice of his wife.

Paul’s point is that God’s perfect creation was plunged into its present groaning state of death and decay because Eve reversed roles. The implication is that woman’s reversal of roles must not be repeated in the church or in the home. She must not be permitted to lead men or her husband in obedience to her initiative or to overthrow/reverse what is accepted as the transmitted tradition of doctrine and practices. Eve questioned the original commandment and was deceived by her own initiative. The impulse to take the initiative should never have been followed. It was not her place to initiate a way of getting round the commandment. Adam, it would appear, was prepared to live in obedience to the command but she was not content with her allotted station.

The character of the temptation illustrates Satan’s craftiness. There was nothing said at first to awaken suspicion in Eve, or to shock her moral sense; merely a shy insinuation calculated to excite a natural curiosity. Then there was a direct lie, combined, however, with just enough truth to give it plausibility (Gen 3:4-5). Three steps lead to Eve’s transgression: (1) doubt about God’s Word (cf. Romans 14:23); (2) an addition to God’s Word (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:2-4; Rev 22:18-19); (3) and an outright contradiction of God’s Word (cf. Gen 2:17) (suspicion, addition, contradiction). Adam’s sin was not caused by the deception that brought down his wife (the inference of the story is that the

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90 Luke 22:25, “And he said to them, ‘The kings of the nations do exercise lordship [κυριεύουσιν] over them, and those exercising authority [ἐξουσίαζον] over them are called Benefactors, but you are not so, but he who is greater among you, let him be as the younger; and he who is leading [ὁγονέων], as he who is serving.” In the parallel passages in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42 the terms are κατακυριεύουσιν and κατεξουσίαζον respectively. Luke’s term is found in Romans 6:9 where death has no more lordship over the risen Christ, and in 6:14 sin has no more lordship over those under grace. In Romans 7:1 the marriage law has lordship over a man as long as he lives, and in 14:7 Christ is lord of the living and the dead. Jesus is called Lord of lords in 1 Timothy 6:15. In 2 Corinthians 1:24 Paul denies that he and Timothy acted as lords over the Corinthians but, rather, he saw himself as a fellow-worker with them. These are the seven occurrences of Luke’s term in the NT. Matthew’s term occurs in Acts 19:16 where a demon possessed man leap on the seven sons of Sceva and overpowered them. Peter warns elders not to exercise lordship over church members but be a pattern for them to follow (1 Pet 5:3). Matthew’s term occurs only four times in the NT. Because each man has Christ as his Lord then no man may be lord of another man. This agrees with Christ’s headship. As regards headship all men are equal and no man (bishop or elder) may dominate another man against his conscience toward God. This is not to rule out church discipline. Paul is aware that the authority of an apostle which he had received from Christ was to be used to build up the Church (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:9) not to ‘cast it down,’ but if necessary he would use his apostolic authority to discipline the disorderly in order to preserve the flock from being led astray.

serpent's method would not have worked on Adam). Eve's mind was engulfed by the deception, she was “thoroughly deceived” (1 Timothy 2:14). It would appear that she did not set out to disobey God deliberately, but was tricked into doing so through the appeal the forbidden fruit had physically, aesthetically, and intellectually for her.

On the other hand, Adam thought about the possibility of disobeying God's command and then he made a conscious decision not to obey God. Paul seems to have thought deeply about the manner in which mankind fell. Sin entered into two perfect, sinless human beings in different ways which are gender specific. The sinless woman was tricked into sin, and the sinless man made a conscious decision to sin. For this reason there was a command of Christ given (1 Corinthians 14:37b) that the new Eve in Christ must never teach or exercise authority over the new Adam in Christ (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Paul, drawing on the analogy of the original sinless pair, feared that “by some means, as the serpent deceived Eve in his cunning, so your thoughts might be spoiled from the pureness which is due to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). He is addressing “brothers” here which indicates that the new man in Christ is not in the same advantageous position as the first Adam, who was not deceived. The Christian man in Christ is now as vulnerable to sin through deception as much as the sinless woman was in Eden. Hence his oft repeated warnings to be on their guard. But if Eve, in her state of sinless perfection, could fall for a trick, how much more vulnerable is she in her fallen condition. She can be tripped at will (it would seem) by Satan, at any time he chooses. Paul taught that even in her restored position “in Christ” the vulnerability is still there in her feminine nature, hence his theologically-based disqualification to teach or rule men in the Church is gender specific and is for all time and in all places.

A woman could lead a man into the truth (e.g., Priscilla[82] [assisting Aquila] and Apollos) but in this good deed lies the potential for leading him the other way; it is for this reason that leadership per se is taken away from her altogether, so that there is no opportunity given to her to lead her husband into sin again, despite all the potential there is to lead him into the truth.93 By coming under the oversight of her husband and receiving her doctrine from him (“ask your men at home”—1 Corinthians 14:35) the orthodoxy of her knowledge can be secured. But the impulse to take the initiative to change what has been handed on to her may always be present. If this impulse was present when she was in a sinless condition, then how much more after she is fallen? The regeneration of her soul does not restore her to her sinless state, consequently the impulse to change her allotted place will always remain a potential threat to her salvation and to good order in the Church.94

Some see Satan in the form of a serpent who tempted Eve to commit the first trespass, I am not so sure that Satan was present in a world which God pronounced “very good.” Eve may have sinned without involving the necessity for Satan to be present in the Garden of Eden. The serpent who spoke to Eve was an amoral animal who could not sin, who was not capable of sinning. We are told that he had superior guile to any other animal that God had made. He did not acquire this ability: he was created the way he was. Now for an amoral creature to suggest to Eve that she might be equal to her Creator was not a sin, but Eve was a moral creature. So that what the serpent said and what she heard were two different things. In the serpent’s “not-possible-to-sin” world what he suggested had no moral connotation for him, but what Eve heard had moral connotations. This is how the idea was conveyed to Eve in a perfect creation. We have a parallel in the words of Peter to Jesus—words full of concern for Jesus’ safety—but nevertheless what Peter said and what Jesus heard

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[82] It is sometimes speculated that Priscilla wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. See A. Harnack, Über die beiden Recensionen der Geschichte der Prisca und des Aquila in Act xviii. 1-27 in the Sitzungsberichte des kénigl. preuss. Akademie zu Berlin, 1900, pp. 2-13. Against this is the masculine participle αὐγοῦμενοι in Hebrews 11:32, ‘for the time will fail me recounting about Gideon.’ The fem. form would be αὐγοῦμενη.

[93] See 4.5.1 below on Peter’s injunction to Christian wives not to preach to their unconverted husbands.

[94] I am not convinced of D. J. Moo’s position that ‘Paul cites Eve’s failure as exemplary and perhaps causative of the nature of women in general and that this susceptibility to deception bars them from engaging in public teaching’ (“1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,” Trinity Journal 1 [1980] 78). But the fact that women can never exercise authority over a man ensures to some extent that she will not repeat the Adam and Eve scenario again. It is within this supervised context that she can use her teaching gift to help other women, and contribute enormously in guiding her children into the way of truth, as Lois and Eunice did in the case of Timothy. In the normal situation a woman’s ministry will come under the oversight of her husband or male relatives (father/brothers) who in turn will come under the oversight of the local church.
were two different things. What Jesus heard, made him rebuke Peter with the words, “Get thee behind me Satan” (Matthew 16:23) much to Peter’s surprise and consternation, no doubt.

In the biblical account sin entered the world when Adam and Eve reversed the leadership order; she led and he followed (deliberately). In 2 Corinthians 3:19 Paul stresses that Eve was completely deceived. She—a sinless, perfect creature—was, as Stitzinger noted, “led to believe something that was not true. She was doctri-nally beguiled into hostility toward God and sensual desire for the unknown.”* In 1 Timothy 2:14 Paul again notes that it was the woman who was deceived, not Adam, and he uses this as a supporting argument for the limitations given to women with regard to positions of leadership in the church. Stitzinger notes, “In contrast to Paul’s appeal in 1 Corinthians, the deception described in 1 Timothy could only happen to women.”* He goes on to say:

The apostle may have had more than one idea in mind by this mention of the woman’s deception in 1 Timothy 2:14. He may be suggesting that a woman’s emotional faculties are different than man’s in such a way that she is more apt to be led into a course of unintentional error, and/or he may be using this verse as an argument for what her deception precipitated, namely a usurpation of her role as helper.

In either case, Gen 3:1-7 indicates that Eve allowed herself to listen to the serpent. In the course of this, she was deceived and subsequently sinned. She then introduced her husband to sin, who wilfully ignored his headship and partook of the fruit. Eve’s sin was disobedience to God, which expressed itself, in part, by a self-assumed position of leadership above her husband.

Adam freely chose to obey the voice of his wife, maybe because he realised what she had done and that it could not be undone, and in order to stay with her through the consequences he joined her in eating the forbidden fruit. His sin began the moment he failed to maintain control over his own decisions. It is yet another indication of his headship that not until he sinned was the entire human race plunged into decay and death (Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:22). One wonders what would have happened if Adam had not followed Eve into sin. Paul has warned the Church not to permit women to reverse the roles again, hence the prohibition on her speaking in Christ’s Church which would lead to her talents taking up a position of authority once again over man.

Two aspects of Eve’s punishment are worth noting:

First, “and your desire shall be to your husband.”

There is no need to emphasize the aspect of sexual desire, though that is there. It is more likely that the idea is that woman, because she has less physical strength, will desire man for protection after they are banned from the Garden of Eden and placed in a hostile world in which brutality and force would be the order of the day. Then the desire would also have as a result that man would rule over her, which is the second aspect: “and he shall rule over you.”**

What is remarkable about the state Eve was in when she was completely deceived by the words of the serpent was that she was sinless. Even while she was in the perfect state, and under Adam’s faultless care—she fell, and was the first to do so. What was to prevent her from falling again into a worse state? Hence God put her more firmly under her now fallen husband’s rule, and how despoticy history has shown that to be. She has, since that fatal day, been cruelly treated, exploited, abused, raped and dishonoured. Who can calculate what she has suffered at the hands of what was once a perfect being, whose every movement was once for her well-being?***

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*** Banks remarks: “That which is new in 3:15 is not that the husband shall rule but that his rule will be painful” (“Paul and Women’s Liberation,” Interchange 18 [1976] 81-105, esp. p. 213). F. F. Bruce (“Women in the Church: a Biblical Survey,” Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship 33 [December, 1982] 7-14, esp. p. 8) makes the mistake of saying that it is not in the creation narrative but in the Fall narrative that subordination is first mentioned. Gen 1 is pitted against Gen 2 in a destructive manner. He is also misleading when he says that Phoebe delivered the Romans Epistle to Rome. Romans 16:1 says no such thing. The bearer of the Epistle is unknown (see 4.5.2). Against it we can safely say that it is very unlikely that a woman travelled alone in those times. The same assumption is made by H. Wayne House, “The Ministry of Women in the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Periods,” BibSac 145 (1988) 387-99, esp. p. 387.
**** For a useful summary of the post-Fall status of woman see Caroline M. Breyfogle, “The Social Status of Women in the Old Testament,” The Biblical World 35 (1910) 106-116, 405-418; esp. p. 110. The woman is the possessed and not the possessor, and legally the wife is the property of her husband. He was her Baal, master, or owner (Exod 21:3, 22; Prov 31:11). Sarah calls Abraham her Master. There
But it has been suggested that God is not here ordaining her subjection but predicting it, just as in the case of Adam’s punishment thorns and thistles would spring up. And since no one would consider it impious to rid the ground of them, so neither is woman’s attempt impious to be free from man’s dominance (it is argued). It is simply an attempt to ameliorate the evil caused by sin. The fact is that there is not a single nation or tribe where women or children rule men successfully. And it would appear that there is not a single country that is free from thorns or thistles—even the deserts have them. But there is one nation—the Israel of God—where, by a strange paradox, the more lovingly and willingly the wife fulfills her God-given role the less she experiences the more evil consequences of fallen man’s force-headship. Peace comes to her through obedience, whether her husband is a Christian or not.

The New Testament writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood “he shall rule over you” to be both causal and descriptive; in God’s saying it He was ordaining it. 99 He could see the consequences because He ordained them to come into effect should disobedience occur. He is the Cause (sometimes direct, sometimes indirect) behind every effect.

In Paul’s thinking the teaching of headship is reinforced at the time of the Fall.100 Man can no more turn back the fallen nature of men and women to what they were originally than he can cause thorns and thistles to revert to what they were originally. Both in her perfect state and in her fallen state God ordained that Woman should be accountable to her head. What, then, is her position under the New Covenant, in the new creation in Christ Jesus?

can be no doubt that the Fall affected the total person (physical, mental, spiritual, etc.) detrimentally, and both Adam and Eve underwent a diminution of their original image of God, leading to a distortion of that image and resulting in Adam and Eve experiencing an estrangement (i.e., two minds not quite in harmony over the way forward) which did not exist before the Fall; an estrangement that is not allowed to develop because of God placing Eve under the headship of Adam in a manner that would not have developed had they both remained sinless. Fortunately, with the coming of Christ the image of God can be renewed once again and men and women can, to some degree, return to the pre-Fall situation and live out their original callings with the aid of the Holy Spirit. See George H. Tavard for the prelapsarian and postlapsarian views of woman as inferior and subordinate to man (Woman in Christian Tradition [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973]).

99 This text was a thorn in the side of the early feminists, including Sarah Grimké (1837), and they sought to get rid of it by altering the translation of the Hebrew verb forms from ‘shall’ to ‘will’ ‘rule over you’, thereby turning God’s words into a prediction rather than His timeless rearrangement of the relationship between the sexes. See De Swarte Gifford, “American Women and the Bible: The Nature of Woman as a Hermeneutical Issue,” in A. Yarbo Collins (ed.), Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship (SBL Centennial Publications; Biblical Scholarship in North America, 10; Chico CA, 1985).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton produced her own translation, The Woman’s Bible (1895-98) in reaction to the Revised Standard Version’s all-male version made between 1881 and 1885. The English Revised Version was made by an all-male, 27-man Committee between 1870 and 1881, and the Authorised Version was made by 54 reputable bishops and godly divines. Her one-woman project was to counter any suggestion that the Bible taught that women were to be subordinate to their husbands. This work had a wider goal in that it was also a deliberate attempt to de-patriarchise the Bible. She treated the Bible as just another human production, written by men and reflecting their view of the world (i.e., patriarchy). She repudiated its divine authority commenting, the Scriptures “bear the impress of fallible man, and not of our ideal great first cause, ‘the Spirit of all Good’” (The Woman’s Bible, p. 13), and, accepting the Darwinian view of the progress of humanity, regarded the story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden as a myth (here she drew on higher critical studies); she exonerated the snake and praised Eve’s struggle to be emancipated (see her conclusion in the second part of The Woman’s Bible, p. 214). The ideals of liberty, justice and equality became her new Gospel when she realised that patriarchy was not just a veneer but fundamental to both Testaments. In the course of her translation she gave up the attempt to accuse male translators of mistranslating the Bible to support male-domination when she became convinced that the Bible was a patriarchal book which did not contain a message of equality for the sexes; that a hierarchy within humanity pervaded the Bible from beginning to end.

100 A view endorsed by Ann L. Bowman, “Women in Ministry: an exegetical study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” Bibliotheca Sacra 149 (1992) 193-213. Women are to learn, not teach, because male headship was established at creation, and this principle was violated through role reversals in the Fall.
2.4. THE TEACHING OF HEADSHIP RESTS ON THE ORDER OF THE NEW CREATION

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past . . . used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right” (1 Pet 3:1-6).

Many interesting points emerge from Peter’s exhortation to the women. First, he is not culturally bound when he tells the wives to be submissive to their husbands, since he goes back to around 2066 BC for his ideal Christian wife—to Sarah. Two thousand years on Sarah still remains the ideal for the daughters of the Church to follow. The use of Sarah does not suggest that the New Testament writers were culturally bound. It does, however, suggest that they combed the Scriptures carefully for their models.

Second, he says, “Wives, in the same way . . . “ and this takes us back to the verses immediately preceding this passage, where we find Peter exhorting the slaves in the following manner: “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh . . .” He then goes on to set before the slave the example of the Lord enduring the cross without any resistance, showing how far one can take submissiveness to one’s master.

And third, Peter mentions two qualities that every Christian woman should seek to cultivate, since they are said to be of great worth in God’s estimation, namely, a gentle and quiet spirit. A “gentle” spirit, denoting the absence of self-assertion, or speaking in public with an authoritative voice. A “quiet” spirit, denoting a calm tranquil disposition that pervades all she does, and which communicates itself to others producing a similar state in them.101

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . . . Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

These are very instructive passages since it is highly unlikely that the Church would ever have the audacity to tell Christ what to do, therefore wives should not put themselves in a position of telling their husbands what to do.

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:2-5).

These four texts explicitly state that the wife in the New Creation is to be subject to her husband. It would appear, therefore, that whether a woman lived in the Garden of Eden, or at the base of Mount Sinai, or on the top of Calvary, she was to be subject to her husband. The example of submission is that of Man to Christ and of Christ to God, and of the Church to Christ, “as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:24). And if wives are to submit after the example of the Church, then husbands are to love their wives after the example that Jesus has left of his love for the Church:

101 Based on her own participation in the women’s world of the Bedouin (closed to male eyes) Lila Abu-Lughod uses the word ‘modesty’ to sum up the female moral code of shyness, self-restraint, and a deferential attitude, the Arabic term for which is hashama which is translated by ‘a cluster of words including modesty, shame and shyness, in its broadest sense, it means propriety’ (Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], p. 105). By contrast the image of the Western ‘liberated’ woman is one who is brash, loud, and self-assertive.
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy . . . In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church . . . each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:25-33).

From which it may be inferred that if Christ’s men were to love as Christ did, and the Church’s women were to submit as the Church should, then the governments of this world would have a model example of a peaceful and harmonious society. A society held together by mutual love for its members, and built upon a patriarchal authority structure, where the natural laws would be in harmony with the spiritual. The Church’s calling is to be such a model, not as an end in itself, but because it is the desire of its Head—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Given the clear, unambiguous role that God had designed woman to fit into, in relation to man, is it appropriate that she should aspire to exercise leadership over her own husband? The answer is clearly, No. It follows that if her position is one of submissiveness to her husband then she is in no position to exercise any role of any description over another woman’s husband. Her sphere of influence is best fulfilled in the home environment, under the leadership and headship of her own husband (or the direction of her father if she is unmarried).

The older women are given the role of teaching younger women how to be good wives, but the sphere in which women are to operate and exercise this teaching role is clearly in the home according to Titus 2:2-5, and just as clearly it is exercised over other younger women. If older women fulfilled this God-given function today would there not be greater harmony between men and women in Christian marriages? Would there not be less divorces among Church members? Have women failed women to reach their God-given potential? Where are the books written by older women for younger women? The areas delegated to older Christian women to pass on to the next generation of women are set out in Titus 2:4. They are: (1) to teach what is good, (2) to encourage the young women to love their husbands, (3) to love their children, (4) to be self-controlled, chaste, and kind, (5) to be good managers of the household, (6) to be submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. The home and family is the sphere in which women are envisaged fulfilling God’s will for their lives and bringing credit to His Gospel.

SUMMARY

We have noted that the teaching of Headship rests on the order of creation. Adam was formed first; the first of a new order of beings directly related to God and made in His image (which the lower creation is not, being amoral creatures). To Adam (representative Man) was given dominion over all the earth before Eve (representative Woman) was formed.

We have noted that the teaching of Headship rests on the origin of woman. Whereas Man had his life breathed into him directly from the mouth of God (denoting something emanating from the very being of God Himself, rather than God taking a pre-existing creature and “converting” it into a Man), Woman receives her life from the directly created living substance of the Man. A living part of him is taken away and from it a Woman is formed and brought to Man to be with him for life.

We have noted that the teaching of Headship is reinforced in the Fall of creation through the first sin which was made by Woman, who was deceived into reaching for power and authority which was not hers to take. She was in a state of sinless perfection when she sinned. Having lost that state she was instrumental in bringing her husband into a state of disobedience: but he was not deceived into sinning; he chose to sin. If she could be deceived in a perfect state how much more in a fallen state? She is not permitted to put herself in a position of authority over Man lest she be subject to the same deception, and again lead Man, renewed Man this time, into sin once again.

We have noted that the teaching of Headship is upheld in the New Creation in Christ Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, women are commanded not to speak in the Church, and not to aspire to positions of authority over men. We noted that even in a pure state she fell because she reached for a position of authority that God never intended her to have. Speaking, and speaking powerfully with authority, is one sure way of gaining (or regaining) dominance over one’s hearers, and inducing them to be one’s followers. God prevents this avenue of opportunity from opening up by demanding that women be silent in the New Testament Church, as He had ensured they were in the Old Testament Church. But man and woman are part of the New Creation in Christ Jesus, and this opens up a new era for both: they have a real opportunity to fulfil the roles that He had set for them “in the beginning.” With the presence of the Lord Jesus within, and all the resources of the Holy Spirit at
their disposal the Christian man can be a second Adam again, and the Christian woman can be a second Eve again, and both can try once again to live within the spheres of their God-given powers and responsibilities and do a better job of it this time round.
3. THE OFFICE OF ELDER AND ITS QUALIFICATIONS

Every family has its male head who “must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:4). Paul taught that through the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus Christ has committed the oversight of His Church (the aggregate of all the families) only to those heads of families who have managed their own house well, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:5). Certain men are excluded from managing the larger unit of the church on the grounds that they have not proved themselves to have the necessary skills to manage a smaller unit, namely, their own family. Since women are not permitted to be head of their own husband they can never be eligible to rule over other heads of families in the larger unit of the church. Only the head of a family is eligible to rule over the heads of other families.

The following diagram may help to illustrate God’s authority structure.

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102 It is interesting that in the Roman world of Plutarch (AD 45-125) a similar view was expressed: “A man therefore ought to have his household well-harmonized who is going to harmonize State, Forum, and friends.” Plutarch, *Moralia* 144.43 (Loeb Classical Library [1971]. Vol. II, p. 333)
AUTHORITY STRUCTURE IN CREATION

GOD
"ALL IN ALL"

CHrist
"THE HEAD OF CHRIST IS GOD"

MAN
"THE HEAD OF MAN IS CHRIST"

WOMAN
"THE HEAD OF WOMAN IS MAN"

AUTHORITY STRUCTURE IN THE CHURCH

CHRIST IS HEAD OVER EVERY MAN

"AND WE ASK YOU, BROTHERS, TO RECOGNISE THOSE LABOURING AMONG YOU, AND LEADING YOU, AND ADMONISHING YOU, AND TO ESTEEM THEM VERY MUCH IN LOVE, BECAUSE OF THEIR WORK" (1 THESS 5:12)

"THE WELL-LEADING ELDERS OF DOUBLE HONOUR LET THEM BE COUNTED WORTHY, ESPECIALLY THOSE LABOURING IN WORD AND TEACHING" (1 TIM 5:17)

"AND IF ANYONE HIS OWN HOUSE DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO LEAD, HOW CAN HE TAKE CARE OF AN ASSEMBLY OF GOD" (1 TIM 3:5)

"AND WE ASK YOU, BROTHERS, TO RECOGNISE THOSE LABOURING AMONG YOU, AND LEADING YOU, AND ADMONISHING YOU, AND TO ESTEEM THEM VERY MUCH IN LOVE, BECAUSE OF THEIR WORK" (1 THESS 5:12)

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"AND IF ANYONE HIS OWN HOUSE DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO LEAD, HOW CAN HE TAKE CARE OF AN ASSEMBLY OF GOD" (1 TIM 3:5)
No man can be the head of another man, since all men have Christ as their direct head. The Elders do not have a headship position over other heads of families, or single men. Their position is not comparable to the relation between Christ and the Father as might appear at first sight. Though Christ and the Father are equal in nature, as are men and Elders, yet God is the head of Christ whereas men and Elders are heads of wives/women. The Elders, therefore, manage Christ’s household on His behalf because the office of Elder has been created by the Lord, and is a gift from Him. The Elders are to see that they exercise their authority correctly.

The Elder is to “lead” not to “rule” the Church according to 1 Timothy 3:5 where “to lead” is explained by “to take care of.” 103 The term “to lead” (προϊσταμένοις) occurs eight times (Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14). Romans 12:8 lists “leading” as one of the gifts of the Spirit: “And having gifts different according to the grace that was given to us, whether—prophecy—“according to the proportion of faith;” or ministration—“in the ministration;” or he who is teaching—“in the teaching;” or he who is exhorting—“in the exhortation;” he who is sharing—“in simplicity;” he who is leading (ο προϊσταμένος)—“in diligence;” he who is doing kindness—“in cheerfulness.”

The other uses of “lead” convey the image of one who leads by personal example in good works (esp. Titus 3:8, 14). It suggests someone who is standing out in front of others as a pattern for them to follow. All the office bearers (Elders and Deacons) must be leaders of their own homes otherwise they are not eligible to lead their assemblies (1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12). Those who are recognised as leaders must be leaders “in word and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17) and be alert to admonish the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12) as they would their own families (1 Timothy 3:4, 12). The male members need not accept any ruling of the Elders that is contrary to the relation that each man has toward his immediate Head—the Lord Jesus Christ. No Elder can override any man’s headship with Christ. So while there may be a diagonal exercise of discipline between a man and his Elder, the vertical relation of headship with Christ is direct and not through Elders. Woman’s duty of obedience to Christ is through her husband (vertical) or through her father (diagonal) if an unmarried daughter and still living with him. But the issue of covering and uncovering the head is gender-based, not headship based, and it applies only when males and females are engaged directly in “praying or prophesying.” Paul leads off with a theological statement in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that at first glance seems like taking a sledgehammer to crack open a peanut. Its scope is so vast that it encompasses God, Christ, Man and Woman within it. Sandwiched between the headships of God and Christ is the disputed headship of Man. This is the theological issue at stake in 11:2-16. 104 If there is no headship between men and their wives then they are equal, and so both should appear before God with an uncovered head. Paul’s reply is to reaffirm the husband’s God-ordained headship which points up the created differences between the genders at the root level. And these fundamental differences pervade all aspects of human life—physical and spiritual. All males, whether married or unmarried must leave their head uncovered: likewise all females, whether married or unmarried, must cover their heads when, and only when, they are engaged in spiritual activity.

Each male member is responsible to his own Head—Christ—directly and he should not accept any other headship from among men, this includes his own Teaching Elder/Leader or Minister, Pastors, Bishops, Archbishops, Popes, or Kings. Rather, every man is to look upon Christ’s under shepherds as gifted leaders to help them to order themselves under Christ and bring maximum glory to their Head.

The relation of the Elders to the men is comparable to the relation between a father and his son. The father’s experience, advice, and instruction should never be lightly turned aside by the son. The son’s head is not his earthly father, but Christ—and that from birth. Every man in the Church has only one Head. Every married woman in the Church has Man as her head in the Lord.

The following chart sets out the biblical teaching on the office and qualifications for leadership in Christ’s Church. The following observations are worth noting. First, only the male members are eligible to take on the oversight of the church. 105

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103 This word occurs three times, here and twice in Luke 10:34-35 where it refers to the care that the Good Samaritan showed.

104 See Chart 13. Title: ‘Paul’s reordering of the three headships of 1 Corinthians 11:3.’

105 Yet Baldwin (op. cit., p. 16) can say: ‘It is clear that the New Testament writers did not draw the sharp distinctions between men and women in the church which some of our contemporaries maintain to have been the case.’ A case of wishful thinking on her part.
Second, the choice of suitable candidates is further restricted to those heads of families who have managed their own house well, and restricted further to those who, not only have managed their own house well but, “whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” Where the candidate is not a husband, or a husband who has no children, it is doubtful if he is eligible to be an Elder because he lacks the evidence that he can take care of a smaller unit—the family. However, if Paul means that should a man be married and should he have a family then he should be able to demonstrate that he is capable of taking care of the church; and if he has a family and does not demonstrate that he can lead it then this is positive evidence that he is not likely to lead the church well. However, the unmarried or childless husband cannot be positively tested in this way. But should negative evidence disqualify him? Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Paul points out that “the unmarried man is anxious for the things of the Lord, how he shall please the Lord; and the married man is anxious for the things of the world, how he shall please the wife” (1 Corinthians 7:32-33). The unmarried man is in a better position to lead “in word and teaching” because he is less distracted (7:35). Does the Spirit give the gift of leading only to fathers? Is it a father-specific gift? Jesus was not married. Paul may not have been either. But who can doubt that they had this gift in abundance? Thus the unmarried man (or childless husband) may qualify if in other spheres he shows he has leadership qualities (in youth work, as an employer, or in a position of responsibility in the work place, etc.). If the gift of leadership is given only to fathers then it would seem like a penalty against the unmarried man (or childless husband) if they are debarred from all church offices on the grounds of their greater devotion to Christ! Such men (and childless husbands) must be “blameless” in character—morally and spiritually, as the married candidates are required to be.

Third, the stipulation that the prospective Elder must be living with only one wife (when the culture of those times countenanced two or more) has behind it the teaching that the Elder’s family ought to be a model example for all other families in the church to emulate and follow. Fourth, he must be “apt to teach” and this in the public assembly of God’s people. He has to be fit spiritually in order to exhort publicly and to confute those who contradict the teaching delivered to him. Such a public ministry can only fall—by its nature—to the male members of the Christian community, and mature ones at that.

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106 The Greek Orthodox Church mistakenly made it a compulsory condition of all its parish priests that they had to be once-married men (see A. J. Maclean, ‘The Ministry of Women,’ Church Quarterly Review 89 (1919/1920) 193-215, esp. p. 208).
THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR PUBLIC OFFICE IN THE CHURCH

"IF A MAN DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO LEAD HIS OWN HOUSE, HOW CAN HE LOOK AFTER A CONGREGATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE?"—1 Timothy 3:5

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"AND THE THINGS WHICH YOU DID HEAR FROM ME THROUGH MANY WITNESSES, THESE THINGS BE COMMITTING TO STEDFAST MEN, WHO SHALL BE CAPABLE TO TEACH OTHERS ALSO"—2 Timothy 2:2
“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:23-24, NIV).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have examined so far the biblical grounds for the headship relation between Man and Woman, and between wife and husband, and found that it fitted into the much broader picture of delegated authorities that pervade all of God’s creation.

Every aspect of God’s creation has delegated authority or hierarchies built into it. This can be seen in the animal world, the human family, the angelic orders, and the Divine Family. Every head is subject to a higher head with God head over all. It turns out, therefore, that the terms subordination, submission, and submission are not so alien to Christian theology, or offensive to Christian ethics, as some have made them out to be. The lover of God and Christ would find these terms far too weak to express their deepest desires to throw themselves utterly and completely at their feet in utter devotion to them: “His yoke is easy and His burden is light,” would be their testimony.

In the practical outworking of these terms Paul presents Christ Jesus as the supreme example of what true submission means. The Woman is called upon to follow His example.107 Man, as her head, is called upon to follow His Head’s example of love and care for her as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. Once again there is nothing offensive or unbecoming in such love and submission. The Holy Spirit makes no provision for female Elders. Scripture teaches that “the elder must be the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2), never “. . . the wife of one husband.” As Bruce Waltke noted: “One cannot appoint a wife as a leader of the church without upsetting this government for if a wife were an elder her husband would be subject to her authority: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority” (Hebrews 13:17).”108

The next section will deal the issue of the visible signs on the head to denote the different powers that God has given to men and women. Here we give a summary of that discussion in order that the reader may have a clear understanding and preview of how this topic relates to the preceding before engaging with the details themselves.

Concerning women covering their heads in the presence of God it will be shown that it is misleading to make it the sign of submission to her husband when in fact its counterpart in the natural world is the woman’s own hair—her glory. If it were the sign of her submission to her husband then she would have to wear an artificial covering on her head from the moment she was born to the moment she died.

As woman’s natural covering of hair was designed to bring her glory (doxa) and acceptance among men in the natural world, and make her acceptable/desirable to be in their presence, so her artificial covering was also designed by God to bring her authority (exousia) and acceptance among spirit beings in the spiritual world, and make her acceptable to be in their presence (“because of the angels”109).

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107 Ephesians 5:32 says she is to be subject ‘in everything’. Banks (op. cit., p. 86) remarks on this: ‘There can be no escaping the all-inclusive character of her response here, but it is important to note that it is to issue from devotion, not from fear or duty, and that the thrust of the Greek term used is more of her ‘ordering herself under’ her husband than of her ‘submitting herself’ to him.’


In covering her head in the presence of God and His angels, the woman (married and unmarried) is accepting her place in His authority structures, which involves her relationship toward Man. Man in uncovering his head in the presence of God and His angels is likewise acknowledging and accepting his relationship toward God. There is no alternative to these God-ordained symbols. They provide a visible distinction between male and female worshippers.

Most commentators quickly got lost in expounding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 because they looked among the customs of those times for an explanation for the significance of the covering. Once the “covering” (to be more precise the text reads, “having down [from the] head”; κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἐχωμ) was mistakenly identified with the cultural veil (καλυμμα), it was given a cultural meaning. Once the false identification was set up it was just a matter of time before it was discarded because its cultural significance was judged to be incompatible with the Gospel.

Lastly, that the Head of the Church has committed the government of his Church to those who bear “the image and glory of God,” that is, to gifted male members who are clearly in control of their own house, reflecting God’s control of His house (Num 12:8). Both Man and God share the common distinction of beings Heads; Woman is not a head in her own right.

The Christian woman may find no difficulty in accepting this if she wants to please her Lord and Saviour who has begun to transform her former unrestrained spirit into a “gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” She may recognise that the family structure was not intended to be a democracy where the wife and children could out-vote their father and impose their will on the head of the family. She may recognise that she belongs to an hierarchical structure, and that she does have God-given authority over her children, and they are to honour their father and mother because of this God-given authority. She may recognise that the family is not only hierarchical but patriarchal. Similarly, she may recognise the same form of government in Christ’s Church.

Man is still her head and Christ is still the Head of Man. There is no question of democracy where the men may out-vote the Head of the Church (for example, by allowing something which He has disallowed). They are called upon to carry out the will of their Head, not to formulate it for him. What Christ is to the Church, the husband should be to his family.

In conclusion, Elisabeth Elliot’s sums up one popular anti-ordination viewpoint in “Why I Oppose the Ordination of Women”:

The fruit of the Spirit which is called meekness is, I believe, the ability to see one’s proper place in the scheme of things. If I as a woman have been endowed with certain gifts that may be good for the “use of edifying,” let me use them within the boundaries set, recognizing that the Spirit of God does not contradict himself. Any attempt to obfuscate the lines drawn will only impoverish the one who makes the attempt but also deprive the Body of Christ of depth, of variety, and of that maturity which is described as “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Her assessment of the situation could not be put more starkly: “The Church must choose between the ordination and the subordination of women. Which does God command? If subordination is the command of God, ordination is excluded. It is a contradiction.” The theological choice would be better stated as being between abolishing or establishing Man’s headship.

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111 Yahweh commended Moses for being “faithful in all My house” (Num 12:6) because his attitude was to do His will in everything. “for I have not done them of my own will” (Num 16:28) he could claim.

112 Christianity Today, June 6, 1976, p. 16.
PART 4. OVERVIEW OF HISTORY: GOD HATES DIVORCE

4.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

We are privileged to be living 2000 years after the fulfilment of the major part of God’s plan for humanity. We can look back with the advantage of hindsight to see that the God of all the earth was right in all His ways and dealings with mankind. We see most of all His rule, His governance, His control of history, but most of all we see His sovereignty in His dealings with humans. Humans are His own offspring—His family, set on this earth to love and serve Him, and to govern the earth on His behalf. He created the body of His son, Adam, directly from the substance of the ground, and breathed into his body His own life-force, so that in every sense Adam represented the image of the incorruptible God. Adam did not have his origin in a pre-existing animal body, but from the beginning God created a unique body in which the life-force that He breathed into Adam would be able to express itself fully. God took on such a body Himself when He walked with Adam in the cool of the day as they communed together, like father and son.

God created a helpmeet for Adam in the form of Eve. She was created from a pre-existing creature—from Adam. She derived both her substance and her life-force from him. She was made to be dependent on him, and to serve him in a submissive capacity. He was, by his constitution and through marriage, her head, and she was responsible and answerable to him, as he was to God, his father.

Then came the catastrophic spiritual and biological fall of both Adam and Eve. “From a woman was the beginning of sin; and because of her we all die,” so wrote Ben Sira about 200 BC (Ecclus 25:24). Two hundred and fifty years later Paul made the same point, “And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (1 Timothy 2:14). “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). “Unto the woman he [God] said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband,” and he shall rule over [κρατεῖν] you (Gen 3:16).

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113 Some have understood the text to mean that woman would seek to dominate man. How this curse has worked itself out in secular society can be seen in Menander’s advice, “The wife ought always to take second place in speaking (legein), and the husband ought in all things to take the lead. For there is not a home in which a wife takes first place which has not been utterly ruined” (edition by A. Körte [1910], quoted from Quinn & Wacker, 1-2 Timothy, p. 225). Menander, the Attic poet, lived between 343 and 292 BC. It is interesting to note the Jewish attitude toward ‘headship’ in Jesus’ day as seen through the writings of Josephus and Philo. Josephus (Con. Ap. 2.201), ‘The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority (to kratos) has been given by God to man.’ Philo (Op. Man. 167) wrote, ‘In the next place she tasted deprivation of liberty and the authority of the husband at her side, whose command she must perform obey.’ Others have pointed out as a truism of anthropology that male leadership is normative in every culture and that there is no evidence of matriarchy (see Bruce K. Waltke, “The Role of Women in the Bible,” CRUX 31 [no. 3, 1995] 29-40, esp. p. 36, who has a cross-reference to George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty [New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1981], p. 136.).

114 Luke 22:25, “And he said to them, ‘The kings of the nations do exercise lordship [κυριεύουσιν] over them, and those exercising authority [κυριεύουσιν] over them are called Benefactors, but you are not so, but he who is greater among you, let him be as the younger; and he who is leading [διδάσκειν], as he who is serving.” In the parallel passages in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42 the terms are κατακυριεύοντας and κατεξουσίασιν respectively. Luke’s term is found in Romans 6:9 where death has no more lordship over the risen Christ, and in 6:14 sin has no more lordship over those under grace. In Romans 7:1 the marriage law has lordship over a man as long as he lives, and in 14:7 Christ is lord of the living and the dead. Jesus is called Lord of lords in 1 Timothy 6:15. In 2 Corinthians 1:24 Paul denies that he and Timothy acted as lords over the Corinthians but, rather, he saw himself as a fellow-worker with them. These are the seven occurrences of Luke’s term in the NT. Matthew’s term occurs in Acts 19:16 where a demon-possessed man leap on the seven sons of Sceva and overpowered them. Peter warns elders not to exercise lordship over church members but be a pattern for them to follow (1 Pet 5:3). Matthew’s term occurs only four times in the NT. Because each
The Christian always takes the view that whatever God does is right and proper. The Christian acknowledges that quite often God’s ways are not his ways, and God’s thoughts are not his thoughts, but there is an implicit and instinctual belief that the God of all the earth does what is right in His own eyes. The Christian falls in behind God and seeks to understand His dealings with mankind.

Genesis contains the record of God’s dealings with Adam’s descendants. God foretold that there would be enmity in the earth as a result of Adam’s sin. This enmity would be between the seed of the woman (the ‘sons of God’) and the seed of the serpent, the devil (the ‘sons of man’). The ‘seed of the woman’ has been identified with the Lord Jesus, who crushed the head of Satan on the cross. The promise was made to Abraham that his ‘seed’ would bring a blessing to the entire world. This seed has been explicitly identified as the Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 13: 23 and Galatians 3:16. This ‘seed’ is said to indwell every disciple of the Lord Jesus, “Every one who has been begotten of God, does not sin, because his seed in him remains, and he is not able to sin, because he has been begotten of God” (1 John 3:9).

The announcement that there would be warfare between Christ and the Devil for as long as human life existed on the earth is borne out to this very day. Both Christ and the Devil will have their disciples, and they will be in continual struggle for supremacy. It is Satan’s goal to rob God of His children by every means possible. The key tactic of Satan is to use mixed marriages. We can divide world history into three eras. First, the era from Adam to Noah’s flood, second, from Abraham to the coming of Christ, and third, from Christ to the present day.

4.2. FROM ADAM TO NOAH’S FLOOD

The hatred that God placed between the offspring of the woman (Christ) and the offspring of the serpent (Satan), manifested itself in two streams of humanity, a very small one (Christ’s sons) and a very large one (Satan’s sons). Cain killed righteous Abel, and was banished from the presence of God. He constitutes the seed of the serpent. He multiplied. His descendants were the “sons of man.” Seth, constituted the righteous line, and he, too, multiplied. His descendants were the “sons of God.” It was always God’s intention to fulfill His promise to Adam that of his seed would come a future Redeemer of all mankind. To fulfill that promise it was essential to keep the two streams of humanity apart and distinct, hence the emphasis placed on the distinct genealogical descent of Seth’s line, which is kept apart from the distinct genealogical descent of Cain’s line. The one plots the descendants of a righteous man, and the other plots the descendants of a murderer. These distinct lines must not be blurred or mixed if the promise was to be fulfilled. It is Luke who gives us the pure line of descent from Adam to Christ via Seth’s descendants.

Satan attempted to destroy the fulfilment of the promise to Adam by killing Abel, who would have constituted the righteous line leading to Christ. He may have thought that the seed of Christ was being carried in the loins of Abel. But God raised up a replacement for Abel in the form of Seth, and Seth carried the seed of Christ in his loins. Seth carried the seed of Abraham, and Abraham carried the seed of David, and Christ was of the seed of David according to the flesh (John 7:42; Romans 1:3).

God frustrated the purpose of Satan, but Satan had another strategy—mixed marriages. If he could get the two lines of descent to intermarry, then there would be no ‘righteous line’ leading to the ‘seed of the woman.’ So we read that God was sorry that he had made man on the earth. The descendants of Seth were as wicked as the descendants of Cain, and because they were birds of a feather, they naturally intermarried. The ‘sons of God’ (Seth’s descendants, the so-called righteous line) married the daughters of the ‘sons of men’ (Cain’s descendants). Thus Satan’s strategy worked. The two lines of descent were now intermingled. The distinctness of the two lines of physical descent was so badly compromised that a direct line leading from Seth to Jesus was in real danger of breaking down completely. So wicked had the totality of mankind become that there was only one man left on the earth whom God regarded as ‘righteous,’ namely, Noah. It was at this point that God decided to destroy the entire seed of the serpent, and start all over again with a single righteous man and his three sons and their wives. Because Noah was a direct descendant of Seth, God ensured—by means

man has Christ as his Lord then no man may be lord of another man. This agrees with Christ’s headship. As regards headship all men are equal and no man (bishop or elder) may dominate another man against his conscience toward God. This is not to rule out church discipline. Paul is aware that the authority of an apostle which he had received from Christ was to be used to build up the Church (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:9) not to ‘cast it down,’ but if necessary he would use his apostolic authority to discipline the disorderly in order to preserve the flock from being led astray.
of the extermination of all mankind except the seed of Noah—that the Messiah’s genealogy from Adam, via Seth, to Noah, could not be altered or frustrated by Satan, because Satan had no descendants left after the Flood. All future generations of mankind would be Seth’s descendants. Noah’s Flood defeated Satan’s strategy to use mixed marriages to frustrate God’s purpose. But Satan was not finished. He did not admit defeat. He would bide his time.

4.3. FROM NOAH TO JESUS

Noah had three sons. The eldest was Japheth, then Shem, then the youngest Ham. Ham dishonoured his father Noah for which God cursed him and Canaan, his son. So Ham and his descendants replaced Cain and his descendants to become the seed of the serpent. So, once again, the battle is joined between the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘sons of man.’ Once again the whole earth becomes disobedient. God said to Noah, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” This is not what men wanted. They wanted to remain in one place. To prevent their dispersion they built the Tower of Babel to frustrate God’s expressed will for them. But God frustrated their will by confounding their one language, “and from there Yahweh scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth,” and in this way He imposed His will on mankind.

The dispersal of Noah’s descendants to all the ends of the earth was not a random affair. God chose where each nation was to dwell on His earth (Deut 32:4; 2:5). In His wisdom He moved the descendants of Canaan—who He had cursed—to Palestine. He could have moved them to India or Britain, and so they would be well away from Shem’s line, which was now the continuation of Seth’s line, leading to the ‘seed of the woman.’

Abraham was a direct descendant of Shem, but all his contemporaries had long lost their connection to the true religion and had become idol-worshippers. It looked as though, once again, Satan was going to frustrate God’s plan to fulfil His promise to Adam. But just when all seemed lost, God chose a 75-year old, childless, man, and instructed him to leave his tribe and journey to the land of Canaan. God’s ways are inscrutable, because He cursed Canaan, and yet He gave him the land of Canaan, which He had foreordained to be the land of His Messiah. So now the seed of the serpent would be living cheek by jowl with the ‘seed of the woman’ (Abraham).

Abraham almost played into the hands of Satan when he visited Abimelech, king of Gerer, and out of fear for his life asked Sarah not to divulge the fact that she was his wife. God had to step in and retrieve the situation. Then Isaac—himself the subject of a promise of God to Abraham and Sarah—was born. But he, too, almost jeopardised his wife in the same manner, but Abimelech, king of Gerer, and now king of the Philistines (Gen 26:1) realized who Rebekah was and was angry with Isaac, informing him of the great danger he could have put one of his men in, if he had lain with her—a married woman. Abimelech was so frightened that Rebekah might be violated that he demanded the death penalty for anyone who committed adultery with Rebekah (Gen 26:11). There may be a remembrance of the fear of God he, or his father, experienced in a similar incident with Sarah.

Satanic threats to the purity of the line of descent leading from Adam, through Seth, through Noah, through Shem, through Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, were unsuccessful. Satan would have to bide his time and wait for another opportunity, but it was a long time in coming. He had to wait 430 years while Jacob’s family grew to nationhood in Egypt, composing an army of over 600,000 men over twenty years of age.

When Israel left Egypt in a long column, the Amalekites butchered the stragglers in the rear and God saw it (Deut 25:17-19). He determined to exterminate the Amalekites, not just for this particular, cowardly sin but because of their, and the Canaanites, whole lifestyle while living on the land that He gave to Abraham and his descendants until the coming of the Messiah. King Saul was eventually given the task of carrying out the sentence of death on them, about 409 years later (in 1037 BC; cf. 1 Sam 15), showing that a holy God cannot let sin go unpunished. He shows mercy on whom He chooses to show mercy, and through this displays His inscrutability. He is not a man to think like a fallen man.

God chose the nation of Israel to be His Elect people because they were the fulfilment of His promise to Abraham to make him into a great nation. The entire nation was raised to the state of being holy to Yahweh. They were forbidden to intermarry with the surrounding nations (Deut 7:3). This blocked off one of Satan’s oft-used strategies to frustrate God’s long-term plan of sending a Messiah to intercede for the entire world. Indeed, God commanded the extermination of Ham’s

115 There are at least forty years between Abraham’s encounter with Abimelech (Gen 20:2) and Isaac’s encounter with a king of the same name (Gen 26:1), that it is possible that ‘Abimelech’ was not a personal name, but like ‘Pharaoh’ a title.
descendants in Palestine. These consisted of seven nations (Deut 4:32) who were mightier than Israel whose army numbered over 600,000, so the prospect of defeating nations with armies greater than Israel’s was a daunting challenge, but they had Yahweh as their commander-in-chief, and that insured victory every time. The seven nations were the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. These nations were exterminated, men, women and children. They were to show no mercy or pity. They had to be ruthlessly efficient because their remnant could lead them astray from their pure worship of Yahweh (Dt 20:17; 2:34; 3:6; 7:2, 16; Exod 23:23). In the case of nations outside Palestine, who fought with them, only the males were to be exterminated. The women and children were to be spared (Deut 20:13). If an Israelite city or town apostatized they had to show the same ruthless efficiency to exterminate every man, woman and child, because they, like leaven, could contaminate the entire nation in time (Deut 17:5). God was not going to tolerate any apostates living on His territory. To ensure that He could hold the nation in check until the arrival of His Messiah, He introduced the Torah to hedge them in, and prevent them adopting Canaanite practices. Yahweh imposed His religion on the entire nation. They were a rebellious nation from the moment they left Egypt (Deut 9:7, 24). Moses experienced their stiff-necked opposition to him and to Yahweh from the moment he knew them, he tells us (Deut 9:24), and if they were like that while he was alive and holding them in check he dreaded to think what they would do once he was dead (Deut 31:27). He knew this nation inside out, and so he predicted they would “become utterly corrupt” as soon as he was dead, and that this would break out in the distant future as well, leading to disaster (Deut 31:29).

The whole Satan was unsuccessful in getting the Israelites to intermarry until after Israel returned from the Babylonian exile (from 605 to 536 BC). While Ezra and Nehemiah were away in Babylon the people intermarried with non-Israelites. When Ezra returned in 445 BC he discovered that Israel had intermarried with some of these seven nations whom they had failed to exterminate, such as the Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Amorites, Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians (Ezra 9:1). Ezra tore out the hair of his head and beard in utter horror, because he, more than any other priest at that time, realised the physical (and spiritual) significance of this contamination of flesh (and genes). “For they have taken some of their [foreign] daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass” (Ezra 9:2). Ezra gathered the exiles together and confessed the sin of the people quoting Yahweh’s command that they were never to intermarry with foreign women. Ezra then forced all these foreign wives and their unclean children to be separated from the “holy flesh” of Israel. The contamination could have been catastrophic because it had reached from the leaders down to the peasants, including the priesthood itself. This could have spelled disaster for the identification of the Messiah that Moses had prophesied would come. It was absolutely imperative that they guarded their racial purity, because intermarriages brought in foreign religions and practices, which Yahweh would not tolerate on His soil. Ezra was successful in withdrawing the clean from the unclean, the holy flesh from the unholy flesh. The genealogical records were cleaned up and good order reinstated.

4.3.1. The horror of adultery and fornication outside Israel

4.3.1.1. The incident of Abimelech and Sarah

We noted above that the punishment for divorce was a life-sentence, but not a death sentence, which Yahweh could have laid down. Consider the case of unintentional adultery between Abimelech, king of Gerar, and Sarah, wife of Abraham. Abraham lived between 2166 and 1991 BC. God threatened the king with death if he did not return Sarah to her husband. The context is as follows:

1 And Abraham journeys from there toward the land of the Negeb, and dwells between Qadesh and Shur; and he lodges awhile in Gerar. 2 And Abraham says of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar reaches out and takes Sarah.

3 And God comes in unto Abimelech in a dream of the night, and says to him, “Lo, you are dying over the woman whom you took, and she is being owned of an owner [= she is married to a husband].” 4 And Abimelech had not drawn near unto [= lain with] her, and he says, “Lord, also a righteous nation do you slay [because of me]? 5 He said to me, did he not, ‘She [is] my sister!’? And she—she herself said, ‘He [is] my brother.’ In the honesty of my heart, and in the innocence of my palms, I did this.” 6 And God says to him in the dream, “Yes, I—I have known that in the honesty of your heart you did this, and I restrained you, even I, from sinning against Me, for this reason I have not
allowed you to come unto her.  7 And now, send back the man’s wife, because he [is] inspired, and he prays on your behalf, and live! And if you are not sending back, know that dying you do die, you, and all that you have.”

And Abimelech rises early in the morning, and calls for all his servants, and speaks all these words in their ears, and the men fear exceedingly.  9 And Abimelech calls for Abraham, and says to him, “What have you done to us? and what have I sinned against you, that you have brought upon me, and upon my kingdom, a great sin? Practices which are not done you have done to me.”  10 Abimelech also says to Abraham, “What have you seen [wrong in my land] that you have done this [evil] thing?”  11 And Abraham replies, “Because I said, ‘Surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they have killed me for the sake of my wife.’  12 And, in any case, truly she is my sister, daughter of my father, only not daughter of my mother, and she becomes my wife.  13 And it comes to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I say to her, ‘This [is] your kindness which you do for me: at every place where we arrive, say of me, ‘He [is] my brother.’”

14 And Abimelech takes sheep and oxen, and servants and female servants, and gives them to Abraham, and sends Sarah his wife back to him.  15 And Abimelech says, “Look, my land [is] before thee, where it is good in your eyes, dwell there.”  16 And to Sarah he said, “Lo, I have given a thousand silverlings to your brother. Look indeed, it is to you a covering of eyes, 16 to all who are alongside you; and by all [with me]. And she is being cleared [of any impropriety].

And Abraham prays to God, and God heals Abimelech and his wife, and his second wives, and they bear, 17 because Yahweh restraining did restrain every womb of the house of Abimelech, over the matter of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Note in 20:6 that God sees the probability of adultery, not so much as a sin against Abraham, her husband, but as a sin against Him. This means that adultery is first and foremost a sin against God, and only secondarily a sin against Abraham. Jesus noted that when a man divorces his wife and remarries “he is being adulterous against her” (Mark 10:11). From the Abimelech incident we can infer that it is also a sin against God, because he has violated the law of union (Romans 7:2).

King Abimelech refers to adultery as “a great sin,” and was absolutely clear that he would not knowingly commit such a great sin. The claim was recognised by God as true, and so He stepped in and restrained the king from sinning. As far back as the late third millennium BC, adultery was recognised by non-Hebrews as “a great sin,” and deserving of the death penalty. This traditional punishment was carried forward into the Sinai Covenant document.

Note in 20:3 God says, “Lo, you are dying over the woman whom you took.” The verb is the participle, ‘are dying,’ which means that from the moment Sarah came into the possession of Abimelech he began to die as a human being, and he would have continued down that track if he had continued in his possession of another man’s wife. Also, from the moment Sarah came into the possession of Abimelech, God cursed the wombs of all the king’s wives, and the curse was lifted only when Sarah was returned to Abraham.

The lesson that comes out of this incident is that unintentional adultery is still adultery and “a great sin” in the eyes of God, and a sin against Him. In modern times, many think that because they remarried in all innocence that somehow this is not adultery. God does not come in a vision of the night to warn such so-called ‘innocents,’ but He does warn them through the faithful preaching of His Word, and through internet works such as this one. The man or woman who is sleeping with another man’s wife, or another wife’s husband, must immediately cease that relationship and send back that person to their first partners. Only in this way will the curse of eternal death be removed that presently hovers over such evil remarriages (Colossians 3:5-6).

4.3.1.2. The incident of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife

Joseph, who lived between 1915 and 1805 BC, was brought into Egypt at seventeen years of age, to be Potiphar’s butler, but he was trusted by Potiphar so much that he had charge of his entire household. When Joseph was in his mid-to-late-twenties, the biblical record informs us that he was “beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance” (Gen 39:6), and this was noticed by Potiphar’s wife who tried to seduce him but she failed, and she failed because of Joseph’s theology.

The incident reads (Gen 39:2-20):

116 This is an Egyptian idiom, meaning no one can infer any wrong, which, in this case, is presented under the form of an expensive present offered in compensation for a non-existent wrong.
And Yahweh is with Joseph, and he is a prosperous man, and he is in the house of his lord the Egyptian.  

And his lord sees that Yahweh is with him, and all that he is doing Yahweh is causing to prosper in his hand.  

And Joseph finds grace in his eyes and serves him. And he appoints him over his house, and all that he has he has given into his hand.  

And it comes to pass from the time that he appointed him over his house, and over all that he has, that Yahweh blesses the house of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of Yahweh is on all that he has, in the house, and in the field.  

And he leaves all that he has in the hand of Joseph, and he has not known anything that he has, except the bread which he is eating. And Joseph is of a fair form, and of a fair appearance.  

And it comes to pass after these things, that his lord's wife lifts up her eyes to Joseph, and says, "Lie with me."  

And he refuses, and says to his lord's wife, "Look, my lord has not known what [is] with me in the house, and all that he has he has given into my hand.  

No one is greater in this house than I, and he has not withheld from me anything, except you, because you [are] his wife. And how shall I do this great evil? [For] then have I sinned against God."  

And it comes to pass in her speaking to Joseph day [by] day, that he has not listened to her, to lie near her—to be with her.  

And it comes to pass from the time that he enters the house to do his work, and there are none of the men of the house there in the house.  

And she grasps him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." And he leaves his garment in her hand, and flees, and goes without.  

And it comes to pass when she sees that he has left his garment in her hand, and flees without,  

that she calls for the men of her house, and speaks to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a man, a Hebrew, to mock us. He has come in to me, to lie with me, and I call with a loud voice,  

and it comes to pass, when he hears that I have lifted up my voice and call, that he leaves his garment by me, and flees, and goes without."  

And she places his garment by him, until the coming in of his lord into his house.  

And she speaks to him according to these words, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought for us, came in to me to play with me.  

And it comes to pass, when I lift my voice and call, that he leaves his garment by me, and flees without."  

And it comes to pass when his lord hears the words of his servant, which he had spoken to him, saying, "According to these things has your servant done to me," that his anger burns  

and Joseph's lord takes him, and puts him into the round-house, a place where the king's prisoners [are] bound, and he is there in the round-house.

Joseph's respect for the marriage bond was such that when he was tempted to take advantage of his high status in the household of Potiphar, he informed Potiphar's wife in no uncertain terms what he thought of her attempt to seduce him. He told her plainly, "How shall I do this great evil? [For] then have I sinned against God." Joseph regarded it as a "great evil" to sleep with another man's wife. But he also states that it is not so much a sin against her husband, which it was, according to Jesus (see Mark 10:11), but a sin against God.  

Both king Abimelech and Joseph regard sleeping with another person's spouse as "a great sin," and "a great evil." This is generally not how people in remarrriages see their situation, but it is nevertheless true, and there will be a day of reckoning when these sins against God will receive their just punishment—exclusion from the Kingdom of God.

The writer of the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, Ben Sira, recorded the contempt that a remarried woman carried in the second-century BC. He wrote:  

So also [is] a wife that leaves her husband, and brings in an heir by a stranger. For first, she was disobedient in the law of the Most High. And secondly, she trespassed against her own husband. And thirdly, she played the adulteress [hemoikeuthatōr shēn] in fornication, and brought in children by a stranger. She shall be brought out into the congregation, and upon her children shall there be visitation. Her children shall not spread into roots, and her branches shall bear no fruit. She shall leave her memory for a curse, and her shame shall not be blotted out (Ecclus. 23:22-26).

Note that the writer sees her sin first as against God, and then against her husband, just as King Abimelech and Joseph viewed adultery and fornication.

To conclude this section we should note that nowhere in the Bible does God ever approve of divorce, use it, sanction it, or give it any credibility. In Deuteronomy 24:1-3 He describes the evil
practice of divorce (introduced by man for man, and regulated by Moses) only to impose on it a
punishment clause, condemning every man who divorces his wife to a life-long ban on reconciliation
to her. There is nothing good about divorce. And anyone who attempts to dissolve a lawful marriage
is a sinner, whether they go on to remarry or not.

4.4. FROM JESUS TO THE PRESENT DAY

The Jews managed to maintain their racial purity from the time of Ezra through to the arrival
of the Messiah—the Lord Jesus Christ. But then a new thing occurred. The Messiah broke down the
racial barrier. Race no longer mattered. The Kingdom of God was thrown wide open to all the nations of
the earth to enter. Descendants of the seven Canaanite nations, the Egyptians, Moabites, Ammonites,
and every Tom, Dick and Harry, plus all the Jews, were to become one, new people of God. Instead of
God’s Kingdom being confined to one nation’s territory, the boundaries of the new Kingdom of God
would be expanded to encompass the entire globe of the earth.

Instead of the Temple being a single building in the heart of Jerusalem, it would be found
everywhere in the world. Each member of the new Kingdom would represent a single building block
of the new Temple of God, making up a huge, spiritual Temple of God. Instead of an external,
imposed system of law and religion, each member of the new Kingdom of God would have God’s
new law inscribed internally on their hearts and in their minds. Instead of God localising His present
in a single building on the earth, in future He would indwell each member of His new Kingdom.

Instead of the Torah, each new member would follow the teaching of God’s long-awaited
Messiah. His teaching would take precedent over all that the Torah contained. Moses pointed to the
Lord Jesus when he wrote, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your
midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear. . . . And the Lord said to me, . . . I will put My words
in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will
not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” (Deut 18:15-19).

Keeping the letter of the Torah was a challenge, but unless it was kept in its entirety and
perfectly, then the follower of Yahweh had sinned and transgressed the Law. So demanding was the
Torah that it condemned all men, for all fell short of its high requirements, especially the supreme
goal to be holy as God is holy. What the Law could not do, in that it was unable to give the inner
power to resist sin in the mind and heart of its followers, God introduced a New Covenant and
embedded in that Covenant was a personal promise that He, God, would take up residence in the
heart and mind of each member of the new Kingdom, and give them the inner power to overcome the
power of sin in their body and mind.

As a way of life the Torah was now obsolete, but it was useful in that through all that God
did and said, the new member of the New Covenant would be strengthened in their inner being to
learn all that they could about their Creator and Saviour. What was obsolete and redundant they
could lay to one side, and extract from the Torah what was good and edifying to the new nature that
God had implanted in their bodies.

Behind the letter of the Law stood the spirit of the Law. The letter of the Law could be kept,
but seldom its spirit, the spirit being the ultimate meaning that the Writer (God) of the Law intended
it should have. He wrote, “You shall not commit adultery,” but He intended, “You shall not look
lustfully on a woman to desire her.” God was pleased that the letter of His Law was observed, but by
asking that the thought of adultery should never enter His people’s minds was a bridge too far for
them to go. But now, by giving each new member of the New Covenant the gift of His Holy Spirit,
the spirit as well as the letter could be observed and kept, and kept willingly and joyfully, and not
because it was imposed upon them from the outside. God assured all His disciples that He would
write His new Law on their hearts. It would internalised. The day of the external instructions on how
to please God were gone. A new method of communication between God and each member of the
Body of His Son was established through the indwelling of the Son in each believer. This was a far
more secure way of bonding each believer to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the abolition of the need for genealogical or racial purity, Satan lost a valuable means
for attacking the genealogical link from Adam to Christ. Luke demonstrated the link from Adam to
Jesus (Luke 3) and with the completion of that link the race card became ineffectual. Jews and
Gentiles could now freely intermarry with no fear of offending God. A new genealogical principle
took over from the physical one. Likeness to God now became distinguishing mark of the spiritual
‘Jew’. He was not a spiritual Jew who was physically born a Jew. Neither was he a son of Abraham
who was a physical descendant of Abraham (and could prove it with his own family genealogical
roll). From now on all Gentiles could be ‘sons of Abraham,’ and ‘sons of God,’ through the evidence
of having the same faith as Abraham in God’s promises.
God introduced a fundamental alteration in His relationship with all mankind. Where once He confined Himself to one small nation, now He burst forth to embrace all the nations whom He scattered over the face of the earth, and with wide open arms He announced that He had reconciled Himself to all peoples, nations, tribes and tongues, and all were freely invited to take up the offer of full reconciliation and become His sons and daughters. The same offer was made to Jew and non-Jew. Faith was all that was required.

Where once the great divide was between Jew and non-Jew, this was abolished, and in its place the great divide has now become between believer and non-believer. Where before the Jew was under a strict obligation to remain racially pure, now the obligation is to remain spiritually pure.

Satan had to adjust to this new era of grace that His Enemy had introduced into the world. If the new battle-line was drawn between believer and non-believer, then the race card was useless. To hurt his Enemy his tactics would have to change. He had to find ways of destroying the believer’s faith.

Two avenues were open to him. First, he could get a believer to marry an unbeliever. This was like getting the Jews to intermarry with the Canaanites, as they did in Ezra’s day. The unbeliever would then contaminate the believer’s faith and weaken him away from Christ. This was like the Canaanite wife bringing her idols and religious ideas into her Jewish husband’s house. God recognised the danger of mixed marriages, so He banned them completely, and so shut off a possible leakage of His followers to His enemy (Deut 7:1-3).

The second avenue open to Satan was to smuggle in his doctrines and teachings and ideas into His Enemy’s new chosen people, the new ‘Israel of God,’ to dilute, if not replace, those of his Enemy’s Son. Paul was not ignorant of Satan’s devices. To meet the first threat of believer marrying an unbeliever he instructed his churches:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.
For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?
And what communion has light with darkness?
And what accord has Christ with Beliel?
Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?
And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?
For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Believers must only marry believers (1 Corinthians 7:39). This replaces the previous arrangement where Jew must only marry Jew.

To meet the second threat to the believer, namely, false knowledge and heresy, Paul puts his churches on the alert:

Now I urge you, brothers, be alert to those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own stomach, and by smooth words with flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. . . . And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly (Romans 16:17-20).

To the brothers in the church in Phillipi Paul wrote:

Brothers, join in following my example, be alert to those who so walk as you have us for a pattern. For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their stomach, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things (Phil 3:17-19).

To the brothers in the church in Thessalonica Paul wrote:

But we command you brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. . . . For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. . . . And
if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

To Timothy Paul wrote:

Teach and exhort these things. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. By professing it some have strayed concerning the truth (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

To the brothers in the church in Thessalonica Paul wrote:

I wrote to you in a letter not to keep company with fornicators, but I certainly did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

The Christian not only has a battle going on inside himself between the Spirit and the flesh, which he has to win, but he is being constantly bombarded with all kinds of false teachings and interpretations of Scripture some of which will be detrimental to his faith, and paralyse him, making him lethargic to work out his own salvation, and take the Gospel of reconciliation out into all the world.

There is no let up in the attempt of Satan to confuse young Christians, but older Christians should take on the responsibility to teach them the certainty of the things which the sacred writings of the New Covenant contain, so that they in their turn will teach the next generation.

Paul the aged, the old warrior, had a true pastor’s heart, and the older he gets the more insistent he becomes to be on the look out for the roaring lion that is the Devil, whose aim is to terrify Christians through powerful, human agents. In his letters he emphasises the need to be alert to the predatory nature of the serpent, Satan, with his subtle ways of sowing discord among brothers. He encourages church leaders to be constantly reproving, rebuking, and exhorting Christ’s disciples (1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 4; Titus 1:13; 2:15; 3:10). Discipline is vital for growth and maturity (Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 2:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). The desire to see Christians blossom and bear much fruit in a setting of perfect harmony and unity is what the Lord Jesus wants to see in His people (Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 4:1-8; Phil 1:27; 1 Pet 3:8). Respect for church leaders should be evident among Christ’s churches (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Hebrews 13:7, 17). God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us sufficient external revelation in writing to guide us into all truth. He has also given each disciple the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide each of them into all truth. He has also given us spiritual gifts which are to be used to build up and edify the Church of His Son.

Discipline, to bring out the best in the Christian, may sometimes be resented by the disciplined person, often resulting in church splits. And so fragile are some churches financially that it would result in dwindling numbers if a hint of discipline is mentioned. What would happen if a minister explained Jesus’ teaching that all remarriages, where the spouses are still alive, are adulterous relationships? With the rate of divorce and remarriage the same in Church and State, such a teaching would be dangerous for the preacher. Where there is no godly discipline for the building up of the faith of the Elect, anarchy at the spiritual level will inevitably ensue. We see the pattern at the physical level in disciplining our children. If you leave them to their own devices they will accumulate vices, and end up in jail.

4.5. OVERVIEW OF INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS’ TEACHING ON DIVORCE
There are six major explanations to account for the so-called exception clauses. They are

1. Inclusivist Interpretation (‘not even in the case of fornication’). Porneia means any unlawful sex act, including adultery.

2. Preterative View or the Exclusivist/Augustinian View,\(^{117}\) where Jesus ducks the issue with a ‘no comment’ ["I do not discuss ‘fornication’", or, ‘setting aside the matter of πορνεία.’ Porneia means ‘whatever uncleanness means in Deuteronomy 24:1.’

3. Separation View (the exception permits separation but not divorce). Porneia means any unlawful sex act, including adultery.

4. Offense-Clarification View (divorce based on porneia is not adulterous, because it was committed before she was divorced). Porneia means adultery before a divorce.

5. Permissible Divorce [Patristic] (takes the exception at face value). Porneia means any unlawful sex act, including adultery. “He who divorces his wife is guilty of adultery unless he is forced to do so because his wife has committed adultery, in which case she is responsible for the sin that such divorce instances.” (Explanation of Mt 5:32)


4.5.1. The Preterative view

This should more accurately be called the ‘focus clause’ solution. Jesus is said in this theory to refuse to consider the ‘case of porneia.’ The so-called ‘exception clause’ is, in fact, a ‘focus clause,’ on this view. Here Jesus puts the spotlight on those divorces obtained for non-fornication causes, and condemns them, but does not explicitly condemn divorces obtained for fornication. Matthew 19:9 would then be translated as: ‘I say to you that whoever divorces his wife (I am not speaking about fornication) and marries another commits adultery.’

This interpretation acknowledges that the Gospel of Matthew, which was written for the Jews, does not specifically rule out divorce for fornication. This interpretation limits Jesus’ condemnation of divorces obtained for non-fornication causes, and divorces based on hate. While this interpretation leaves a large loophole in Jesus’ teaching on divorce in Matthew’s Gospel, we are assured that when the readers of Matthew read Mark and Luke—which were Gospels written to the Greeks and Romans respectively—they would realise that Matthew had an exception at 19:9 and 5:32 which those Gospels must take into account lest they misunderstand Jesus, and make Him out to be more absolutist than He really was. Likewise, when the readers of Mark and Luke read Matthew they would realise that Jesus was not as absolutist as they had been led to believe by Mark and Luke.

4.5.2. Criticisms of the ‘focus clauses’ solution in Matthew

Such a targeted focus lets those who obtained their divorces on the grounds of fornication off the hook. They are not condemned anywhere in Matthew. This opens the door to the possibility that divorce for fornication was not disallowed by Jesus, on the grounds that what is not condemned is permitted.

Is Matthew to be read in the light of Mark and Luke, who both present an absolutist position ruling out divorce on any grounds, or are Mark and Luke to be read in the light of Matthew?

If the former, then the universal scope of Mark and Luke must be narrowed to reflect the focus on one class of divorcees who are not guilty of adultery if they remarry. As a result of this focusing on one particular group, no criticism is made of the other divorce group.

If the latter, this would justify the interpretation of the historic Christian churches of the Reformation to read Matthew’s clauses as ‘exception clauses’ to what is said in Mark and Luke, on the grounds that all four Gospels would have been consulted and thoroughly examined before coming to a definitive understanding of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage.

If the answer is the former, then, why, when Matthew came to write his Gospel some 15 years (according to some very early source) after this confrontation with the Pharisees did he (or the Holy Spirit) create a deliberate misunderstanding of Jesus’ position on divorce? The parallel in Mark 10 shows that the editing of what Jesus said was in the hands of each of the Gospel writers. Mark deliberately omits information that Matthew admits, and vice versa. And what Mark omits is done with an eye to conveying the truth of Jesus’ teaching to his target audience (the Romans) in as clear a manner as he can. Telling half the truth amounts to a half-truth.

On the presupposition that the Gospels do not present contradictory records of Jesus’ teaching on divorce, the assumption must be that Matthew, Mark and Luke are singing from the

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same hymn sheet as they now read. Matthew is not falling short of what Mark and Luke are saying on Jesus’ teaching, especially on the issue of divorce.

The Gospels were written for distinct cultural communities. Where Mark and Luke have successfully conveyed the full truth of Jesus’ teaching on divorce to the Greeks and Romans respectively, Matthew, we are informed, failed to do the same to his Jewish audience. He conveys half-truths twice. It is argued that Matthew allowed himself to present half the truth because this was all the Jews were given at that time. This might explain away Matthew 19:9 but not Matthew 5:32. Why, on the only two occasions that Matthew records Jesus’ teaching on divorce does he insert the ‘focus clause’ on both occasions? In the Sermon on the Mount there is no dispute with the Pharisees. There must be a reason why Jesus feels the need to qualify what He is saying to a Jewish audience, but no need to qualify His statement when His Gospel is preached to a Gentile audience, by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

So deficient is Matthew in conveying the true teaching of Jesus on divorce that the Jews have to go to the Gentiles, and read the Gospels written to the Gentiles in order to discover the full extent of Jesus’ teaching on divorce. This is a serious weakness in this scenario, apart from the danger of misrepresenting the integrity of Matthew. A solution which requires us to look down on Matthew as being incapable of recording Jesus’ teaching to make sure he does not misrepresent it, is a suspect solution.

It is surprising, therefore, that Wenham & Heth devoted a chapter to it, and even more surprising that Abel Isaksson is criticised by them for not considering this view in his major study of solutions. But should not Isaksson be congratulated for showing good discernment and focusing the attention of serious scholars on biblical solutions that translate the Greek text in front of them? There are hares and hairs.

4.5.3. Criticisms of the betrothal interpretation

The only criticism of any substance made against this view by Wenham & Heth is the observation that it restricts the meaning of ‘fornication.’

Of greater substance is the objection (not made by them) that the question put to Jesus concerned the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which is explicitly dealing with a consummated marriage, and not with a betrothal marriage. Consequently the idea that Jesus inserted the exceptive clause to cover the case of the betrothed husband who divorced his betrothed wife ‘on the grounds of fornication,’ is dismissed on the grounds that He starts off talking about a married man divorcing a married woman and so the exception must refer back to the same married pair.

This criticism would have some substance if the negative μη must be translated as ‘except’ in Matthew 19:9. However, if 19:9 and 5:32 deal with the same exception, then the 5:32 exceptive clause (‘apart from the case of betrothal fornication’) favours the view that Jesus is referring to a different but parallel scenario, namely, the divorce of a betrothed wife. If we use 5:32 to throw light on the highly abbreviated form of the exceptive clause in 19:9 then μη can resume its normal use as a negative before an elliptical form which must be ‘divorce,’ as it has just been mentioned. So the exception (‘except . . .’) becomes an exemption (‘not divorced for . . .’). Jesus, referring back to the married husband, instantly thinks of another kind of husband, namely a betrothed husband, and exempts his divorce action from what He is about to say to the married men standing around Him. The exemption clause should read (paraphrased): “The husband who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, but I exempt the husband who divorces his betrothed wife for fornication and marries another woman. He is not guilty of committing adultery because he never actually married her, to become ‘one flesh.’” Jesus is not talking about an exception to divorce (a special category of divorce) that would exempt the married husband from the guilt of committing adultery, but an exemption for the betrothed husband (a special category of husband) who divorces his betrothed wife.

When revising their book, Wenham & Heth, took another look at the case of Joseph’s proposed divorce of Mary and concluded: “But there is nothing in this story that conflicts with Jesus’ teaching that divorcees may not remarry.” This can be said only of those living under the Torah,

118 Wenham & Heth, op cit., p. 278 n. 2.
119 Splitting hairs over whether porneia states the grounds why the first marriage ought never to have taken place, i.e. is understood as a ground of annulment rather than divorce, misses the thrust of Jesus’ accusation of adultery which is inescapable in all second marriages while the partners are still alive.
120 Wenham & Heth, op cit., p. 235.
and only if the so-called ‘exceptional clauses’ are read as ‘exclusion’ (Mt 19:9) and ‘exemption’ (Mt 5:32) clauses.

The theological implications of Joseph’s ‘putting away’ Mary are that Joseph was not ‘one flesh’ with Mary until after he slept with her. Up until that point Joseph was not ‘one flesh’ with Mary. So it was a fiction to get a divorce for a marriage which did not take place.

All the talk about Joseph divorcing Mary before their marriage was consummated is to no avail if Jesus ruled out divorce for a consummated marriage then He ipso facto, ruled out divorce during the betrothal period. And since only a consummated marriage is a one-flesh union, the man-made tradition of the elders to require a divorce during the espousal period is also of no avail. It is meaningless, because nothing but words are dissolved.

The law of the land at that time probably recognised the espousal vows as binding as the wedding vows, but we have no direct evidence that Joseph went along with the law of the land (if such existed) in going through a fictitious divorce of a ‘one flesh’ marriage which never took place! The word ‘secretly’ puts paid to a public divorce. Gossip will bring Joseph’s action to light, and will he still be seen to be a righteous man when the truth gets out? It is an assumption from the use of the verb apoluo that this can only mean ‘divorce’ when used in a betrothal/marriage context. But is it safe to assume this in every context, without exception?

However, God used the law of the land to smuggle in His Son into our estate. For we know that Joseph, having gone through the wedding vows with Mary, did not consummate the marriage until after she bore the Lord Jesus. So some might say that Joseph was not married to Mary until he consummated the marriage. But God shielded the legitimacy of His Son’s birth by using the Jewish Marriage law to bring Joseph and Mary together as legitimate husband and wife before they became ‘one flesh.’

4.5.4. The death penalty for adultery (fornication)

The essence of this solution is that Jewish culture was overwhelmingly a religious culture, whose laws were set by Yahweh Himself. No divorce was permitted for adultery. It was so heinous a sin that it was incorporated into the Ten Commandments, which were capital offences. Jesus said, “Now I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his woman—not over fornication which carried the death penalty”—and may have married another, is being adulterous against her.” If a wife committed fornication with another man Moses was instructed to issue a death certificate, not a divorce certificate. So, in Jesus’ eyes, the divorce certificates issued on the basis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did not, and could not, cover divorce for adultery or fornication. They could only be given for non-fornication causes, such as ‘an indecent thing’ or if her husband ‘hated’ her.

So if Jesus wanted to condemn the complete list of causes that the Jews had been using to break up consummated marriages, He just needed to exclude the one cause, fornication, in order to condemn every other cause. In so doing He was condemning anyone who did not carry out the death penalty for adultery, but instead, used adultery as their grounds for a divorce.

In order to justify their divorces they could have by-passed Deuteronomy 22:22ff., and gone to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and used the charge of ‘an indecent thing,’ or ‘hate’ to get their divorce. In effect Jesus covered, and condemned, every possible grounds for divorce below adultery/fornication. It now turns out that the ‘exclusion clause’, “not over fornication” was Jesus’ way of condemning all divorces, because in the case of fornication this was already covered by the death penalty.

Consequently, Jesus undermined the law on divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 by pointing out that if the Pharisaiic husbands obtained a divorce on the basis of this law, that is, for non-fornication issues, and married another woman, they were guilty of committing adultery against their non-adulterous wives. This was an indictment on every husband who remarried since the time of Moses as narrated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Every such husband, without exception, was an adulterer, in Jesus’ eyes. This must have come as a stunning revelation to the entire Jewish nation, and a great relief to the female population. Jesus was protecting their marriages from easy divorces from hard-hearted husbands.

We noted below, when examining Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in detail, that Jesus unambiguously distanced His Father from the command that a husband had to write out a bill of divorce and hand it to his wife as she left his house. This command did not come from God, but was created by Moses on his own authority to appease hard-hearted husbands, who were not prepared to forgive their wives for non-fornication issues.

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121 Or, “excluding fornication,” for which the death penalty, not divorce, was commanded.
Of particular concern to all Jews, who were bound to live under the Law, was sexual purity. Yahweh exterminated the inhabitants of Canaan because of their sexual excesses, which He warned the Israelites not to imitate, otherwise they, too, would be thrown off the land.

For adultery, Yahweh decreed that both offending partners must die. Therefore, there was no need for a divorce certificate. The defiled spouses were physically put to death, so that the innocent partners were free to remarry. Proverbs 6:32-35 reveals the depths of passion that adultery arouses in an offended husband. No amount of payment will save the adulterer. He cannot escape the vengeance or appease the aroused husband.122

The three ‘wife-sister’ stories (Gen 12:10-20; 20:26:11-11) reveal that adultery is a sin against Yahweh. He punished Pharaoh (Gen 12:9) and terrified Abimelech (Gen 20:3-7). David committed adultery with the wife of Uriah but because David confesses his sin he is forgiven. However, he does not escape punishment. The double penalty is that his own wives will be ravaged (cf. Job 31:9-11) and his child will die. In Hosea 1:2 the marriage of Hosea to Gomer, the ‘wife of prostitution,’ serves as an example of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. Using Gomer, Israel is metaphorically threatened with repudiation, with stripping and with the withdrawing of bed and board, but the marriage is never dissolved. Ezekiel uses the same metaphor of Jerusalem and Yahweh (Ezek 16:23).

For fornication before marriage, described as ἐκπορνεύσαι (ekporneusai) (Dt 22:21, and within marriage, see Jeremiah 3:1 ἐξ πόρνευσας [exporneusas]). Yahweh decreed that if the bride was not a virgin on her wedding night, she was to be stoned. Her parents needed to be vigilant if the tokens of her virginity were to be accepted in a legal challenge (Dt 22:13-19).123 Again, there was no need for a divorce certificate if the bride was not a virgin. The innocent bridegroom could remarry because she was physically put to death by stoning. If his challenge was not upheld by God then he could never divorce her and the parents were to receive double the (fixed) price of the bride-price (Dt 22:19). Also, where a man raped a girl he was obliged to marry her (should her father consent) and he could never divorce her (Dt 22:29). In these two cases God prevents divorce which is proof of its existence before He gave the full Covenant Law on Mount Sinai.

It might seem harsh on the raped women that they could not get a divorce from men whom they may very well hate as a result of their actions. Since every man had the right to expect to marry a virgin, raped virgins were doomed to live out their lives without a husband. But the ‘no divorce’ provision is looked upon by Yahweh as a deterrent to other men, because the offender had to support her financially all his days. The law ignores the girl's wishes in its concern to ensure that pre-marital sex is not treated as casual sex, such as a man may have with a prostitute, and get away with responsibility for a subsequent birth. The lesson for the men was that they must exercise self-control or there will be a penalty to pay in sowing their ‘wild oats.’

Yahweh also made provision for cases of rape of betrothed and unbetrothed virgins (Ex 22:16; Dt 23:28-29) and when a slave acquires a wife from his master (Ex 21:3), or when, through economic hardship, a father has to sell his daughter (Ex 21:7), but she cannot be sold to be a prostitute (Lev 19:29). He covered sexual relationships between masters and female slaves (Lev 19:20-22), and captured females (Dt 21:11-14). 32,000 Midianite virgins were incorporated into Israel (Num 31:35). He thus had a comprehensive coverage of a wide range of common situations. All difficult or unlegislated for situations were to be brought to the priests and Levites, who would receive His further judgments (mishpatim) (Dt 17:8-13) which had to be obeyed on penalty of being cut off from Israel.

For suspected fornication, Yahweh decreed that the wife should undergo a test in His presence. If she was innocent she went out free. If she was guilty then He punished her with a disease and illness that would prevent her from having any further children, leading to death, presumably (Num 5:11-31). Again, there was no need for a divorce certificate. Provision was made for the innocent husband to have a second wife (Ex 21:10).

The standard for all priests and high-priests was that they could only marry a virgin. They were forbidden to marry a divorced woman or a prostitute, and so a defiled woman,124 because “he is

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122 Some see a discrepancy between the way adultery is handled in Hos 2:4-5; Jer 3:8; Isa 50:1 and Prov 6:32-35, and explain it in terms of the difference between practice and ideal. The laws stress the utter seriousness of the offence, and that is its main function.

123 The morning after a daughter’s wedding, the sheet of the nuptial bed that was stained with hymenal blood was handed to her parents as proof of their daughter’s virginity. This insured that the bride price would remain theirs. Gordon J. Wenham (“‘Betûlâh’ A Girl of Marriagable Age,” VT 22 1972] 326-48) assumes bethûlāh refers to menstrual blood as the tokens of the bride’s virginity.

124 In addition, the high-priest could not marry a widow, and the virgin must be an Israelite, Lev 21:13. These stipulations made the keeping of female genealogies imperative, although none have
holy to his God” (Lev 21:7) and because he is not to “pollute his seed among his people” (Lev 21:15). The two types of women mentioned here would have ‘polluted’ his seed. There is a concern here to see that the seed of ceremonially holy men should be deposited in a holy womb (Ex 22:31). Sowing ‘wild oats’ was not an option for priests. However, the priest could marry a widow of a priest. What separates her off from the other three types of women is that they are still one flesh with whoever had intercourse with them, whereas the widow had broken that one-flesh link. In the case of the high priest, even the widow is excluded (Lev 21:14). God takes into account that even the daughters of His priests may be divorced by their husbands. If these divorced daughters have no children and return to their father’s house ‘as in her youth,’ then she can partake of her father’s holy food (Lev 22:13)

Yahweh used death, not a divorce certificate, to terminate broken marriages. He hated the divorce certificate which Moses was forced to introduce because the people would not live according to the expectation inherent in Genesis 2:24. Moses compromised Yahweh’s stated position, which had been handed down ‘from the beginning of the creation.’ Yahweh’s attitude was: If men want to live out their lives at a sub-standard level, then sub-standard rules will govern their existence on earth. Hence, Yahweh, put various riders or qualifications around the issuing of divorce certificates to prevent the morals of His people from sliding into the Canaanite excesses. One of these riders is recorded in Deuteronomy 24:4.

Without condoning Moses’ compromise of issuing divorce certificates for non-capital offences, Yahweh states that if a man divorces his wife over an issue that would not have led to the death penalty—in this case ‘an obscene act’—then she cannot return to her first husband. Yahweh regards her as a ‘defiled woman,’ even though she did not commit fornication before she was divorced. It was the fact that she slept with another man while her husband was still alive that defiled her. In the eyes of her first husband she ‘died’ when he divorced her, but in Yahweh’s eyes she was not divorced. This is proof that the divorce practices described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 did not come from Yahweh. He regarded her as still the wife of her first husband, hence she was committing adultery, albeit, due to her husband sending her out of his house. This is exactly how Jesus views her situation.

Those who do not accept Jesus’ view on the status of the divorced wife, have cast around for another reason why the first wife is not permitted to be reconciled to her first husband, and suggest that when a man married a woman he became related to all her close female relatives, and should his wife die or he divorce her, he could not marry any of them. Some think this may throw light on the married woman’s status as though she had become a close female relative, and therefore illegible to marry the second time around.

It should also be noted that adultery or fornication was not just a private affair. The sin was against good order in the community. This is indicated by the constant refrain, “and you have put away the evil thing from your midst” (Dt 22:21, 22, 24, etc.) in order to restore the community’s purity. Paul applies this in the case of the man who married his mother-in-law (1 Cor 5:6; cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11)—a sin which involved the death penalty. The physical death penalty is transmuted into excommunication from the people of God, ‘he is to be removed out of the midst of you.’

To be put outside the Church was a spiritual death penalty. This method of dealing with sins involving the death penalty under the Torah enables the Church to apply it in the case of all the others sins that come under the death penalty, including adultery and fornication. All adulterers (i.e., those involved in a second marriage while both partners are still alive) are to be excommunicated from the Church because they are excommunicated from heaven (Gal 5:19-21), or prohibited from becoming members of the Church, because adulterers cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

The administration of discipline is a communal one both in Deuteronomy and in Paul. It shows that all members of Israel and all members of the ‘new Israel of God’ are responsible for actualizing God’s blessing by obeying the law. An individual may pollute a church, and a polluted church may pollute the whole Body Church. The Church is one body, made up of member churches,

survived in the OT. A high-priest needed to know the last five-member genealogy of his bride, according to rabbinic tradition.

125 Yahweh assumes divorce is a tradition because some of His laws presuppose its existence soon after they left Egypt. It may be that Moses only ratified what was the practice in Egypt, rather than that he set it up for the first time. The reason for its introduction was “hardness of heart,” which suggests that divorce was a very early institution in human society.

126 Pollentius, writing to Augustine (354-430), in order to justify divorce and remarriage, suggested that the adulterous partner should be considered as dead and then, using 1 Cor 7:39, argued that he should be permitted to remarry (see Wenham & Heth, p. 42).

therefore, to maintain purity, it is essential that all communicating churches are obeying the law of Christ, otherwise one bad apple will pollute them all. A church without eyes to exclude any member who is polluted is blind and soon pollutes itself. To embrace a polluted member is to embrace pollution itself. Paul cannot shout it loud enough, ‘flee fornication,’ because he knows how deadly a sin it is in the body of Christ, be that at the individual or church level.

4.5.5. The merits of the ‘NO DIVORCE FOR FORNICATION’ interpretation

The merits of this interpretation are better than the betrothal solution in that Jesus’ statement that marriage is about becoming ‘one flesh’ implied that divorce could only really apply to a consummated union, which the betrothal stage was not, so that if Jesus did not intend to be comprehensive in His statement, His position on betrothal divorces could easily be worked out from His theology. In any case, fornication in the betrothal period would also have led to a death certificate, not a divorce certificate. This may explain why Joseph decided to divorce Mary ‘secretly,’ otherwise she would have been stoned, showing that the Law was still being practised.

Given that the Jews knew that God had demanded the death penalty for adultery, homosexuality and bestiality, and that divorce was not permitted for adultery, this explains why the Jews demanded the death penalty for the woman taken in adultery (Jn 8:5, “Moses did command us that such be stoned;” cf. Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22-24). The inference is that this was the current practice in Jesus’ day. Ezekiel records Yahweh’s speech demanding an assembly of righteous men to condemn the two adulteresses, Aholah (Samaria) and Aholibah (Judah), by stoning them (Ezek 23:46-47). Nothing is said about divorcing them.

When God’s people become corrupt and live by double standards, whereby they commit adultery with their neighbour, Yahweh is not blind to what is going on. So when their wives commit adultery with another man they want to use the Ordeal of Suspicion (in Num 5) to get God to confirm their suspicion about their wife’s infidelity, but Yahweh refuses to be used as a tool in their social politics, and yet that Ordeal was there to be used. So if a nation is living a righteous life, and a righteous man has his suspicions about his wife’s unfaithfulness, then one would expect God to be the Judge of the matter.

Now, if we rule out adultery as a means to obtain a divorce, then this leaves only issues other than adultery (or fornication) on which a man could get a divorce certificate. And this appears to be what Jesus is saying in His ‘not upon fornication [charges, as these are not permissible in law].’ Whichever way we translate the text, the sense is clear, in that we hear Jesus saying: “Divorce continued to exist for non-fornication issues after God gave His Torah on Mount Sinai. Now, if you get a divorce according to this tradition, and remarry, then you are an adulterer, and so is the person who sleeps with your wife after you have put her away.”

The punishment for adultery seems excessive until one realises that the continuity of a man’s lineage was crucial to the identification of the Messiah when He appeared. He had to emerge from Judah’s line, so each of the twelve tribes had to keep strict records of each family, so that the tribe of Judah would remain distinct from all the other tribes. Then within each tribe, each clan or family had to maintain strict genealogical records because the Messiah had to emerge from one particular family, from David’s House. Then within each family each branch of it had to maintain an exact record of each man’s paternity, so that when the Messiah did eventually emerge His genealogy would identify Him alongside His miraculous works.

Nothing would taint a line more effectively and catastrophically than a wife bearing the son of another man and passing it off as her husband’s own son. Hence Yahweh makes special provision to ensure that a man could expect his wife to bear his children. If he had any suspicion then he could make use of the Ordeal of Suspicion, and Yahweh personally superintended the proceedings and punished the guilty wife with barrenness.
PART 5. MOSES ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

5.1. MARRIAGE AMONG FREEBORN WOMEN, CAPTIVE WOMEN, CONCUBINES, AND FEMALE SLAVES

This first section is a collection of biblical texts relating to marriage customs among the Hebrews. It is intended to widen the horizon of the reader with regard to the diversity of customs that the Bible contains, and which directly affect how marriage is regarded among the social classes.

FREEBORN WOMEN

These are the daughters of registered males in the genealogical records of each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Daughters may never be sold into slavery. Their families, however, may fall on hard times and they become servants for a period of six years. They must be released in the Sabbatical (Jubilee) year.

LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

Where a man dies without children, it was the duty of a brother to marry the widow, and the first child born to her is deemed to be the child of her first husband, and this child will inherit his dead father’s estate.

ILLEGITIMATE MARRIAGE

However, “If a man takes his brother’s wife [while the brother is still alive], it is an unclean thing. He has uncovered his brother’s nakedness. They shall be childless” (Lev 20:21). Only when his brother is dead and childless may he take is brother’s wife and raise up children to carry on the name of the dead brother.

QUALIFICATION OF A PRIEST’S WIFE

Lev 21:7, “They [priests] shall not take a wife who is a prostitute or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God.” There are three classes of women a priest cannot marry.

1. A prostitute. This woman has had unions with one or more men.
2. A defiled woman. This woman has been divorced and remarried.
3. A divorced woman. This woman has been divorced but not remarried (Ezek 44:22).

Presumably he can marry a widow, provided she is a priest’s widow (Ezek 44:22). He cannot marry a widow of a non-priestly tribe of Israel.

Note the progression toward the most likely candidates.

Regarding the High Priest, “He shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or a defiled woman, or a prostitute—these he shall not marry, but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife” (Lev 21:14).

1. A widow
2. A divorced woman. This woman has not yet been remarried.
3. A defiled woman. This woman has been remarried.
4. A prostitute. This woman has had unions with one or more men.

Note the progression toward the most unlikely candidates.

There is a difference if the father of a prostitute is a non-Levite or a Levite. If her father is a Levite, a priest, then she is burned with fire (Lev 21:9). If her father is not a priest she is not burned.

The fact that the text excludes priests from marrying prostitutes and divorced wives, implies that Israelites, who were not priests, were doing so. This gives us some idea of the degradation that existed in Israel for men to marry prostitutes who should have been stoned (Deut 22:21).

FEMALE CAPTIVES

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 lays down the procedure for captive females. Marriage with female slaves and captives were arranged without any other real ceremonies than the husband’s going in to
them (Gen 30:4; Deut 21:13).\textsuperscript{128} If she is slept with by her captor and then he decides not to keep her as his woman, he is not allowed to sell her, but she goes out free, and the reason for this is because ‘he humbled her.’ This means that he had relations with her, and therefore she had no say in the matter. The same term, ‘he humbled her,’ is used of the rape of a virgin (not betrothed) in Deuteronomy 22:29. The rapist has to pay the father 50 shekels of silver, “and she shall be his wife.” If the victim agrees to marry the rapist, he cannot divorce her all the days of his life. But the rape victim can choose not to marry him (Exod 22:16-17). In this case the rapist must still pay the fifty shekels to the victim’s father, and does not have her for his wife.

As a non-virgin she had very little prospect of finding a husband, and her future was bleak. Like salt that has lost its savour, so is a woman who has lost her virginity. Both were of little value. If she wanted children, she was only likely to get them through the man who robbed her of her virginity. If she detested to marry her rapist, then her bride price by another man would be little or nothing, and she may have to accept a lower-ranking, poorer husband, who could get her for a fraction of the bride price.

What is instructive about these two cases is that where compulsory sex takes place, it is done under abnormal circumstances of ‘humbling’ the female. It is not a legitimate union.

It is instructive that it is God, not Moses, who imposed a ‘no divorce’ order on the rapist. Now, if a compulsory marriage contracted after violence is made permanent by God, how much more should a voluntary contract be considered permanent by Him, seeing it was entered into voluntarily by the freeborn virgin?\textsuperscript{129} Daniela Piattelli noted that ‘it seems certain that in Israel there was no payment of the mohar for a slave woman, even though she was taken as a lawful wife; no reference is made in the biblical passages already quoted. At Elephantine, the situation seems to be the same.’\textsuperscript{130} The mohar, which was put aside for the woman in view of a possible repudiation (divorce), could, if the circumstances of the divorce were correct, be given back to her when a repudiation took place (Ketubot 4:7). The discovery of P. Mur. 19 gave the text of a divorce in use in Palestine in the 2nd century A.D. for which see Markham Geller.\textsuperscript{131}

BETROTHED VIRGIN CONCUBINE

Leviticus 19:20, “Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this [sin] there shall be scourging: but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free.” The man is to offer a trespass sacrifice for his sin and it will be forgiven him.

BETROTHED VIRGIN FREEBORN

Deuteronomy 22:23-27, “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbour’s wife, so you shall put away the evil from among you. But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbour and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.”

ADULTERY WITH A CONCUBINE

\textsuperscript{129} The same point was made by Tertullian (part second, book 4, Chapter 34, p. 727, Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3).
\textsuperscript{131} Markham J. Geller, “New Sources for the Origin of the Rabbinic Ketubah,” Hebrew Union College Annual 49 (1978) 227-45. He compares the Mishnah with Mesopotamian and Egyptian (Elephantine) practices. He concluded that prior to the 1st cent. B.C., Jewish marriage law adhered closely to the Akkadian prototypes.
Leviticus 18:20, “Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbour’s [concubine] wife, to defile yourself with her.” That it must be a concubine wife can be deduced from Leviticus 20:10, “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). Here the death penalty is imposed, but there is no penalty when the adultery is with a concubine, except that the man becomes defiled in the eyes of God. A concubine had no status, therefore, there was no dowry, and no marriage contract. She is a possession.

So God makes a distinction between a concubine wife and a freeborn wife.

CHILDREN OF LOANED CONCUBINES BELONG TO THEIR MASTERS

Exodus 21:2-4, “If you buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gave him a woman and she bore him sons or daughters: the woman and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself.”

That this was a very ancient and widespread custom among Near Eastern cultures can be seen in Laban’s attitude toward Jacob's offspring. Laban regarded Jacob as his slave to whom he gave his daughters as wives while Jacob was his slave. Consequently, when he caught up with the fleeing family of Jacob he could claim, “These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock, all that you see is mine” (Gen 31:43). That Jacob was in some sort of slave contract for the last six years of his service can be gauged from the fact that none of his four wives born any children during those years. Laban put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, and this may have separated him from his wives. Indeed, he could not leave Laban’s flocks of sheep and goats, so his wives had to do the three-day journey out to visit him (Gen 31:4). Laban's daughters complained that their father had sold them to Jacob as if they were his female captives (Gen 31:15). And as his captives, he was entitled to retain them and their offspring, and send Jacob away empty-handed, as he intended to do (Gen 31:42). Laban had already taken advantage of local custom to get an extra seven years’ service out of Jacob for Rachel, and he was prepared to do the same over selling off his daughters as loaned wives.

God did not put the union of the concubine and the male slave on the same level as the union of freeborn wives with freeborn husbands. In essence the concubine was only on loan to the Hebrew servant: they were not married. God approved of the master’s right to claim back the loaned wife and any children she bore, and to send out the male slave empty-handed.

The custom described in Exodus 21:2-4 became an integral part of God’s law for His Old Covenant church. Many evangelical writers on divorce and remarriage, who use the Old Testament to prove that God approved of divorce under certain circumstances, avoid commenting on Exodus 21:2-4, because they see an injustice here which they find incompatible with the image of the God that they have formed in their mind. Selective editing of God’s revelation to the Old Testament saints is not a viable tactic to make God the approver of divorce. Eventually Exodus 21:2-4 will keep surfacing no matter how much it is suppressed, ignored, or discarded as irrelevant. The truth is God recognises that in human society there is an underclass of misfortunate persons, who due to the depravity of fallen human nature fall from their freeborn status to become the servants of others. As another teacher once observed, “The poor [the underclass] you always have with you.” And this will always be the case while human society exists on this planet.

NEGLECTED SLAVE CONCUBINES CAN GO FREE

Exodus 21:7-11, “If a man sell his daughter to be a slave girl, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she please not her master, who had engaged her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed: to sell her to a strange nation, he has no power, seeing he had dealt deceitfully with her. And if he engaged her to his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take to him another female, her food, her clothes, and her ointment, he shall not diminish. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free without money.”

Republican and imperial Rome refused to sanction the marriage of the slave. Male and female slaves were allowed and even encouraged to cohabit together. But the union was not considered as a marriage: it was called contubernium, not nuptiae, or matrimonium. This continued into Christian times, for Christian slaves, living as husband and wife, were not joined together by any religious ceremony by the priest. If a slave married without the permission of his master he could be put to death (see Davies Morgan, op. cit., I. 264).
Note it does not say “... after the manner of wives,” but “after the manner of daughters.” A freeborn daughter loses her freeborn status, when she becomes a chattel, and so divorce is not necessary to end the sexual relationship, because there was no marriage.

In ignorance of Near Eastern culture, and, in particular, of early Hebrew culture, it is sometimes assumed that Abraham divorced Hagar, and consequently divorce is justified and lawful in some cases. This assumption ignores the fact that Hagar was a bondwoman, a female slave. There never was a marriage between Abraham and a freeborn Hagar. The Western world cannot come to terms with this extramarital, ‘free sex’ Hebrew culture, but God can. God agreed with Sarah’s sentiments to cast out Hagar and her son. No bill of divorce was necessary when sending out a slave wife. “And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water, and placed them on the shoulder of Hagar ..., and sent her away” (Gen 21:14 ). That is how easy it was to get rid of a troublesome slave-wife, and God approved of it. But the marriage of a free-born woman to a free-born man was a different matter, and on a completely different level. These marriages were for life, with no prospect of a divorce, in accordance with God’s design for marriage as set out in Genesis 2:24.

In Abraham’s testamentary speech to all his sons he reminded them that God commanded, “that we should keep ourselves from all fornication and uncleanness, and renounce from among us all fornication and uncleanness. 4. And if any woman or maid commit fornication among you, burn her with fire,\textsuperscript{133} 3 and let them not commit fornication with her after their eyes and their heart; and let them not take to themselves wives from the daughters of Canaan; for the seed of Canaan will be rooted out of the land. 5. And he [Abraham] told them of the judgment of the giants [Gen 6:1f.], and the judgment of the Sodomites, how they had been judged on account of their wickedness, and had died on account of their fornication, and uncleanness, and mutual corruption through fornication. And guard yourselves from all fornication and uncleanness” (Jubilees 20:3-5).

In Jubilees 25:1-3, Rebecca urges Jacob to obtain a wife from Abraham’s ancestors in Mesopotamia saying to him, “My son, do not take for you a wife of the daughters of Canaan, as Esau your brother did, who took him two wives of the daughters of Canaan, and they have embittered my soul with all their unclean deeds: for all their deeds are fornication and lust, and there is no righteousness with them, for (their deeds) are evil.” These married wives committed fornication, which would embrace adultery. The general does duty for the specific.

Jacob was still single at 63 years of age and was pleased to inform his mother that “I neither know, nor have I touched any woman, nor have I betrothed myself to any, nor even thought of taking me a wife of the daughters of Canaan. For I remember, mother, the words of Abraham, our father, for he commanded me not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, but to take me a wife from the seed of my father’s house and from my kindred. I have heard since that daughters have been born to Laban, your brother, and I have set my heart on them to take a wife from among them. And for this reason I have guarded myself in my spirit against sinning or being corrupted in all my ways throughout all the days of my life; for with regard to lust and fornication Abraham, my father, gave me many commands” (Jubilees 25:4-7). The words ‘lust and fornication’ are well-suited to each other.

Marriage between Hebrews and Canaanite women, while they may be conducted correctly according to the laws and customs of either ethnic group, are null and void in God’s sight. The equivalent in the New Testament, would be the marriage of a Christian (who was single upon conversion) to a non-Christian. If such should occur, the Christian should be excommunicated from membership of Christ’s church, and refused Communion, until the marriage is regularised. The discipline is always administered in love in the expectation that the offender will conform to Christ’s teaching, and put Him first in their lives.

The Jews have never denied the discriminatory nature of the grounds for divorce as described by Yahweh in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, that divorce could only be initiated by the husband, never by the wife. But in the case of Exodus 21:1-11 they could not deny that a slave-wife (bondwoman) could take the initiative to separate from her ‘husband’ if he did not meet the three statutory provisions that he must provide for her, namely, her food, her covering, and her ointment.

However, we need to watch the context here. Exodus 21:1-11 is concerned with Israelites who through some circumstance, or change in their social status, lose their independence and are subject to the control of a fellow Israelite male. The first case involves a male, vv. 1-7. He can ‘go out free’ after he has served six years. The idea of ‘divorce’ in the words he can ‘go out free’ is out of the question here, but the same term is used of the woman in v. 11.

The second case involved selling off one’s daughter, vv. 7-9. She can be ‘ransomed’ but not divorced.

\textsuperscript{133} According to the Law only the adulterous priest’s daughter was to be burned with fire; others were to be stoned (cf. Lev. 21: 9; 20: 10).
The third case involves ‘taking to him’ another woman, whether as a concubine or a servant (possibly on a par with the male in vv. 1-6) is not stated. She could be a woman bought in the marketplace with a view to providing the Hebrew bond-servant with a wife (21:4). The text reads, ‘If another [woman] he take for him, her food, her covering, and her ointment (or oil), he does not withdraw.’ The same three words occur in Old Babylonian law on the exact same topic, where it translates as ‘food, ointment and a garment’ in that order. 134 Neither the word ‘habitation’ nor ‘sex’ are the right meaning here, as some translations have it. In any case, God would not force a man to have sex with his ‘second,’ if ‘it is evil in his eyes,’ as Scripture puts it. It is sufficient that she has all the expectations that a man’s daughter should expect in a family.

I suspect that personal hygiene was rated highly among Old Babylonian and Hebrew women, but husbands controlled the purse strings, so that it was impossible for a ‘second’ wife (or concubine) to have the financial independence to buy her own perfumes. So if the ‘second’ wife (or concubine) can keep herself clean (= through the use of oils), hide her nakedness (= by means of clothes), and not starve (= through the provision of food), then she can exist quite comfortably even if she is denied love (and sex). It is clear from the context that this woman is not a free woman.

Now, if she is not looked after properly, she ‘can go out for nothing—without the payment of money.’ He cannot sell her off. This is not a case of a free woman taking her husband to court and divorcing him for neglect. She is a lower status woman.

So we do not have any evidence in the Old Testament that freeborn, native Israelite women, could divorce their husbands. Hence the conclusion that the Jews ‘had to allow women to divorce their husband,’ needs to be qualified to read ‘had the right to go free,’ without implying the handing over of a bill of divorce, and the text is limited to lower status women, who may, or may not, be in a sexual relation with their owners.

It is said by those who believe that Jesus took His understanding of Scripture from how the rabbis of His day interpreted it, that He would have accepted divorce for adultery. They assume that Exodus 21:10f allows a female ex-slave to be freed from her marriage if three conditions were not met. From this, we are informed, Jewish interpreters assumed that if the lowest of society had this right, then all men and women had this right.

Those who support the suggestion that Jesus naively followed the interpretation of the rabbis of His day (assumed to be men like Hillel and Shammai) agree that being set free is not the same as divorce. Nevertheless, they assume that this text was used as a cornerstone of Jewish divorce law.

The challenge to this assumption takes the form of asking when did Exodus 21:10 become the cornerstone of rabbinical exegesis? The evidence points to it being later than the time of Jesus.

First, as exegetes, we must go back to the text of Scripture itself and to the middle of the 15th century BC, in particular, to understand what that text meant at that time, without being influenced by the interpretations that were extracted or imposed on it 1400 years later. Jesus was very wary about how the Pharisees did their exegesis of the text, and the ‘burdens’ they laid upon the people.

The second observation is that we have, in the rabbinic sources (collected from the mid-2nd century onwards, and written up in the mid-3rd century after the time of Jesus), an abnormal view of how Moses’s divorce law operated, because, it is assumed, the death penalty for divorce was taken away from them under Roman rule. Consequently, the only context under which divorce appears to have been discussed (as it has come down to us in the Mishnah and other rabbinical sources) is how it was practiced under foreign domination which has skewed the ‘normal’ situation. Consequently, when it is argued, ‘this text [Ex 21:11] was used as a cornerstone of Jewish divorce law,’ we have to add that this cornerstone has been drastically cut down to size by the Roman restriction on their freedom to follow the Law in a ‘normal’ situation. The Jews were thrown off the ‘normal’ use of the Law, and had to find temporary ways of getting round the foreign curtailment on their ability to keep the Law as they should have.

I can understand that if they could not freely execute adulterers, that the next best thing would be to allow divorce. But this could and should have been seen only as a temporary measure until such time as they gained their freedom, when the death penalty would come back into use. The same thing applied to sacrificing in the Temple, after it had been destroyed in AD 70. Until they regain the use of the Temple Mount the Jews are in an ‘abnormal’ situation.

So, if we assume for the sake of argument that the Jews in Jesus’ day were in an abnormal situation, and we are forced to permit divorce for adultery (as a temporary measure) because they could not freely execute the adulterers, it is highly unlikely that Jesus would accept this temporary, stop-gap, provisional law governing divorce under a foreign government, as His new, permanent teaching on marriage and divorce, would He?

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If Jesus were a true teacher come from God (Jn 3:2; 13:3), and if His Herodian, Hillelite and Shammaite enemies could say, ‘Master, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth, neither care you for any man: for you regard not the person of men. . . . ’ such a testimony suggests that Jesus did not take His doctrine from men (or contemporary Pharisees) but from God. His reputation for overturning rabbinical exegesis was well known from His Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus cancelled rabbinical interpretations in order to fill their place with His own God-given exegesis of the text. In the light of all that we know about Jesus’ supernatural source for His teaching it is hard to see Him falling in meekly behind the quirky exegesis of Hillel or Shammai (whose existence in Jesus’ day has yet to be established). We can conclude that it is inconceivable that Jesus would have been duped by His contemporaries, and to have His teaching determined by the temporary or abnormal situation the Jewish rabbis found themselves in, in having to compromise implementing God’s Law over the death penalty for adultery. But there are some so-called evangelical writers who believe that Jesus was a man of His culture and could not extract Himself from taking on the views of His contemporaries, and they sincerely believe that Jesus went along with Hillel and Shammai in permitting divorce for adultery. In this they have the support of Erasmus, who doctor the Greek text to make Jesus a disciple of Hillel and Shammai.

Jesus does not strike me as one who would compromise God’s view on marriage as it had been formulated by God ‘from the beginning of the creation.’ Indeed, the whole Torah was, in its entirety, a temporary measure. The credit goes to Jesus for being the only rabbi in history to recognise the temporary nature of the Torah, and the Mosaic dispensation. When He had fulfilled the Torah, He abolished it, and He took His followers back to the teaching that preceded the giving of the Torah. In the case of His doctrine of marriage, He took His followers back to what His Father revealed in Genesis 2:24, and declared that no provision for divorce was contemplated for any lawful marriage when God instituted marriage, for He deduced that when God fused male and female in a one-flesh union, no man could take it upon himself to separate what His Father had joined together.135

The reason why Jesus took His teaching on marriage from Genesis 2:24, and not from Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 21, was because Adam and Eve were at the time of their marriage in a sinless state. They were sinless beings. They were God’s pure offspring. Through the ‘born-again’ experience all believers are taken back to the same position that Adam and Eve were in, where it was possible for Adam and Eve not to sin. This is the new starting-point of every new convert’s life in Christ. When Christ Jesus takes up His abode in the body of each of His converts, they enter a new level of existence comparable to what Adam and Eve experienced before their fall. All things become new. They see God and His creation in a new light. They see the significance of Christ’s life and death in a new light, and they experience it with growing clarity and understanding, through the spiritual gifts that Jesus has endowed His Church with. Yes, they can sometimes trip and stumble and temporarily be duped by false teachers, but while the Spirit of Christ dwells within their mortal bodies they can never fall away or apostatize, if they abide in Christ at all times.

Christ Jesus raises all His people to a new level, and at that level there is no place for divorce. Divorce belongs to the lower level of those who are not yet born again of the Spirit of God and who are slaves to their fleshly nature, and who will die in their sins, resulting in a destiny in the company of the Devil and all his angels. On the other hand, those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within them will recognise that divorce is of the Devil and is obtained through his divorce courts, secular and religious.

5.2. AT WHAT POINT DOES A MARRIAGE BECOME PERMANENT?

Some have argued that every marriage is provisional until the bridegroom confirms the following morning that his bride was a virgin. At this point his marriage is deemed to have entered a permanent state. Others say that it is not until other expected conditions have been met by the bride and the groom, especially if the conditions are stated in the marriage contract.

Some have likened a marriage contract to buying a washing-machine. A man buys it in good faith, but when he gets it home if is not working properly, as he expects it should, or it is defective, so he is entitled to send it back to the buyer and get his money back.

The status of a married couple is that they are married in the eyes of the State from the moment they are pronounced ‘man and wife,’ and sign the Registry, and walk out before the

congregation as ‘husband and wife.’ If they change their minds before they go off on their honeymoon, they must obey the law of the land and get a civil divorce to reverse their decision to be man and wife. So long as there has been no physical, sexual union between them, what Scripture terms ‘one flesh’ (coitus), they can free themselves to marry other persons. But once they have lawfully become ‘one flesh’ (i.e., consummated the marriage) then they are married for life in the eyes of God (and the State). And what God has joined together no State divorce court can separate.

Others suggest that a marriage is formally entered into with the public recognition that a man and a woman have agreed in public (before witnesses) to live together as husband and wife. This is common to most civilised cultures. That marriage then becomes an unbreakable union when the two become one flesh (at coitus). At this point there is no turning back. The marriage is for better or for worse, and ends when one of the partners dies.

If coitus does not occur, following the public endorsement by the community of the legitimacy of the proposed union, then there is no one-flesh union in the eyes of God, yet it is still a marriage in the eyes of the community and of God, because their status is one of husband and wife. They cannot be divorced, because Jesus did not set up any courts that could undo the covenantal agreement that they have entered into.

In real life, because the couple are deeply in love, there is no gap between the ceremony and first coitus. It would be nigh impossible to get hold of a case where the couple split up after they had entered into a covenantal agreement to live together ‘forsaking all others,’ and before they slept together. In real life there is a one hundred per cent transition between vows and sex, as it should be. There is no thought in anybody’s mind that the first few days or weeks of a wedding are provisional.

God did make provision for the rare occasion when a husband, after sleeping with his bride, accused her of not being a virgin (the Bitter Waters Ordeal, Num 5:11-31). God, personally, judged these cases, because only He could know infallibly if the accusation was true or false. If the accusation was false, God decreed that the man could never divorce his wife (and presumably vice versa). But here again we are seeing life under the Law, which has passed away as obsolete, and God is not going to adjudicate any man’s allegation of sexual impurity in any bride, Christian or non-Christian.

If we stand back and view the purpose of the Torah, we can see that virginity was essential to safeguard the genealogical lines of each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel so that each tribe inherited its promised future and lands, but it was also essential to safeguard the lineage leading to the Messiah of Judah, and this might be considered its chief goal. Now that the Messiah has come, the need for strict genealogical records has passed. They have no longer any future goal or function. Jesus was the terminus of all the genealogical record-keeping. Once He came the need for purity of descent in all the tribal genealogies of Israel was past.

We must make a distinction between the purpose of Old Testament marriage and marriage following the birth of the Messiah. During the Old Testament period, the emphasis was on keeping your name alive through physical descendants, hence it was crucial that a man’s descendants came through a virgin wife. This also explains levirate marriage. Levirate marriage is no longer necessary once the Messiah was born. The requirement that all gentle brides should be virgins is also no longer conditional to constitute a lawful marriage. Having children is no longer required of any marriage, now that the Messiah has come. It would be ideal to marry a virgin, but if a man discovers that she is not a virgin this is no longer any grounds for stoning her to death. Marriage is now incidental and is on a what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) basis.

Virginity is no longer essential (though highly desirable for many good reasons136) as a precondition to form a valid marriage in the sight of God. If it was essential, then the majority of marriages in the Western world would be invalid. Now, because virginity and other non-biblical preconditions were never essential to constitute a valid marriage among the gentile nations of the world by God, they cannot be imposed on any society, culture or religion under the present dispensation of Grace.

Marriage among the gentiles has always been on a WYSIWYG basis. Given the dangers inherent in marriage the apostles got it right when they observed, “It is better not to marry.” There are better things for a Christian to do than spend precious time raising a family. It is too wasteful of the Lord’s time. It is not all that it is cracked up to be. Better to pray not to have the gift of marriage and be more devoted to the Lord’s interests.

The Messiah introduced a paradigm shift from the physical to the spiritual, and this is what sets His kingdom apart from all other kingdoms, past and present, including ancient Israel.

It is a mistake to bring forward the demand for virginity, and to make it absolutely essential in a lawful, permanent marriage. Physical circumcision avails nothing if it is not accompanied by spiritual circumcision. The same goes for virginity. Physical virginity avails nothing if it is not accompanied by spiritual virginity. Spiritual circumcision and spiritual virginity are what matters before God and His Christ in the present age.

The Early Church was composed of purified sinners such as murderers (who should have been put to death), adulterers and fornicators (also subject to death under the Law), and, presumably, many converted non-virgins, who, under the Law, would have been stoned to death.

It would be a backward step to live under the Law and not under Grace, or to try to bring forward some hand-picked, obsolete laws of physical Israel and transplant them into the spiritual Israel, and impose them on Christ’s elect people.

Marriages among Christians have to be on the level of WYSIWYG. Virginity is desirable, but not essential, to create a permanent marriage. Backsliding is not a grounds for divorce. Nothing is a ground for divorce in Jesus’ world.

Some pro-divorce writers argue that the Torah is a complete legal system so that whatever is not forbidden is permitted. Since divorce is not banned by God in the Torah then it is permitted. But it should be noted that God did not need to make a law banning divorce, because there was a law already in place making it clear that marriage is indissoluble. That law was in force ‘from the beginning of creation,’ Jesus says. Everyone knew about it, from the time of Adam onwards. As Adam’s descendants spread out into all the world, they took this law (or will of God) with them.

The Mosaic Law was not for the righteous but for the unrighteous, or hard-hearted man. Because the Israelites would brazenly not live by the will of God, which He clearly revealed to all mankind in Genesis 2:24, they pushed through divorce on pragmatic grounds.

Moses had to come down to their lower level of morality and try to regulate sin. So he put together the best package he could, introducing a ‘bill of divorce’ (which he was not authorised to do), but Yahweh disdained it and slapped a non-reconciliation order on Moses’ Mickey Mouse law approving of divorce. It is sub-standard. It is sub-human. It is degrading to women. It is of the Devil. But it is the natural level to which the sinner sinks to. It is an unnatural level in God’s eyes, so He shows His contempt for it. He nowhere endorses Moses’ cosmetic law. The only complete moral system is, ‘To love God and love your neighbour as yourself.’ Divorce is a denial of both parts of this moral system.

5.3. DID GOD USE MOSES TO REGULATE DIVORCE?

Some take the view that God guided Moses to regulate divorce. If He did, then He has colluded with Moses to undo what He has fused together. I do not see God colluding with Moses, or worst still, guiding Moses to introduce laws facilitating the splitting up of lawful marriages. If that is how some read 24:1-4 then consistency demands that God also facilitates the man-stealer in 24:7, because God describes the method used by the thief to steal a man. Description is not prescription.

If divorce had been of God He would have set up priestly courts to adjudicate each case to ensure fairness. Deuteronomy 17:8-13 reads:

8 When anything is too hard for you for judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke — matters of strife within your gates — then you have risen, and gone up to the place on which Yahweh your God fixes. 9 And you have come in to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who is in those days, and you have inquired [for a judgment], and they have declared to you the word of judgment, 10 and you have done according to the tenor of the word which they declare to you, (those) of that place which Yahweh chooses. And you have observed to do according to all that they direct you. 11 According to the tenor of the law which they direct you, and according to the judgment which they say to you, you do. You do not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, right or left. 12 And the man who acts with presumption, so as not to listen to the priest (who is standing to serve there Yahweh your God), or to the judge, even that man has died,
and you have put away the evil thing from Israel, \(^{13}\) and all the people do hear and fear, and do not presume any more.

The fact that Yahweh did not pass a law stating that all divorces must be taken before these priestly tribunals to be judged on their merits is highly significant. It means that He would have nothing to do with these sordid affairs. He was not going to waste the valuable time and energy of His priests in dealing with men who could not show love, mercy, forgiveness and kindness toward the wives of their youth. Now just as God made no provision for divorce courts in Israel, so neither has His Son made any provision for similar courts within His Church. The dominant chord in all Jesus’ teaching is forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. There is no place in His kingdom for unforgiving men and women. They are excluded because they do not have Christ living in their bodies, minds, and spirits. Such hard-hearted persons belong in the kingdom of Satan.

Another procedure that God used to safeguard the legitimacy of a man’s offspring was the test for fornication, touched on above. The suspected wife had to drink the ink which was used to write out a curse against any woman who lay with another man but there was no proof or witnesses. God, Himself, would be the Judge in all these cases. He would not leave it to the judicial system in Israel to adjudicate in all these cases of suspected adultery or fornication. The reason for God’s intense interest in these cases was that they affected the purity of the male line of descent, one of which would lead to His Son, the Messiah.

But God shows His disdain for husbands who, on non-sexual grounds, divorce their wives over trivial matters, which He refers to as an ‘eravat dâbûr “an exposed thing,” and “hatred” (Deut 24:1-3). He is not going to be at their beck and call to sort out their sordid squabbles. He will not even allow His priests to get involved in the evil of divorce. The very idea of divorce is repugnant to Him. As far as Yahweh was concerned the evil of dumping a wife on the street was on a par with all other acts of domestic violence, and just as He passed no laws relating to what goes on in private in a man’s household, so likewise He passed no law explicitly condemning the private act of divorce. Divorce was a private matter, as the procedure in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 shows.

The theory that Hillel’s ‘no-fault’ divorce was a new thing and the talk of everybody in Jesus’ day is false, because divorce for any excuse is inherent in the words ‘eravat dâbûr and this existed before the giving of the Torah in 1406 BC. Prior to 1406 BC any man could privately divorce his wife for any reason. Divorce was a private matter, it belonged to domestic, not public law. Moses did not take away the private right of any husband to divorce his wife. He only commanded them to make it publicly clear that they had privately exercised their unalterable tradition and inalienable, patriarchal ‘right’ to divorce their wives. Nowhere in the Torah are men required to take their divorce cases to the priests. It was a private matter.

It should be pointed out that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is to be dated to 1406 BC. It records what was the practice of private divorce in those days, and as it was still in Hillel’s days (cf. the action of Joseph toward Mary; he sent her away privately [no divorce was needed]). Hillel, and not Shammai (I say this without prejudice to my own opinion on their existence and of their ‘schools’), represents the life-style of the Hebrews before Deuteronomy 24 was written down. Hillel is the authentic voice of Hebrew man, and not Shammai.

In the Torah, Yahweh described a sin and then followed it with a punishment clause. In Deut. 24:1-3 He described the evil practice of divorce, and in v. 4 we have His punishment clause. The sin of private divorce is laid bare for all to see its arbitrary nature. A man comes to hate his wife or he uncovers a matter that disgusts him, so he divorces his wife. He is not obliged to take his case to a court, and his wife has no appeal. This practice was common in all the surrounding nations going back to the time of Hammurabi and before him. Israelite men were no different from all other men in adopting this arbitrary divorce procedure.

As with all cases of domestic violence, God stood aloof with respect to laying down rules and regulations governing every possible grievance that a man might encounter after the honeymoon. Commonsense, natural justice, and exposure to the demands of the Torah, should be sufficient to mould and shape every man’s moral development from boyhood to manhood.

Moses certainly, using his privileged position as leader of the nation, wrote down a law that if any man could not live with his wife he could not just dump her on the street in case someone misunderstood his action as an act of divorce. Moses wanted the status of every married woman who

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\(^{13}\) This meaning has no connection with the ‘matter of fornication,’ λόγος πορνείας of Mt 19:9. If Jesus had intended to refer to the ‘eravat dâbûr category He would have used the phrase διχήμιον πράγμα (the LXX translation of ‘eravat dâbûr). One (λόγος πορνείας) is sexual, the other (διχήμιον πράγμα) is non-sexual.
was dumped on the street to be public knowledge. hence his ingenious decision to command all husbands to issue such dumped wives a handwritten note so say his marriage to her was dissolved. This was the best thing he could do under the circumstances, because he had no law from Yahweh forbidding this kind of domestic violence.

Yahweh did not approve of this action by Moses, because it gave a semblance of legitimacy to the private action of an evil man. For this reason Yahweh did not endorse Moses’s written command, which had to be transmitted well away from, and outside, His written Torah. By refusing to include Moses’s private judgment respecting his creation of a ‘Bill of Divorcement’ in the Torah, God refused to sanction Moses’s innovation. He disowned it.

Moses may have thought he was removing an undesirable evil consequence if private divorces were allowed to go unchecked, but by regulating these private divorces, instead of condemning them, he accidentally multiplied divorce in Israel, because, by regulating it at an official level, by means of a legal procedure, he inadvertently gave divorce a legal standing. The impression then arose that so long as a husband obeyed Moses’s legally-binding command, then Moses could not object to their domestic violence toward their hated wives. In effect Moses’s personal command gave these men the justification they were looking for to dump their wives. You do not eliminate thieves by limiting their thefts to low value goods. The limit creates thieves. And Moses’ requirement of a bill created divorcers.

The evil of divorce was justified still further by the schools of Shammai and Hillel. Although these schools had no written document passed down from the time of Moses, which recorded the actual words of the command that Moses used, they did have Yahweh’s description of how it worked out in practice, which is recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-3. Yahweh used the umbrella term ‘erut dâbâr to cover anything that offended one’s sensibilities of what was ‘seemly’ or ‘right.’ The term itself was non-specific, and deliberately chosen by God for this reason. It was a collective term because the range of faults that an evil man could use to dump his wife was almost infinite.

So while Yahweh chose a term that reflected this range of causes, the rabbis took the two-word term, separated it into its constituent parts, and used each part to justify a multitude of causes, or rather justify their infinite range. The word ‘erut literally means ‘nakedness.’ The rabbis declared that this covered any form of literal nakedness that gave offence! The word dâbâr means ‘word, thing, deed,’ so they said this covered any ‘thing,’ or ‘deed,’ that gave offence! Little did they realise that Yahweh’s umbrella term had got there before them! The school of Hillel, and not the school of Shammai, had correctly understood the open-ended nature of the term to embrace any cause that a man might nominate, and which evil men had been using from the time of Moses (if not long before his time in Egypt) to legalise private, domestic violence.

The method of exegesis used by the rabbis to justify divorce for any cause is quite bizarre. By splitting Yahweh’s umbrella term ‘an exposed thing,’ and using ‘exposed’ and ‘thing’ separately, puts this method on a par with a foreigner, who does not understand English, splitting ‘mother of pearl’ into its constituent words, ‘mother’ and ‘pearl,’ and looking up each word in an English dictionary to try to understand its meaning!

When a man takes seriously that Jesus had inside knowledge of all that went on between Moses and God at Sinai, and between Moses and the evil generation he had to lead, and His statement that God did not give any law on divorce, it leads to only one conclusion: Moses must have bowed to pressure from an adulterous generation and consolidated the evil practice of divorce that was common to all societies before Israel left Egypt in 1446 BC. If Jesus said that Moses, not God, gave them a law permitting them to divorce their wives, then the evangelical should take Jesus at His word and believe Him.

If God, in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, is laying down the law when it is right to divorce a wife then He would have given the wives the same right as the men. As it is, the practice described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, is unfair in that it gives the right to divorce to men only, and women are denied this right. This unfair law was the practice of the ancient Near Eastern cultures, as their unearthed literature reveals. It was a law made by men for the advantage of men. It does not have the wisdom of God in its provisions.

Now if Jesus said that Moses, not His Father, gave them the unfair privilege of divorcing their wives, that should be enough for the evangelical. They should not entertain the idea that Jesus meant to say that the Law came from His Father, but was passed through Moses, which is the position of those pro-divorce.

As co-Creator, Jesus knew the mind of His Father when He created male and female. He also knew that there was only one relationship that pleased God and it was revealed in Genesis 2:24, namely, that what He had joined together no man should put asunder (or divorce).

When Jesus pointed out that the ‘no divorce’ state had been the Father’s will ‘from the beginning of the creation,’ the Pharisees were quick to spot a contradiction. They say to him, "Why,
therefore, did Moses command to give a scroll of legal divorce, and to put her away?” Jesus saw no contradiction because God did not give any law setting up or sanctioning divorce. Moses did not give any law setting up divorce. Divorce was already established in Israel before Moses was born. The Pharisees did not credit Moses with the origin of divorce in Israel. They correctly point out that the only thing Moses commanded was that a bill of divorce should accompany the act of putting the wife out into the street, and giving her permission to marry whoever she wanted. So, although Moses did not originate divorce in Israel, by commanding that a bill of separation must accompany the divorce, he implicitly approved of it.

Some pro-divorce writers seem to think that God, in the time of Moses, contemplated man’s permanent tie to one woman, which Genesis 2:24 expected of all marriages, and said to Himself, ‘It is not good that man should be tied to one woman for life. I will pass a law which will permit him to divorce his wife ‘for any cause’ that annoys him, so that he can put her away, get another wife, and have a jolly good time on the earth.’ Jesus thought otherwise. He noted that its origin lay in the hardness of man’s heart; and that Moses only consolidated or confirmed them in their determination to divorce their wives. Hard men decided that they would not live by the law of Genesis 2:24. An evil law had its origin in an evil heart. This law could not have its origin in a pure, holy God, and we have Jesus’ express words that Moses, not God, harden them in their own, man-made divorce tradition.

5.4. DID MOSAIC DIVORCE DISSOLVE A LAWFUL MARRIAGE?

Theologically, divorce began very soon after the Fall. It was endemic throughout all Near Eastern civilisations as archaeological records and literary finds have shown. Divorce very likely entered into Israelite society during their stay in Egypt. Israel wanted to be like all the nations round about her. They wanted kingship because others nations had kings. God was displeased with this request. It was not His will. A similar thing may have happened with divorce. Moses inherited divorce. He did not introduce it into Israel. He inherited a potential threat to the purity of genealogical lines of descent leading to the line of the Messiah who was to come, along with other social evils. It was essential to find some method for ensuring purity of descent. Moses, using his own initiative, commanded the divorcer to write out a “roll of severance” and hand this to his wife as he dumped her in the street. This was a commonsense solution to avoid adultery. Moses did it with the best of intentions, but the suggestion did not come from God. It came from Moses, as Jesus pointed out. God had nothing to do with it.

In Matthew 19:7 the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a roll of departure . . . ?” Note the use of the word ‘command.’ In Mark 10:3 Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What did Moses command you?” Again, note the use of the word ‘command.’ Now we do not have any record of Moses giving this ‘command’ in the Hebrew Bible. Why? Because it was given ‘off the record.’ It was given orally. It was an unwritten command, which God refused to allow into His written Word for His people, otherwise it would have entered the Torah, but it is excluded. However, the record of Moses having given such a command was carried down in the oral traditions of the Hebrew fathers, just as the names of the magicians who opposed Moses are recorded in 2 Timothy 3:8.

The descriptive interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4

In Deuteronomy 24:1-3 God takes us through a typical scenario, describing the stages that a typical sin of divorce would take, which Moses had inherited. God then shows us that the typical divorce obeyed Moses’s unrecorded (but written down, Mark 10:5) command to write out a ‘roll of severance.’ God then switches our attention to the fate of the divorced wife. She remarries a man, and by becoming his wife she becomes a defiled woman. Now, if she had been truly divorced, and was a free woman, then marrying a second time should not have defiled her. It is the fact that a second living man has slept with her, while her first husband was still alive, that constitutes her a defiled woman in the eyes of Yahweh, so her divorce did not change her marital status to her first husband in the eyes of God. She was still married to her first husband even after he had written out his bill of divorce and handed it to her and she walked away from his house.

The proof of God’s rejection of divorce is seen in His judgment of the divorced wife (she is an unclean woman in His eyes for the rest of her life) and His judgment of the husband (his sin will not be forgiven). Both judgments would be lifted and forgiven and ‘cleanliness’ restored to the ‘abominated woman’ in her lifetime, and the husband allowed to return to his divorced wife, when the Messiah arrived and introduced a new ‘law’ by which all men and women were to live by. This ‘law’ had existed in the beginning with Adam and Eve, and it would be a return to this ‘law’ that all the disciples of Jesus Christ would automatically aspire to, and revel in, when they ‘put on’ Christ
and “clothed themselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14). To enter into Christ requires a new heart and a new spirit, which the natural man is not born with. It must be requested from Christ Jesus in a direct, personal request. It cannot be imparted through the laying on of hands, or through human effort. It is the gift of God, freely available to all men everywhere.

No Jew or Jewess in Jesus’ day, who got such a divorce, would agree with God’s decision that her remarriage was invalid, and that she was an abomination in His eyes, because two living men had slept with her. This shows that God did not change His mind throughout history over the issue of a woman sleeping with two living men. Jesus was one with the Father in noting the consistency in God’s attitude toward a divorced and remarried woman throughout human history.

To conclude this first point, note that God is not approving or sanctioning what He is describing in vv. 1-3. He is describing a sin, which happens to be a human institution, created by man for man. Divorce is of human origin, that is what God is pointing out in His description of this particular sin.  

Descriptive parallel with the thief (Deuteronomy 24:7)

It is a very common assumption that when God introduced the law of ‘no reconciliation after divorce,’ that He approved of divorce per se. What this assumption fails to notice is that in Deuteronomy 24:7 God introduced the death penalty (just after He dealt with divorce) for stealing a man, but no one would assume that He approved of stealing, yet look at the structure of both laws. They both conform to the casuistic (protasis-apodosis) style, ‘If . . . then.’ In apodictic laws, there is an imperative, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ Deuteronomy 12–26 contains 31 cases of casuistic law. The majority of all laws in the Torah are in the hypothetical style, ‘If you do such-and-such a thing, then this will happen to you.’

In the case of stealing we have the protasis: “When [If] a man is found stealing a person, . . .” Then follows the apodosis: “Then has that thief died.” Now, in between the protasis and the apodosis we have a description of the thief’s action. It reads: “. . . and he has tyrannized over him, and he has sold him, . . .” The structure “When . . . then . . .” is the same here as in the case of divorce. The latter reads: “When [If] a man has taken a wife . . . and sent her out of his house, . . . then he is not able to take her back.” The identical structure: “When [If] . . . then . . .” between stealing and divorce, shows that God is describing an evil situation in both cases, and following ‘When’ comes the punishment clause in both cases.

The King James Version has been responsible for leading myriads of Christians into thinking that the apodosis comes at the end of verse 1, so that it reads: “When a man has taken a wife . . . and she finds no favour in his eyes . . . then let him write her a bill of divorcement.” This is not what the Hebrew says; it is what the Reformers of the Protestant Churches wanted it to say, so that they could use Erasmus’s tampering of the text of Matthew 19:9 to justify divorce for adultery. The faulty translation of the AV is followed in the ASV (1901) and the RV (1881). The correct translation is found in the NKJV, RSV, NAB, NIV, ESV, and many more.

The sin of the thief is not to be forgiven. It is an unforgivable sin. In this case, so heinous is the crime that God demands the death penalty for it. The sin of the divorcer is likewise not to be forgiven. It, too, is an unforgivable sin. In this case, however, the sin is not so heinous as to demand the death penalty. The punishment is reduced to a life-time ban on reconciliation. The significance of this is that while the divorcer is allowed to live, he will never be forgiven by God, and this damnation is sealed in his inability to reverse his sin, and so be reconciled to his first wife. Under Grace, the

138 William F. Luck, Divorce & Re-Marriage: Recovering the Biblical View (2nd revised ed. (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2009), misunderstood Deut. 24:1-4 as God giving permission to allow divorce to protect abused wives, hence God has not withdrawn this provision right up to the present day. Adultery is not just the sex act, but the ‘ill-treatment of wives’ (pp. 241, 273-84). Jesus was wrong to abolish divorce for any cause. W. Luck is not alone in re-applying rabbinic teaching to override what Jesus taught (‘no divorce and no remarriage’). Luck’s teaching is OT wine (designed for the lawless) put into NT wine-skins (designed for the born-again person). Luck claims that there was nothing really new in what Jesus taught (p. 241). ‘We did not find that all remarriage was considered [by Jesus] adulterous, but only the kind that involved treachery’ (p. 241). The trouble is, that today 100% of all marriages involve treachery of some kind; so all remarriages are justified on the grounds of Exod 21:10-11, because Luck believes that God has not withdraw any provisions relating to divorce that He gave under the Law. They all carry over into the New Covenant.

wickedness of putting a wife out into the street (concealed under the euphemism of ‘divorce’) can be forgiven, and the sinner can be reconciled to both God and his wife.

We have the bizarre situation among some conservative-evangelical writers that because God presented a law forbidding reconciliation that this constitutes His approval of the wrong that He is describing. This is how those whom Jesus condemned as hypocrites had interpreted the text to get what they demanded.

Descriptive parallel with the hated wife (Deuteronomy 22:13-19)

An even closer parallel to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 occurs in Deuteronomy 22:13, “When a man takes a wife and goes in to her and hates her . . . then shall the father of the young woman . . . bring out the tokens of virginity . . . the elders shall chastise him . . . he may not divorce her all his days.” Yahweh is describing a typical scene that could occur. He is not endorsing it, or approving of it. He sets out a probable scenario in order to punish the wrong-doer. The opening four Hebrew words are the same in Deuteronomy 24:1 and 22:13.

Another parallel occurs in Deut. 22:23-24. These cases prove that the description of sinful deeds cannot be taken as God’s endorsement of those evil deeds.

Under the Law the punishment for divorce is severe, as it was for man-stealing, rape, and other crimes, but the life-sentence for divorce should have been a deterrent to any man to inflict such evil on his wife. But hard-hearted husbands (for this law is focussed only on husbands) traded in their lust to have ‘sex now and pay later.’

When Yahweh described the sin of the thief, and described the sin of the divorcer, and described the sin of the rapist, He was not thereby approving the act of the thief, or the rapist, or the divorcer. He had to describe what they were doing wrong in order that He could spell out the appropriate punishment.

There are many who have missed this point, and they have assumed that in the case of the divorcer, God was noting a very minor, cultural adjustment, to an institution which He had set up, and sanctioned. They mistook the description for prescription. Most commentators today recognise the danger of reading Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as legislating for divorce, but the full impact of viewing verse 4 as an expression of God’s anger over divorce per se is seldom brought out, or if noted, few see the connection with the Son of God’s blanket condemnation of divorce, which was in place from the foundation of the world (cosmos).

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus, “Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a roll of departure and to put her away?” (Matthew 19:7) they were not implying that Moses’s command was actually recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, rather, they were aware that off the record, Moses had orally commanded them to write out a roll of divorcement, and God was referring to this off the record command. So the Pharisees were referring to an unwritten law laid down orally by Moses before Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was written. The actual command of Moses is not recorded in Scripture.

Jesus was aware that before Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was written down, Moses had already commanded them how to regulate their divorce procedure, because in Mark 10:3 He asked, “What did Moses command you?” So both the Pharisees and Jesus were aware that a command was issued by Moses prior to the writing of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and it is to this unwritten command that both Jesus and the Pharisees allude to.

Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, who accompanied Israel when she left Egypt, knew the exact circumstances under which Moses made his command, which the rabbis of Jesus’ day were ignorant of. Jesus was able to reveal that Moses’s command originated in the unforgiving nature of unregenerate men (Matthew 19:8). This is a very telling revelation and completely demolishes the case for divorce, as Jesus knew it would, when He took all men back to Genesis 2:24.

Lastly, we need to look at Jesus’ sidelining of Moses’s unrecorded command to the Israelites that if they are going to divorce their wives then they must write out a ‘roll of severance’ and hand it to their wives. Jesus has no time for this command, and cancels it on His own authority as the Son of God, and in accordance with all that He taught, for He taught nothing but what was given directly to Him from His Father to teach.

We need to be clear that what is written in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 comes from God. It does not come from Moses. Moses did not introduce the law of ‘no reconciliation.’ What Moses wrote down from God’s mouth must be followed. Compare Mark 1:44, where Jesus tells the people to “offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded,” which refers to what was ‘on the record,’ or written down.

When we take a closer look at the descriptive interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 it sets the scene of a man who finds some moral or physical defect in his wife. The defect, as circumscribed by
Yahweh’s terminology and by separate laws elsewhere, can only be a non-sexual matter. This is described in many translations and commentaries by the expression, ‘nakedness of a thing.’ The knee-jerk reaction to the term ‘nakedness’ has been that it refers to literal nakedness in this context. This is not so in this context. The only other use of the same phrase in the Old Testament refers to human excrement that is not covered over (Dt 23:14). So, there, it refers to something that is exposed which ought to be hidden. In Deuteronomy 24:1, it refers to something that was hidden which became exposed, or comes to light, that displeases the husband, and which is not covered by other laws (cf. ‘for every cause’ in Matthew 19:9, which harks back to the ‘ervat dãbãr in 24:1). It would be better to translate ‘ervat dãbãr as “uncovering of a matter.” This would remove the sexual element and throw the focus on to the ‘matter’ that came to light.

Yahweh next focuses our attention on the events in the divorced woman’s life. She remarries. By this action she becomes a defiled woman, because in His eyes she is still married to her first husband (as Jesus’ teaching makes clear). She is an abomination in His eyes, through the fault of her first husband’s action of divorcing her leading to her remarriage.

Yahweh continues to keep our focus on the divorced woman. Her second husband hates her. The reason for the hatred is not relevant to Yahweh’s main purpose. The hard-hearted husband follows the same divorce procedure as the first husband, and divorces her. So she is now free to remarry anyone she chooses, it would seem. She could remarry her first husband. But Yahweh mentions another possible scenario, which would also leave the divorced woman in a position to remarry anyone she chose, namely, the death of her second ‘husband’ (who was not her husband, in God’s eyes). Now, according to Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:38, the death of a husband dissolves the marriage bond, and in the eyes of God, it is lawful for a first-time widow to remarry. Yahweh has carefully noted the two windows of opportunity whereby the defiled wife could return to her first husband.

Now in terms of Moses’s permission to divorce, this widowed woman was clearly entitled to remarry whoever she chose to. She was entitled to remarry her first husband, it would seem. But there is a snag. Yahweh never recognised the first divorce. It was unauthorised in His eyes. As a punishment for the first husband causing his wife to become a defiled woman and an abomination in His eyes, she is barred and banned from returning to her first husband. The ban is for life. The divorced woman is shut out. She can only continue on in her life of adultery, through further ‘marriages,’ as God and Jesus would view her life.

Yahweh carefully chose the sequence of events in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in order to bring to the attention of all would-be divorcers that their action results in God’s disapproval. Divorce was sexist. Only men could initiate it. The practice was set up by men for men. It was institutionalised bullying of the worst kind.

The sequence of events, as described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, is no longer possible for Jesus’ disciples to copy, or use for pastoral purposes. It is incompatible with Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness.

How each divorce came about is totally irrelevant to Yahweh, as no cause could justify it. The nature of the disapproval is significant. Under the New Covenant, such a divorced woman would be able to be reconciled to her first husband because any subsequent marriage by her or her husband would not be viewed as a marriage, but as adultery. Reconciliation meets with God’s approval under the New Covenant, but meets with His disapproval under the Old Covenant, showing that the ban on reconciliation was double-edged. Under the Old Covenant the offending Israelite husband was not reconciled to his wife or to God, showing that there was no way back into God’s favour. Under the New Covenant the offending Christian husband is reconciled to his wife and to God, showing that there is a way back into God’s favour. Divorce is a sin in itself, even if it is not followed by a remarriage. It needs to be forgiven, as it is never right to enact a divorce under any circumstances.

The fact that a husband might seek to take his wife back again, shows that he divorced her on trivial grounds. In effect he is turning a blind eye on his original action in making her an unclean person, and thereby constituting her unworthy to bear his children. By attempting to reverse his original judgment and assessment of his wife, and by taking her back as a clean person, he is admitting that he was wrong in the first place. Of course, being a hard-hearted individual, he is unlikely to say ‘Sorry,’ to her.

The idea of reconciliation, per se, cannot constitute the meaning of ‘abomination,’ since God desires this of all marriages. Neither is it the attitude and behaviour of the husband in getting a cheap divorce and then attempting to reverse her unclean status to clean, just to get her back again as if he

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never divorced her in the first place and soiled her reputation.141 What constitutes God’s abhorrence in this context is the remarriage itself. As Jesus was to point out later, this remarriage defiled the woman and her next husband(s), and constituted them adulterers, who would not enter the Kingdom of God.

Marriage was a covenant (Mal 2:14), and Yahweh used this as a metaphor of the covenant-status He had with Israel—His bride (Ezek 16:8).142 Using the bold, ad hominem metaphor of marriage and divorce, Yahweh imagines Himself married to Israel and Judah (polygamy). He conveyed to both ‘wives’ (who were sisters) His deep sense of grievance over their ‘fornication’ (i.e., their apostasy), but it had no effect (Jer 3:6-10). If the metaphor justifies divorce, then it also justifies polygamy and gay marriages (i.e., He is married to the men of Israel). The Lord’s second coming will be ‘like a thief in the night’ (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10). This does not make Him a thief! Yahweh is only like a husband married to a wife, and the analogy is taken from current practice.

Yahweh can choose any analogy from any real life situation to carry His message to His rebellious people, and what could be more suggestive of His broken relationship with Israel than a divorce? In this case, the evil practice of divorce lent itself as fit for purpose to convey His disengagement from them.

In the case of Israel she made herself unclean (Jer 13:27), and therefore Yahweh’s ‘divorce’ did not make her unclean. His ‘divorcement’ only confirmed to her that she was in an unclean state. Hosea 2:2 may reflect the current language of divorce in Hosea’s day: “She is not my wife, nor am I her husband.” After Israel committed ‘adultery’ by serving other gods (baals), she eventually came to her senses and resolved, “I will go and return to my first husband.” If God had followed through with the metaphor, He could have refused to have her back, because the sin of adultery was not punished by a divorce, but by death. He should have killed her. But, fortunately, His covenant was an everlasting covenant made with Abraham, and was indissoluble. Nevertheless, such a covenant allowed for only two righteous men to enter into the Promised Land, or into God’s rest (Hebrews 4:1-10). Hosea is told to take back his adulterous wife on the analogy that God is taking back His adulterous wife—Israel (Hos 3:1). So the idea of reconciliation, per se, cannot constitute the meaning of ‘abomination,’ since God desires this of all marriages. The ban on reconciliation under the Old Covenant comes in the form of a punishment for a heinous sin, which God will not forgive.

One direct inference that one can draw from God’s expressed anger over the example of a husband divorcing his wife for a non-sexual offence is that all such Mosaic divorces are an abomination to Him (as they have remained to this day). It also means that when Hillel permitted God’s people to divorce their wives (and it was mainly men who did the divorcing; see Ecles 42:10) for trivial reasons such as burning a husband’s food, or Akiba’s justification that a man found a more beautiful woman, these men were utterly obnoxious and an abomination in the eyes of God.

After the woman of Deuteronomy 24:2 was divorced by her second husband for a non-sexual offence (which it had to be143), such as hate, it is certain that he could not take her back. The same

141 Jesus revealed that when the woman of Deut 24:2 entered into her second marriage, unknowingly, she was committing adultery, as was the man who married her, because in the eyes of God and the Son of God, she was still married to her first husband, because the document he put into her hand had no status (legal or otherwise) in God’s eyes. It was a man-made set-up, which Jesus exposed and then demolished in Matthew 19:9, so that those entering God’s New Covenant would have to abide by a new appreciation of marriage. It was not really ‘new,’ as Jesus was quick to point out, because it had been in existence before Moses made regulations to control the evil consequences of the sin of divorce. It is to the standard of Gen 2:24 that all Christians must rise to if they are to lead a life pleasing to God.

142 God does not follow the metaphor of marriage and divorce to its conclusion in Deut 24:4. He chooses to adapt it to suit His own teaching on marriage as a permanent covenant between man and wife. See D. H. Aaron, Biblical Ambiguities. Metaphor. Semantics and Divine Imagery (Boston, 2002).

143 The Jews were prepared to inflict the death penalty on the woman taken in adultery (John 8:5) in accordance with the law of Moses (Lev 20:10), therefore we must reject the interpretation that Deut 24:1-3 allowed divorce for adultery. It is assumed that under Roman rule capital punishment was abolished (see D. W. Amran, ‘Adultery,’ The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1925), I.217). This is incorrect, because Pilate gave the Sanhedrin the necessary permission to execute Jesus “according to your law” (John 18:31), but the Jews wanted the Romans to do it for them, so the charges were changed to put Jesus in conflict with Roman law (Luke 23:2, 5, 14; John 18:30b), but he was found not guilty on those charges (Luke 23:14-15, 22, 23; cf. Matthew 27:18, 23). With the dispersal of the Jews after the Second Jewish War in AD 132-35, and lacking nation
would apply to her third, fourth, and subsequent husbands. None of them could have her back once they had divorced her, for whatever reason, because she had defiled them all. So God’s law of ‘no return after divorce’ was universal, and applied to all marriages under the Old Covenant. Only with the coming of the Kingdom of Christ was this law abandoned for all time, and Jesus returned His covenant people back to Genesis 2:14.

The law of ‘no return (reconciliation)’ implied that there was no chance for the hard-hearted husband to be reconciled, either to his divorced wife or to God. God locked him into a spiritual death penalty and threw away the key, until the coming of His Son. Man might appear to get his own way in writing a divorce notice on a piece of papyrus or parchment, but, as usual, God gets His way in the end. He has the last laugh, and it is a mocking laugh at the fool of a husband who would dare to treat his covenant-wife in this manner.

While God clearly hated divorce, He was Lord of an unregenerate nation which was incapable of being holy as He was. Their natural state was one of hard-heartedness and they had settled into a sinful custom of divorcing their wives for any cause. If God had banned divorce entirely, it would have been like banning sin entirely. Banning sin and banning divorce would have been to raise the level of holiness to an impossible level. It would require the ability not to sin, which only became possible with the presence of Christ living in the believer (Romans 8:9b). So just as God could not ban sin, neither could He ban divorce. Both were the natural fruit of the natural man. It came as naturally as breathing. But God was not entirely powerless to have some input into Moses’s consolidation of divorce and to counter it. Divorce was society’s concession to the ubiquitous presence of sin in the fallen human nature of those who lived ‘under the Law.’ But God’s rider in Deuteronomy 24:4 spelled out very clearly that there were dire spiritual consequences if any man took advantage of divorce (regulated, as Moses tried to minimise the confusion of who was married to whom) to sever what God had joined together in a ‘one flesh’ union.

In the case of Moses’s acceptance of divorce for unforgiving, hard-hearted husbands, God did not stand passively by. He stepped in and banned reconciliation for divorced couples, which Moses did not plan for. God also stepped in to ban Moses’s regulation for divorce in the case of two specific circumstances. Firstly, where a man raped a virgin who was not betrothed (Dt 22:28-29). He humbled her, and for that deviation he can never divorce her. Secondly, where a man accused an innocent wife of not being a virgin when he married her (Dt 22:13-19). This accusation involved the death penalty for the woman if the man could prove his case. The stakes were very high. In view of this, and if the wife was proved to be innocent, God prevented such men from finding an excuse to divorce their accused wives, even if they found an ererat dâhâr in her later on.

The ordeal of the Bitter Waters (Num 5:11-31) is the only instance where God replaces the human judge. In the case of the death or murder of a man in a remote place, God does not reveal to human judges who killed the man, which He could very easily do. So the fact that God personally intervenes to assure the virgin status of a husband’s wife shows the importance of her status for His sons. In the two instances mentioned above, the marriage could never be dissolved. Presumably, if such men later on forced through a divorce against God’s specific command they would have been liable for the death penalty themselves. Their second marriages would certainly have been adulterous ones, since, in God’s eyes, they were still married to their first wives for life.

That Jesus sets His Father’s original law of marriage over-against Moses’s is plain from the content of Moses’s command, which only consolidated the practice of divorce. It did nothing to get rid of divorce. It is a discriminatory law against women. It is an unjust law. It was drawn up by men for men. Jesus’ exegesis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is not difficult to work out. He would have declared that the first marriage bond was indissoluble and the second marriage was an adulterous one while both spouses were alive. This is not reading back New Testament doctrine into Deuteronomy 24:1-4 but recognising that the Father and the Son were, and are, consistent in their Law of Marriage ‘from the beginning’ of human society. And we would expect the Father to act in a way consistent with His own revealed will in the rider He placed against reconciliation.

*Moses introduced his divorce reform to avoid adultery (a lesson for leaders)*

Jesus correctly stated in Mark 10:3b, 5 that Moses wrote down a command that when any man wanted to avail himself of the centuries-old practice of divorcing a wife, he was to write out a ‘roll of
departure’ (a get) and hand it to her. What Moses wrote down has been lost. His command never entered the Hebrew Bible, and Deuteronomy 24:1-3 does not record Moses’s written command. Deuteronomy 24:1-3 records Yahweh’s description of a made-up scenario for teaching purposes.

When Moses commanded irate husbands to write out a ‘roll of severance’ when they were dumping their wives out on the street, he did this out of the grief of his own heart for the plight of these divorced women, and to avert the likelihood of adultery that would result if such wives had to find another husband to take them in and feed them.

The sin of adultery was punished with the death penalty in those days, so a new husband had to be absolutely sure that the divorced woman he was about to marry was indeed legally free to be married. Today, we would consider Moses’s command to write out a bill of severance to be a very humane law in the context of Near Eastern civilisations, and their treatment of divorced wives. The problem was, Moses did not receive the command he laid on the people from God. He, and he alone, imposed the idea of a written divorce document on the people. Humanly speaking, we might consider he used his commonsense to avoid a potentially messy situation.

Sometimes Christian leaders introduce commonsense ideas into the Church, such as a rota of male and female preachers, on the assumption that they are equally entitled to speak in the Church. The new situation then becomes a tradition, and the tradition then conditions the next generation to accept it as ‘normal.’ Just so in the case of Moses’s innovation over his new ‘bill of divorce.’ But what is significant about Moses’s command is that God did not endorse it, and neither did Jesus, or the Early Church. The command Moses gave to the men was never allowed to enter God’s Word.

In other words, God never endorsed it, approved of it, sanctioned it, or in any way, shape or form accepted it as an integral part of His Law. It always remained on the outside.

Now consider that divorce originated in the fall of Adam and Eve. It was in full flood throughout the Near East as all our NE records and excavations have shown, and so it was common in Egypt and in Israel. This was the situation in Israel for the first 40 years on leaving Egypt. So Moses inherited a man-made tradition, which had been in existence for thousands of years. Ben Sira (ca. 200 BC) is representative of the attitude toward headstrong women, “Give not water an outlet; neither to a wicked woman freedom of speech. If she go not as thou wouldest have her, cut her off from thy flesh” (Ecclus 25:26). He also said, “From a woman was the beginning of sin; and because of her we all die” (25:24).

So, we should regard divorce as a long-standing practice throughout all human societies and endemic in all nations of the earth. If we then move forward in time to the eve of entering the Promised Land, we observe that up until this point in time God had not interfered with the universal custom of divorce, nor had He legislated against it in the giving of the First Law (Exodus).

It was at this point that God stepped in to counter the credibility that Moses had given to the evil practice. God laid it down as a fixed penalty notice that any man who went through the procedure that Moses had commanded them to follow would not be forgiven if they divorced their wives. So Deuteronomy 24:4 was a deterrent, and a severe warning, and a life-sentence for this particular crime, for divorce was a crime, and a sin against God.

Note that in both Matthew 19 and Mark 10 we learn that Moses commanded/insisted that a ‘roll of severance’ be part of the divorce transaction. Moses did not command divorce, nor did he invent it. He inherited it from centuries of tradition. However, through his command he regulated divorce, and so he was not anti-divorce, so in this restricted sense I have credited him with instituting divorce in Israel. Moses’s command had the effect of consolidating the tradition of men.

We do not have a written record of the actual words of the command that Moses used. They are not recorded in Scripture. He gave the command ‘off the record.’ If we did not have Jesus’ contribution we would never have known of this ‘off the record’ command given by Moses, because God does not refer to Moses as the one who introduced the idea of writing out a ‘roll of severance.’

If divorce did not exist in the earth until Moses instituted it, then he would have been punished by God. Moses did not originate divorce, so he cannot be blamed for its practice in Israel. Everything we know about Near Eastern societies point to divorce as a fixture going back to the earliest records of human society. Moses did nothing wrong. If anything, his introduction of the ‘roll of severance’ was a humane law, designed to alleviate the vulnerability of the exposed wife standing out in the street in the clothes she was dressed in.

Moses was not punished by God for trying to alleviate the evil that is inherent in every divorce, ancient or modern. But Jesus did disdain Moses’s innovation because it encouraged hard-
hearted husbands to believe that so long as they wrote out a bill of divorce their action was justified, and was not a sin against God.

We only know of the existence of a written bill of divorce because God, in describing the procedure whereby husbands dumped their hated wives on the street, mentions that they wrote out a bill of divorce and handed it to their abandoned wives. It is only in the New Testament that we learn that it was Moses who commanded that such bills of divorce be issued, and Moses acted alone in doing so, not that he didn’t have the support of his elders (we can assume), for the legislation had commonsense behind it.

5.5. DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

The prime source for our understanding of divorce during the Old Testament period comes from Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is the backcloth against which the Pharisees challenged Jesus about His new teaching on divorce and remarriage. The following is a literal translation of the Hebrew text.

24:1 When a man takes a woman and he owned [= ba’al] her, and it was opened, if not she is finding favour in his eyes—because he found in her an exposed matter, and he wrote for her a document of cutting-off [= severance], and he gave [it] into her hand, and he sent her out of his house.

24:2 And she went out from his house, and she walked away, and she became to another man.

24:3 And the latter [= next] man hated her, and he wrote for her a document of cutting-off [= severance], and he gave [it] into her hand, and he sent her out of his house.

Or, when the latter man died who took her to him for a woman,

24:4 not he is able—her first owner, who sent her out—to turn back to take her to be to him for a woman, after that she has been made unclean, because an abomination it [is] before Yahweh, and not you are causing the land [= inhabitants of the land] to sin, which Yahweh your God is giving to you [as] an inheritance.  

On the term ʿerbat dābār (אֶרֶבֶת דַּבָּר), J. Blenkinsopp (‘The Jewish Family in First Temple Israel,’ in L. G. Perdue et al., Families in Ancient Israel (Louisville, 1997), 48-103) wrote: ‘The impossibility of a literal translation (‘nakedness of a thing’) indicates idiomatic usage; it occurs elsewhere only in Deut 23:15 [EV 23:14], with reference to feces or other unclean matter in the camp.’ He takes the term to mean something ‘improper, indecent or at least objectionable,’ and was ‘probably chosen precisely because it was vague, ill-defined, and nonrestrictive.’ Blenkinsopp (pp. 65, 97 n. 33) denied that Deut 24:1-4 was designed to state the basic law of divorce (it is descriptive rather than prescriptive), and blamed Jerome’s misunderstanding of its syntax as placing the divorce procedure in the apodosis rather than the protasis. It makes sense that God would point to the non-sexual excuse for the divorce, and it amounts to ‘any cause’ a man might arbitrarily nominate to get rid of her. The rabbis exploited its vagueness to fit their theology; see Mishnah Gittin 9:10. For sources, see Bernard S. Jackson, “The ‘Institutions’ of Marriage and Divorce in the Hebrew Bible,” JSS LV1/2 (2011) 221-251, esp. p. 241 nn. 82-84. The term ʿerbat dābār is found in the Sifre to Deuteronomy 23:15, citing Sotah 17a, where it is translated as an ‘indecent thing’; cf. D. Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London, 1956; reptd New York, 1973), p. 368.

It is the action of the second husband sleeping with her that actually defiles her, but the first husband will be held accountable for her defilement and the sin of her remarriage (cf. Matthew 5:32).

In Islamic law a divorced wife can return to her first husband but only on condition that she has slept with another man in the meantime: ‘If he divorces her, she is not lawful for him afterwards, until she marries another husband’ (Qur’an 2:229).

The ‘land’ cannot sin (i.e., break a law—the ‘law of the husband,’ Romans 7:2), only the inhabitants of the land can sin, or more specifically, the men of the land, because they are the ones who instigate the divorce proceedings.
Note the underlined texts. This draws attention to the fact that the cultural procedure is the same.

The pivotal clue to Yahweh’s disgust lies in the phrase, “after that she has been made [or: become] unclean [by someone or something].” The verb here is הַחַטַּמָּה (ḥattammanāḥ), which is a recognised mutation of חַטָּמָה (ḥattammanāḥ), which is the rare Hithpa’el theme in Hebrew.149 So rare is this theme that it occurs only seven times in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences are Num 1:47; 3:23; 26:62; 1 Kgs 20:27 (all using the root חַטָּמָה; Lev 13:55, 56 (root חַטָּמָה); Isa 34:6 (root חַטָּמָה); and Deut 24:4 (root חַטָּמָה). The Hithpa’el is the passive form of the Hithpa’el, which occurs more frequently, and means to do something with oneself (reflexive), such as “to walk about.” The passive of this would be “to be walked about [by someone, such as a nurse].” The passive meaning of the Hithpa’el comes out in its use in Isaiah 34:6 where Yahweh’s sword is “coated [or enveloped] with fat.” The Hithpa’el meaning of the four occurrences of חַטָּמָה is to allow oneself to be reviewed for numbering purposes (“not they were presented for numbering”).

Both Gesenius and Fuerst150 give the active Hithpa’el of חַטָּמָה (the root verb used in Deuteronomy 24:4) the meaning, to be or become unclean, impure; to be defiled, polluted, chiefly of Levitical uncleanness, both of persons and animals. In Numbers 5:13, 14 it translates to defile oneself (as of a woman in adultery), or a people polluted by fornication or idolatry, as in Hoshea 5:3; 6:10. In the case of the Hithpa’el in Leviticus 13:55, 56 the priest examines the plague in the skin of a person “after that it has been washed [by someone].” Here the passive aspect of the Hithpa’el can be seen. If the Hithpa’el means to make oneself unclean, then the passive of this is to be made unclean (by something). Hence my translation of the Hithpa’el verb in Deuteronomy 24:4 as, “she has been made constituted unclean [by him].” She is passive and something is done to her. In the case of her first husband, by his decision to put her out in the street to fend for herself, as no longer under his care, or wanted by him, she becomes in the eyes of her community an unclean woman. She may have been perfectly innocent, but now, for the rest of her life she is tarred with the brush of being a defiled woman, and no man, you would think, would want to use her womb to have sons and daughters, who would come into the world with the stigma of being the offspring of an unclean woman.

**Why was reconciliation banned to the first husband?**

A possible explanation why Yahweh placed a ban on the first husband taking back his first wife was to ensure the purity of the descent of his male line. A man’s pre-divorce sons alone are to constitute his lineal descent, it would seem. Theoretically, if a man remarried his first wife and had

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149 Alternative grammatical translation of verse 4: “... after that she has been made unclean, because an abomination [is] SHE (וָהָפַת) before Yahweh, and not SHE (וָהָפַת) is causing the land to sin, ...” Grammatically, the pronoun וָהָפַת could be understood to refer to the woman or to the abomination, since both are feminine. The verb וָהָפַת can be parsed as either 2 pers. masc. sg. (“you are causing”), or 3 pers. fem. sg. (“she is causing”). In this syntax, it is more usual for SHE (וָהָפַת) to refer back to ‘abomination’ and to read: “because an abomination it [is]” (cf. Lev 18:22). This would make the act of sleeping with a second man constitute the abomination. The syntax, however, does not rule out the translation “because an abomination [is] she [= the defiled woman] before Yahweh.” It so happens that this translation fits in with Jesus’ insight that the divorced woman becomes a cause of sin to other men who might think that her legally conducted divorce ended her marriage, and that she was legally free to remarry. She becomes a polluting force in God’s world. God gave David many contemporary wives, but He never gave a wife many contemporary husbands. The latter is an abomination, while the former is a blessing. Under the Old Covenant, a wife may have only one husband at a time, while a husband may have many wives at the same time. This arrangement had the approval of God. Polygamy, per se, is not a sin, but for leadership purposes in Christ’s Church only those with one current wife are eligible to become bishops (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).


further sons through her, then these could become his lineal descendants should all his pre-divorce sons die in battle. Was there also the possibility that the man would have two ‘firstborn’ sons, one from the first marriage, and one from the second marriage (albeit from the same woman)? By debaring the first wife from remarrying her first husband, Yahweh ensured there could be no further offspring between the two, even if they wanted to get back together. So there was a penalty imposed by God on any man who divorced his wife, and that penalty ensured that they would not be allowed to add to the number of human beings on God’s earth. Following every divorce is the curse of barrenness and irreconcilable reunion. They must forever wander the earth as separate individuals. But under the New Covenant, this curse on Mosaic divorce is removed, because divorce itself has been abolished as a reality, and since ‘divorce’ is only an empty word in Jesus’ vocabulary, with no substance, reconciliation can be achieved between ‘divorced’ couples.

What constitutes the ‘abomination’ in Deuteronomy 24:4?

There is a possible confusion over what the ‘abomination’ refers to. Some take it to refer to the reconciliation itself of two divorced persons getting back together, which is highly unlikely since reconciliation is what the New Testament revelation teaches and encourages as the inevitable outcome of forgiveness. This leaves the defiled woman herself, through her remarriage, as the ‘abomination’ and this fits the complete revelation on the subject. As Jesus noted, this was not a legitimate (re)marriage, but simply the case of a man having unlawful sex with her, and in the process defiling her body (cf. John 4:16-18).

Yahweh regards every wife, who has remarried in the lifetime of her first husband, as an unclean (or defiled) woman. That stigma will stick with her for the rest of her life unless she repents of her second marriage and ends it.

Her first husband’s action might appear to determine her status in God’s eyes, if we read verse four as “…after that she has been constituted unclean by him (i.e., by the first husband).” Or, as we have noted above, her defilement came about by sleeping with another man, if we read verse four as “…after that she has been made unclean by him (i.e., by the second husband).” The abomination would then consist in the same woman passing between two contemporary men, which was totally contrary to God’s design for woman. She was designed to live with one man for the duration of her life, or for the duration of her husband’s life, and only on his death could she sleep with another man.

On either reading, the ban on reconciliation is a punishment meted out by God on the first husband. In other words, the first husband’s sin cannot be reversed. He has committed an unforgivable sin in the eyes of God. A hard-hearted husband may use his superior strength and dominance to inflict terrible cruelty on his defenceless wife, but Yahweh slaps down hard on such men and imposes a penalty on them that shuts them out of the Kingdom of God. God’s Son pointed out that such divorces will lead to the divorced wife sinning if she remarries, but her sins will be laid at the door of her first husband, and he will be made accountable for her defilement (Matthew 5:32).

God never introduced divorce into Israel. Man did.152 Deuteronomy 24:4 is God’s judgment on man for this evil practice. He, and the Son, are the same yesterday, today, and forever, in regard to their destatation of this man-made institution. God hates divorce. Full stop. It was an abomination to both members of the Trinity in Moses’ day, and it is the same today. There has been no shift in God’s value-system. But the good news is that all sins can be forgiven under Grace, including the unforgivable sin of divorce which obtained under the dispensation of the Law. Reconciliation under Grace abolishes the need for the injunction (mishpat) in Deuteronomy 24:4. But for all Jews throughout the world who are still living under the Law the force of the injunction is still in place for them.153

To return to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the action of a wife’s husband is pivotal to her destiny. He is in total control of her life, and at his mercy. If he is an abusive or hard-hearted husband she is in for a hard life. If he is a righteous man then she can expect a more tranquil lifestyle. It all depends on the husband. Her life hangs by a thread—a daily thread. He can divorce her at a moment’s notice. He is answerable to no one for his actions. He is her lord (ba‘al), his owner. She is but a possession, to be disposed of or retained at the whim of the owner. Such was the plight that wives were in when Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was written.

It is clear from Yahweh’s other laws that the grounds for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 cannot be adultery or, that she was not a virgin when he married her, for which two deviations He decreed the death penalty (Deut 22:13-19). The grounds, in this case, must be non-sexual. The words

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152 See the grammatical argument under 3.5.
153 The Christian Jew must on no account come under, or accept, this ban on reconciliation. Christ has abolished this rule through His teaching on total forgiveness (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:11).
The prescriptive (or directive) interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Before leaving this section it should be pointed out that some versions (and commentators) translate Deuteronomy 24:1-4 differently, and read the text as a directive from Yahweh, thus: "When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favour in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it into her hand, and send her out of his house."

This translation clearly presents God as giving the man who wants a divorce clear instructions on how he is to go about this. The assumption is that God does not object to the divorce, but He lays down the exact procedure how the divorce is to go through, and a crucial element in this procedure is that the woman is entitled to a divorce certificate.

But some who read the text in this prescriptive way draw back and say that God does not approve of it. The argument goes, "The command only states their duty toward the wives whom they are dismissing, and in no way can it be construed that God condones such action." This does not make sense. God must be in favour of divorce certificates if He is giving commands which must be obeyed. At the very least God is obtaining a divorce certificate for the wife, whether He approves of it or not is another issue. This view believes that Jesus' concern in Matthew 5:31-32 was to defend the rights of oppressed women who should be given a divorce, which would clear her of guilt in the event of the break up of her marriage. This comes out in the translation, "He, who, if he dismisses his wife, let him give her a bill of divorcement." If she had been divorced for adultery then he was not obligated to give her such a bill of divorcement. Deuteronomy 24:1 (we are told) refers to the toleration of divorce for reasons other than adultery. In Deuteronomy 24:2 God (we are told) informs her that she is free to marry another man. The sinful state had to regulated for the protection of the innocent woman who was dismissed unjustly by her husband. The supporters of the directive interpretation believe that, "The Lord [Jesus] agreed with the Old Testament prescription that a bill of divorcement should be given to the wife, unjustly divorced, enabling her to remarry,... He in no way implies that no divorce certificate should be given to her. The Lord does not violate man's free choice to sin, but He does show His interest on behalf of the innocent victim of sin.... It is best not to put your wife away at all for any reason other than her infidelity, but if you do put her away when she does not deserve it, at least give her a bill of divorcement."

On this interpretation the 'abomination' is not the second marriage but the remarriage to her first husband, "Because she would have been the wife of another man." This does not make sense because Deuteronomy 24:3 specifically mentions the death of her second husband as one way of making her available to remarry her first husband, so she is not the wife of another man at the time the first husband wants to take her back. This shows the confusion that results when the text is interpreted prescriptively.

5.5.1. Why was Deuteronomy 24:1-3 included in the Torah?

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 should be viewed as follows. Part A: verses 1-3. Divorce was man's idea. Part B, verse 4. This was God's idea. Part A was not God's will for His people 'from the beginning,' as Jesus pointed out. But hard-hearted Hebrew men forced it upon Moses as a fait accompli, so he complied, and he sanctioned an unrecorded command (but written down at the time by Moses, see Mark 10:5) to alleviate the confusion that would follow if men were permitted to divorce 'for any cause.'

Divorce is an evil. God hates it. He will not positively initiate a law to permit the 'one flesh' union to be broken. Having seen the unsanctioned tradition that sinners secured for themselves and

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described in Part A, God stepped in and put a rider on it, namely, verse 4, which Moses was obliged to write down and hand on. So the only reason why Part A appears in Scripture is because of Part B.

Part B had to be given a context, and that context is Part A, dictated by God Himself to Moses. The judgment (mishpat) in 24:4 should be viewed as coming from God, and verses 1-3 constitute God’s own composition setting out the tradition that appertained among His people (as modified by Moses) on the eve of their entry into the Promised Land. This means that God carefully chose the term ’erovat dāḇar in 24:1, which is deliberately imprecise to convey the innumerable ways that hard-hearted men have used to divorce their wives. But this belongs to a separate study.

Too much commentary time is given to Part A as if divorce was God’s idea. Commentators should start with verse 4, and ask themselves, “Why did God not allow reconciliation of the original marriage under the Old Covenant, when He expects it of all those who enter the Kingdom of God under the New Covenant?” That question shows up the difference between God’s people living without the gift of the Holy Spirit (and without faith), and God’s people living with the gift of the Holy Spirit (through faith), and thus to go back to the law that existed ‘from the beginning,’ which was God’s true way of living, and not take advantage of the law of divorce that hard-hearted men had introduced.

The rider tells us that God is disgusted when a husband divorces his wife over any matter (cf. Jer 3:1). The inevitable result of his private punishment (for the hard-hearted husband is both judge and jury) is that his wife is obliged to sleep with a second man. But in God’s original decree no woman could sleep with two living men. He was disgusted then, and He is disgusted today, when the same thing happens. His disgust has not changed or abated. It has remained constant ‘from the beginning.’ The difference is that today, under grace, all sins can be forgiven and reconciliation is encouraged. Under the Old Covenant, the disgust over a husband’s unjust action in constituting his wife an unclean woman was not forgiven, and the sin stood unforgiven for all time, which is conveyed to the sinner by a road-block to any future reconciliation with his first wife. The anger of God behind 24:4 comes out very strongly when viewed in this light.

God’s new people have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they have saving faith, and both of these take the Christian into a new realm of living, in which divorce is a violation of that Spirit-filled life. The two are incompatible for anyone living ‘in Christ.’ God has reconciled Himself to all men through the death of Jesus (Romans 5:10; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2), and that reconciliation includes the forgiveness of the sin of adultery through second marriages, the sin of adultery while still married, and the forgiveness of pre-marital sexual promiscuity. The slate is wiped clean for those who are in Christ Jesus, and He in them. Once in Christ the Christian must flee fornication from that point on to the end of their lives.

The Christian should no more think of contemplating divorce than he would think of contemplating stealing. Stealing and divorce belong to the same sub-standard world of Moses, and God interacted with these sub-standards when He held His people together ‘under Law’ until the coming of Christ.

I understand (with Paul) that in and of itself the Law is good and spiritual, if used legitimately, because whatever comes out of the mouth of God reveals something of His nature, His values, His ideas, and His hopes for His people. Paul goes on to say that “the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, . . . for fornicators, for sodomites, . . . and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

The sexist and discriminatory nature of the description of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 has never been denied by the Jews. Although Yahweh only described what they were doing wrong in divorcing their wives, they read the text as though Yahweh was approving of what He was describing! And many Christians do the same, who want to present Jesus as supporting divorce.

Some so-called Christian writers have tried to exonerate the Jewish practice of divorce by suggesting that Yahweh intended that wives could divorce their husbands in a vice versa understanding of the principles involved. This meets the serious objection that we cannot project back into the mid-15th cent. B.C., later ideas of economic equality between the sexes, so that she could send him out of his own house. It could not operate on a vice versa basis in 15th century BC culture when it was penned, because (1) A wife does not take a husband. It is the other way round. He is the ‘av, the owner of her, not vice versa. (2) The wife does not own the home. It is the other way round. (3) She cannot send her husband out of his own father’s house. It is the other way round. (4) The man is not defiled. It is the other way round. (5) The abomination and what pollutes the land is not a divorced and remarried husband, but a remarried woman.

Verse 4 is crucial. It is the remarried wife who pollutes the land, not the remarried husband. A husband could have more than one wife, but a wife cannot have more than one living husband. So the charge of Hebrew divorce being discriminatory and sexist still stands to this day.
5.5.2. The syntax of Deuteronomy 24:1-4

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 we have the words of God, not the words of Moses—a mistake often made by careless commentators. God describes (not prescribes) the unauthorised act of divorce itself, and then imposes on this hateful act a punishment clause, in verse 4, which bans the husband from returning to his first wife. The only reason why Deuteronomy 24:1-3 is in God’s Word is to give God’s mishpat of disapproval a context. Verse 24 is the crucial truth we are intended to fix on and contemplate, not on vv. 1-3, which is taken up with describing the sin of divorce.

God never introduced divorce for hardness of heart as some so-called evangelicals believe, and neither did Jesus. Because Deuteronomy 24:1-3 is descriptive, and not prescriptive, God only describes the sin (as He does the sin of stealing in 24:7) only in order to convey His disapproval of divorce. He expresses His disapproval by placing a ban on reconciliation.

The English Standard Version and the New International Version correctly reflect the Hebrew in viewing the whole four verses as one long conditional sentence (v. 1, “if . . . [through to the end of v. 3] . . . then”156 her former husband . . . may not take her.”).157 John Murray pointed out that by separating v. 1 from the three following verses, many translators have given it a meaning which it did not originally have. He went on, if we read v. 1 independently of the next three verses, we get the idea that divorce is not only permitted but also commanded.158 And this is how pro-divorce writers like to read the text, especially those who wish to reintroduce divorce into Jesus’ teaching, following the lead of Erasmus.

J. Murray was right to point out that the purpose of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was to forbid a man to re-marry his divorced wife after she had been married to another man in the interim. There is no hint that divorce takes place with divine consent and moral sanction. The idea that a remarried woman is a defiled woman and should be avoided is clear from David’s refusal to have sexual relations with his ten concubines once they had sexual relations with Absalaom (cf. 2 Sam 16:21-22 with 20:3). The same goes for Jacob who refused to have sexual relations with his wife Bilhah after Reuben slept with her (Gen 49:4). Defiled women polluted the land. This is very clear if we compare Deuteronomy 24:1-4 with the almost identically worded rule in Jeremiah 3:1, which reads:

They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the prostitute with many lovers, yet return to me,’ says the Lord.

The idea here is that the wife of Yahweh defiled herself by having sex with another man. Yahweh knows she has entered a defiled/unclean state, yet despite this He invites her to return to Him again and resume their marriage relationship.159 This was contrary to the mishpat laid down by God Himself in Deuteronomy 24:4. In this invitation we see an early glimpse into the age of Grace that was to dawn some 600 years later, where the defilement of divorce could be forgiven and reconciliation encouraged, due to the clean status that the Christian imparts to the one-flesh union.

The background to the mishpat in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is that God designed woman to have sexual relations exclusively with one man as set out in Genesis 2:24, and that if she broke that rule she became so unclean in His eyes that her husband must not have sexual relations with her again.

Exegetical notes on Deuteronomy 24:1-4

The use of the Hebrew Suffix-form of קָנָה (lorded, owned, mastered) indicates that the marriage was consummated, whereas the notice that “he takes a woman” (Hebrew Prefix-form) is ambiguous since it could indicate a betrothal, but taking ownership puts what follows in a definite marriage context. The use of the Suffix-form of נִנְפָּה indicates that some time after the marriage was

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156 The ESV and NIV have correctly supplied “then” here, even though it is not explicitly in the Hebrew. The construction demands it.

157 Translating the waw+Suffix by a series of present tenses in English is an acceptable way to convey the Hebrew Attributive action in this particular passage, but it would be closer to the Hebrew to use the past tense throughout, as in my translation above.


159 There is a parallel of sorts with 1 Cor 6:15-20, where a married man is defiled when he has sex with a prostitute, and becomes ‘one flesh’ with her. He can return to his wife provided he is cleansed by the blood of the Lamb of God, and the affair is over for good.
consummated (for this is the way Hebrew recommeds events some time in the future), she did something that he considered ‘obscene.’ The term used: *erovat dâbâr* (אֶרֶם דַּבָּר), occurs only twice in the Old Testament, here and at Deuteronomy 23:14 where it is used of Yahweh inspecting the desert camp of Israel and coming across an *erovat dâbâr*. The sight of an *erovat dâbâr* would disgust Him. He says, and cause Him to withdraw from the site—to separate Himself from the ‘exposed thing.’ The immediate context is human excrement which must be defecated outside the camp and covered over. An *erovat dâbâr* in the camp would lead to Him removing His presence from among them (Deut 23:14) and this is the phrase He uses to refer to the ‘behaviour’ of the divorced woman in Deuteronomy 24:1.

The LXX translates *erovat dâbâr* in Deuteronomy 24:1 literally by δαχμοσυνή
times and in Deuteronomy 23:14 by ἀσχημοσύνη πράγματος. The Hebrew term *erovat* occurs 54 times in the Old Testament and in the LXX it is translated by ἀσχημοσύνη 41 times and eight times by ἀγίσιμων. The former means, something indecent, obscene, nakedness, shame, the private parts. The latter means, disgrace, scandal, infamy, shame.

The predominant context for the use of *erovat/ἀσχημοσύνη* relates to human nakedness, especially the nakedness of close, female relatives. The closer the relative, the greater the obscenity was felt to be. The first occurrence of *erovat/ἀσχημοσύνη* relates to Noah’s nakedness as he lay drunk in his tent. His son, Ham, laughed at him, but his other two sons put a garment on their shoulders and walked backwards into the tent so as not to see their father in that state. They were blessed and Ham was cursed by God, who also put great emphasis on His priests wearing undergarments so that their nakedness was not seen when officiating in His Temple (Exod 28:42; 20:26) which incurred the death penalty (Ex 28:42-43).

5.5.3. **Deuteronomy 24:4 should be viewed as a punishment for divorce**

Philo confirms the no-return custom in Deuteronomy 24:4, when he wrote:

> Another commandment is that if a woman after parting from her husband for any cause whatever marries another and then again becomes a widow, whether this second husband is alive or dead, she must not return to her first husband but ally herself . . .

On the basis of the phrase “for any cause whatever,” some scholars concluded that Philo accepted the ruling of the School of Hillel. But the *erovat davar* was sufficiently, and deliberately vague (as it was Yahweh’s choice to cover any non-fornication cause) that a lawyer could drive a horse and cart through it to obtain a divorce for any of his clients. In truth, Hillel was not saying anything new. He represented the *status quo* position, which went back before Moses’s time, and this is all that Philo is saying here.

5.5.3.1. **Denial of reconciliation seen as a mild punishment**

Deuteronomy 24:4 reveals God’s reaction to the abuse of a man misusing his headship authority over woman, which was given to him at the beginning. Some regard the punishment meted out to the abusive husband as a mild punishment, and certainly not a deterrent. But this ignores the character of God. He is concerned for the poor and needy and he hears the cry of the oppressed. If His action is only to shield the abused wife from further abuse, then should we look further than that for an explanation for His ban on a return to the control of an evil man? We can see wisdom in God’s action in the way He steps in to remove abused wives from the grip of hard-hearted husbands. That is the action of a merciful God, who cares for the downtrodden and oppressed.

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161 The same idea occurs at 1 Corinthians 12:23, “our unseemly parts (τὰ ἀσχημονά) have seemliness more abundantly.” This is a euphemistic expression for the human private parts. It was her sexualty that was in question, not her looks or disabilities or lack of skills, etc.

162 This word may also be a euphemism for unlawful sexual conduct in 1 Thessalonians 4:6, though its primary meaning is a thing done, fact, deed, affair.

163 Philo, *De specialibus legisbus* III.30:

Divorce, like sin, is here to stay. Sin and divorce are natural and characteristic traits of the old nature. Until one is ‘born again’ from above both evils will feature in everybody’s genealogy somewhere along the line. One correspondent wrote:

“If you say to the husband: ‘Divorce this woman and you can never remarry her once she has taken another husband,’ he would laugh in your face and say, ‘I don’t ever want her back – I can’t stand her, that’s why I’m getting rid of her!’ To call this a punishment is nonsensical.”

It is sometimes alleged by evolutionists (and there are plenty of theistic evolutionists inside Christ’s Church) that when God cursed the ground as a punishment for Adam’s sin, this was no punishment because thorns and thistles already existed! So Adam got off very lightly for a devastating sin that affected all his male descendants.

Be that as it may, if God told me that if I go ahead and commit a particular sin, and that He will not forgive it ever, I would be alarmed at the short-term and the long-term consequences of such a warning. In the short-term I could not expect Him to answer any of my prayers, or bless me, etc. In the long-term I would not enter ‘into His rest.’ When God speaks, He speaks with measured wisdom to draw back the sinner from his proposed course of action. I do not regard His proposed punishment as ‘mild,’ and therefore to be brushed aside as a trilling reprimand. To disregard anything that God says is to reveal an evil disposition toward Him, and the Elect who see it will take note of it, and be wary of any leader in whom it is found.

In the Book of Deuteronomy Yahweh covers a wide selection of cases in order to set up case law, from which principles and analogies can be drawn. Yahweh constantly requires His people to remember the travelling non-Israelite in their midst, the widow, and the orphan, and those within their jurisdiction who have no family structure to protect them, and not to abuse them, especially before the law.

God saw the vulnerability of the wife who was divorced in an instant, and this displeased Him intensely. It is bullying of the worst kind. Fortunately, such wives would have their father’s house to return to in most circumstances, but Yahweh was not prepared to let these hard-hearted husbands get away lightly with their cruelty, and so He imposed on them a law that they must never return to their abused wives. He did not punish this sin as He did in the other cases, because divorce, like sacrificing on the high places, was such a persistent violation of His will for His people, that Israel would have been under a cloud of heavy discipline all the days of its existence. If you are going to judge a man for his sin, then you have to allow him to sin, and to build up a catalogue of evil such that he will approve of God’s final judgment on him. It is for this reason that God does not prevent any man from sinning. The significance of the long-term punishment meted out to the divorcer was lost on him, because it was a postponed punishment. A punishment that is not experienced as such makes no sense, say some. But it was, nonetheless, a severe punishment in that Yahweh would not forgive it, either in this life or the next. The short-term punishment of being deprived of reconciliation to his ex-wife was seen as a price worth paying to be rid of her and get his own selfish way. There is wisdom in all that God does, so when He refused to allow reconciliation to occur after a hard-hearted husband dumped his covenant wife on the street, He knew that only a ‘born again’ experience would remove the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26-27). That new era was still in the future, so, wisely, God sealed the hard-hearted husband in his sin because his heart of stone could not be changed.

A question that often crops up on internet discussions on web sites devoted to divorce and remarriage is the lack of a law in the Bible specifically banning divorce. We are told that if God had said, “You shall not divorce your wife or your husband,” then this would have been the end of the matter. But God commanded the people, “Be you holy as I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; Num 15:40; cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; Ezra 8:28; Ps 34:9; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22). Christians are to imitate the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:6). The Apostle Peter reminded all Christians of the standard that God set for the Old Covenant saints, and that this standard carried over into the New Covenant ‘holy nation’ (1 Pet 1:16; 2:9).

God’s command to ‘be holy as I am holy’ is a call to avoid all sin, including divorce. God calls His people to imitate Him. He is the standard by which they are to live. He never divorced them, though He had every reason to do so, because they committed ‘adultery’ against Him. From the moment He ‘married them’ as they left Egypt, God complains through His prophets, that they went

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astray and committed fornication, yet He did not divorce them. Every husband in Israel should have imitated Yahweh’s example in refusing to divorce His wife ‘Israel.’ Even in the face of blatant ‘adultery’ and ‘fornication,’ and constituting an affront to Him on a daily basis, Yahweh stuck with His prostitute of a ‘wife’ (cf. Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8).

The proof that it is the act of divorce itself that God regards as a sin against His revealed will in Genesis 2:24 comes out in the fact that God makes no distinction between a so-called righteous man divorcing his wife (for what some would regard as a legitimate cause) and an unrighteous man divorcing his wife. It is the very idea itself of putting asunder what God has designed to stay together—once the one-flesh union has been formed—that God hates. This undercuts the modern idea that there are legitimate and illegitimate causes, and Jesus has been, and is, used to maintain this distinction. Hence the Westminster Confession of Faith (to name just one highly, influential guide) gives ‘fornication’ and ‘desertion’ as just causes for dissolving a lawful marriage. God makes no such distinction in Deuteronomy 24:1-3. In His eyes, and by His example, no cause is legitimate to undo the marriage bond. He never undid His bond with Israel, so why should a husband undo his bond with his wife?

It shows how shallow modern Christianity is when ‘christian’ men can contemplate divorce as described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 as a ‘normal’ thing, as something that happens, and God just has to adapt to it because there is nothing else He can do about it. The evil and cruelty of instantly dismissing a wife over a non-sexual matter, and setting her out in the street with no recourse to a tribunal or compensation, is considered ‘inevitable,’ and therefore ‘normal,’ by these advocates for divorce. This action is no longer considered a sin against God. It has been redefined as ‘human nature.’

If these advocates had paused for a moment to examine the scenario that God described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, they would have seen how unjust and evil it was. What God described, taking us through the procedure step by step, shows up the absolute power of every man in Israel to be his own judge and jury. He has absolute sway over his wife’s life. She is virtually his slave, and as such he can dispense with her as and when it pleases him. He is answerable to no one in the scenario that God lays before us. God presents the husband as a dictator with unbridled power and authority over his wife. God presents this dictator as a heartless, unforgiving man, using his superior, masculine strength and authority as head of his household, to convey his hatred for her in what looks like a legal procedure.

Those who advocate divorce as a lawful practice during the Old Testament period and as something that was culturally ‘normal,’ and which God did nothing to eradicate, should consider the culturally ‘normal’ practice of sacrificing on elevated places in Israel, which the prophets railed against, but which kings of Israel and Judah were unable to eradicate. Even of good kings who were said to walk in the ways of David (the standard), the black mark against their reigns was that they could not stop the illegal worship on the high places. Apostasy was endemic throughout Israel’s history, and in the background men were divorcing their wives at the private level, with the apparent approval of God, they must have thought, otherwise He would have prevented their remarriages from taking place.

On any reading of Deuteronomy 24:1-3 it is clear that God could not have given any man instructions on how to go about divorcing his wife. It is blatantly obvious that divorce in 24:1-3 is the unilateral act of the husband to vent his total frustration on a weaker human being, and use his power and position to bully her remorselessly to the point that he jeopardises the means to keep her body and soul together. He no longer cares what happens to her, whether she lives or dies. That is all encapsulated in the scrap of paper he hands her as he thrusts her out of her family home. The writing on the papyrus sheet did not dissolve the marriage. The marriage was dissolved the moment he hated her for something that fostered and festered. The existence of divorce did not help to reverse what was happening in his soul. It had the opposite effect: it drew him toward it as an instrument to cut her out of his life.

The key to understanding Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is to read the first three verses following the initial word, ‘If . . .’ and for the fourth verse to begin with, “Then . . .”

It is unfortunate that many Christians take it for granted that God tolerated divorce with only a slight mark of disapproval against it under the Old Covenant, and they have carried this over into the New Covenant era, thinking that God shows the same tolerance for their culture of divorce and remarriage. If God had expressed greater anger and imposed a heavier penalty for husbands who divorced their wives, the argument goes, then this would have made it impossible for Christians to sue for divorce in the secular law courts of this age. Indirectly, God is to blame, some assert, because He did not frighten or terrorise His people with the most dire consequences if they divorced their wives. By going ‘soft’ on this particular injustice by men toward women, He inadvertently gave out
the wrong signal to all men that divorce was not such a big sin after all. In fact, He played into their hands by barring them from going back to their first wives, as if they would ever want to do that! They were only too glad to be rid of them!

But to the spiritual man and woman the next sections reveal the true attitude of God towards the sin of divorce among His people under both Covenants. Here we see the Father and the Son holding the same position on the fictitious nature of human divorce. It has no validity in their eyes, and never did have, since the days of Adam and Eve. There has never been a single human divorce that has dissolved a single, lawful marriage in the whole of human history. This is the universal lesson coming out of Deuteronomy 24 verse 4, which Jesus took up and amplified in His teaching.

5.6. IF THE DIVORCER IMMEDIATELY REGRETS HANDING HIS WIFE A BILL OF DIVORCE, CAN HE BE RECONCILED TO HER BEFORE SHE REMARRIES?

Suppose the divorcer, in a moment of rage, and in a fit of temper, and full of hatred for his wife, wrote out her bill of divorce and sent her out in the clothes she stood up in, completely destitute, at a moment’s notice. The hatred, the rejection, the shame, that that wife experiences at that moment of time must have been truly devastating, and if it was accompanied by black eyes and bruises she would not have been in any fit state to go back to that house. But when his temper had cooled, he might have gone after her to get her back. Is she obliged to come back? The answer is a firm ‘No.’ The moment he places a bill of divorce in her hand, the covenant is broken in his eyes, as well as in hers. It is an experience. Both are free, under the law sanctioned by Moses, to go their separate ways and the husband says to his ex-wife, “You are free to marry whomsoever you want.” God also says a firm ‘No!’ to this hard-hearted husband, and so he is left without a wife. He will have to go off and find another one, and if his reputation goes ahead of him few others would give him their daughters fearing what might happen to them.

Some think that the bill of divorce does not take effect until the moment she remarries. Up until that moment she can exercise her judgment to forgive her husband, tear up his bill of divorce, and return to him as if nothing had happened.

We cannot impose Western values on Ancient Near Eastern societies. Cultural norms would play a part in preventing him from taking her back, because if the ‘ervat dâbâr was a valid ground to divorce her, then he cannot ignore it and pretend that the ‘ervat dâbâr ever existed. He has to go through with his accusation, and stick by it, otherwise he would lose credibility in the eyes of his community. The interval following his covenant-breaking act is when the divorced wife will marry a second husband. Very quickly she becomes the wife of another man, which doubly ensures that, should he change his mind, he cannot have her back. Yahweh’s narrative of her movements is what one would normally expect, and so He does not take into account a change of heart in the evil divorcer.

So there are two distinct issues. There is the issue, Can he take her back before she remarries? And, Is it because she becomes unclean through her remarriage that she cannot return to him? The latter is not likely because he is not a clean individual himself, so the focus must shift to Yahweh’s care for the abused wife. He will not allow her to return to an abusive environment, either in the short term or the long term, irrespective of any reform that the first husband might undergo. His past will hang over his head and conscience for the rest of his life.

The bill of divorce takes effect the moment it is put into the hand of the woman. The rabbinic tradition is clear about this. If the woman flees the house before her husband can place it in her hand then the divorce certificate is not valid. She is still married to him. It must be placed in her hand to be valid. At the moment it is placed in her hand she is free to marry any other man she chooses. He cannot withdraw it. And she is under an obligation by God not to return to her first husband. She has no choice in the matter once she has been divorced. God has spoken and He has decreed that there can be no reconciliation with an ex-husband, which is the moment she accepts the bill of dissolution. The bill of divorce means what it says and the proof is that she can stay single in her father’s house for the rest of her life, if she so pleases, as an ex-wife. She is no longer his wife the moment she accepts the bill of divorce.

God treats the divorced woman like a widow in Numbers 30:9. After a wife is divorced, if she makes a vow to God it stands. However, if she was a married woman, her husband could annul her

166 John Ignatius Döllinger, The First Age of Christianity and the Church, translated from the German by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (1st ed; London: Allen, 1866, pp. 222-36) makes the point that, “There was no interposition of others, or sentence of a court: the man acted wholly for himself, and only his right was allowed—the wife could not separate herself” (p. 222).
vow (30:10-15). A wife’s vows must go through her husband to God, and her husband has been given the authority by God to annul her vows, because God has given the leadership of the family to the husband, otherwise the wife could usurp his position by claiming that God had accepted her vows.

This proves that once the husband hands her a bill of divorce and she walks away from his house she is totally free of his headship over her, and he has no powers to force her to come back to him. She can make her vows directly to God, and she must fulfil them. God acknowledges the facts on the ground, and treats her accordingly. God does not accept the dissolution of the bond, but He imposes a permanent ‘separation’ (xωρισμός) just as we read of in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

From this I conclude that once divorced she stays divorced from him, and God forbids her to rejoin her ex-husband, because that would require a fresh marriage to rejoin him, such is the power of the bill of divorce: it does what it claims—it dissolves the first marriage in the eyes of man and the community, but not in the eyes of God. Yahweh points out that if her second husband dies, and so she is free to remarry whoever she chooses (just as when she was first divorced), she is banned from remarrying her first husband. She is forced into a remarriage to another man by the evil divorce of her first, unforgiving, hard-hearted husband. It is through this remarriage that she becomes a defiled woman in the eyes of God, because while the community gives the bill of divorce the power to dissolve a marriage, Yahweh does not recognise that it has this power. That is the key to understanding Yahweh’s actions. It is only because He regards the ‘divorced’ wife as still one-flesh with her first husband that she can be regarded as an unclean woman if she remarries. It is clear from her transfer from a ‘clean’ to an ‘unclean’ status, in the eyes of God, that her first marriage is still in force. The community does not recognise this transfer to be valid, because in its eyes divorce dissolves the first marriage, and so the transfer is from ‘clean’ to ‘clean.’ Yahweh’s actions are consistent with those of Jesus, who revealed that a bill of divorce cannot dissolve any lawful marriage, and anyone who marries a divorced person becomes an unclean/defiled person. And unclean, defiled persons cannot enter the Kingdom of God, “For this you know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, . . . has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:5).

It makes sense to read Deuteronomy 24:4 as God acting in the interests of the abused wife, to protect her from further abuse by this unrighteous husband. That is the solution, and it makes perfectly good sense. God deprives this hard-hearted individual of a wife, as a punishment for divorcing her. It was an expensive business to buy, a good, well-breed wife.

Deuteronomy was written before Israel entered Canaan, but so evil was the nation that left Egypt that that whole generation were debarred from entering the Promised Land, that is how evil this generation was who were practising divorce which they had introduced into Israel, very likely during their 430-year stay in Egypt. There were only two righteous men (Caleb and Joshua) in the whole nation who were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

The positive effect of not being able to take back an ex-wife once she has been ejected from her home, is that all hard-hearted husbands would have to think hard about the consequences of resorting to divorce in a pique of anger toward her.

We know from the New Testament that it is God’s express desire that the divorcer should return to his first wife. The fact that God says to the Old Testament divorcer, “I do not permit you to return to your ex-wife,” and He says to the New Testament divorcer, “I do permit you to return to your ex-wife,” shows an unwillingness to forgive the Old Testament divorcer his sin, but a willingness to forgive the New Testament divorcer his sin, because His Son stands between Him and all men, because the Old Covenant has been replaced with the New Covenant. All men now must come through the Son of God if they are to be reconciled to God the Father. A new era, and a new relationship began when Jesus came to this Earth to be the Mediator between God and Man. This explains the difference between the two covenants’ attitude toward reconciliation.

Some hold that the divorcer of 24:1 is not an evil man but a righteous man. Having divorced his wife, he thinks better of it, repents, and goes after her to bring her back home. Can he do so? The answer is ‘No,’ because he is operating under the Law. By resorting to a bill of divorce and handing it to her, this action is not a provisional dissolution but an immediate and permanent dissolution of the marriage bond. It is final. There is no provisonality about it. It does what it says it does: it dissolves the union in the eyes of the community, but only in the eyes of the community. God’s disapproval is embedded in His Torah for all time to come.

In any case, the divorcer in 24:1 is a hard-hearted husband because his second husband divorced her because he hated her. Now hate is of the evil one. Yahweh records the ‘dissolution’ of

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\[167\] Where a Christian is married to an un-Christian, the children are ‘clean’ due to the Christian parent. They are reckoned as ‘holy’ in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, and so they will be with Him should they die in infancy (1 Corinthians 7:14). The children of two non-Christian parents are ‘unclean’ and so they have no relationship with the Lord Jesus. They share the destiny of their ‘unclean’ parents.
her marriages to both husbands using exactly the same formula of words. But it might be objected that until she marries another man (or woman) she is not defiled; she is still clean. She is still clean, but her status is that she is a divorced woman, and no priest can marry a divorced woman. From God’s point of view, the divorced woman is still one-flesh with her ex-husband, but the bill of divorce is not ignored by Him. He takes account of the husband’s actions and these are determinative for the status of the marriage. Her husband has sent her out to marry whoever she wants to marry. In his mind she is free of him, as much as he is free of her. He feels free. Something significant happened when he handed to her her bill of divorce. A burden was lifted from his mind, be he an abusive or a righteous husband.

Divorce per se is a sin, followed by the sin of remarriage. So there are two sins involved here. If the divorced partners never remarry they are still in a sinful state in the eyes of God, but maybe not in the eyes of Moses’s ‘complete legal system.’ Under Moses’ system, the two are no longer ‘one flesh’ but two. Man has separated them. They cannot be rejoined under Moses’ system, is the ruling Yahweh stepped in to impose on Moses’ system.

Of course, if one or other remarries, which is the likely next stage, this makes the reunion/reconciliation even less likely, because the wife moves into a ‘defiled’ state. If a defender of Moses’s system wants to argue that they can be reconciled before she moves into that ‘defiled’ state, then he would need another law requiring another wedding, as if they were two singles marrying for the first time, because under the complete Mosaic system, they are two singles.

I don’t think a reconciliation through a second marriage ceremony happened in real life. It is an arm-chair discussion point.

The inbuilt discrimination against women, as the description of what happens during a divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 reveals, does not and did not give the wife the right to divorce her husband for infidelity, cruelty, hate, ervath damar, etc. etc. This should not surprise us, because if hard-hearted husbands are in the driving seat and determining the traditions, they are not going to give their wives the right to divorce them, are they? Hence the unjust nature of the traditions governing divorce in Israel, as couched in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, is sufficient to show that divorce did not originate with Yahweh, but with man.

5.7. GOD’S ABHORRENCE IS THE DEFILED WOMAN AND NOT THE RECONCILIATION

It is sometimes said that God never showed any disapproval of the practice of divorce in Israel, which very likely started in Egypt hundreds of years before Moses was born. But God showed what He thought of Moses’s permission to allow divorce among His people in two ways.

First, after a wife was divorced by her hard-hearted husband, it was assumed (as it is today) that the wife was free to remarry whoever she wanted. She is not considered to be an adulteress. She is ‘clean,’ ‘undefiled,’ or so one would think. But as soon as a second man has intercourse with her, at that moment she becomes an ‘unclean,’ ‘defiled’ woman in the eyes of God. The only way this can happen is if God ignores the divorce and considers her as still married to her first husband. Only this will explain how He could regard her as an unclean woman, whom He calls an abomination. The term ‘defiled (unclean)’ is used in Numbers 5:13-14 of the defilement of adultery. The same term, when used in Deuteronomy 24:4, means that remarriage following a divorce is on a par with adultery. This is totally consistent with Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10:11-12, where remarriage by either partner is regarded as an adulterous relationship.

The principle that God is applying to this situation is contained in Genesis 2:24, which was also the view of the Lord Jesus. Both the Father and the Son are consistent in viewing the divorce procedure as invalid, and the woman who remarries after getting such a divorce is an unclean woman and an adulteress. If God had not pronounced the remarried wife an abomination in His sight, then He would have sanctioned divorce in Israel. The term ‘abomination’ certainly applies to the remarried wife, but it must also apply to the means that got her into that position and condition, namely, divorce itself. Divorce was the gateway that led to her abomination status that would stick to her for the rest of her life. Divorce and spiritual death go hand in hand. It was no wonder, then, that God said He hated divorce.

Secondly, I see God’s abhorrence as relating to her intercourse with a second living man, rather than relating to the reconciliation with her first husband. If reconciliation is an abomination to God under the Law, then it still be so under Grace. But under Grace reconciliation is encouraged

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and desired by God. He cannot be inconsistent, therefore it is the defiled wife who is the abomination under Law and under Grace.

The line that Jesus took shows that He is in agreement with what constituted His Father’s abhorrence. If God’s abhorrence related to the reconciliation then He has changed His value-system, because Paul held that reconciliation was no longer an abhorrence to God under Grace.

If homosexuality is an abhorrence to God under Law, is it no longer an abhorrence to Him under Grace? Of course it is! Paul believed that what is an abhorrence in God’s eyes under the Law, is also an abhorrence to Him under Grace. We would expect consistency within the Trinity over what constitutes unrighteous behaviour throughout human history and across all dispensations.

This means that reconciliation cannot be an abhorrent idea to God in Deuteronomy 24:4, and this leaves only her remarriage. Given Jesus’ confirmation that a remarriage defiles a divorced wife, and a reconciliation does not defile a divorced woman, we must rule out reconciliation as being an abhorrent idea in the mind of God. This leaves only the remarriage itself. Grammar, theology, and Jesus’ insight, suggest that God’s abhorrence is the defiled woman herself.

It is clear from the Torah that a woman should not have any seed from another man. Numbers 5:20-22 reads, “And the priest has caused her to swear, and has said to the woman, ‘If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness under your husband, be free from these bitter waters which cause the curse. And you, if you have turned aside under your husband, and if you have been defiled, and any man gives his copulation to you besides (πιάσῃ) your husband . . . .’ Then the priest has caused the woman to swear with an oath of execration, and the priest has said to the woman, ‘Yahweh gives you for an execration, and for a curse, in the midst of your people, in Yahweh’s giving your thigh to fall, and your belly to swell, and these waters which cause the curse have gone into your bowels, to cause the belly to swell, and the thigh to fall.’ And the woman has said, ‘Amen, Amen.’”

Verse 20 makes it clear that the woman is defiled if she has sex with another man, and Leviticus 18:20 makes it clear that the man is defiled if he has sex with another woman. “And unto the wife of your neighbour you do not give your seed of copulation, to be defiled through her.” A defiled wife is an abomination in God’s sight (Deut 24:4). Fornication defiles the fornicator and strikes at the very heart of the ‘one flesh’ union.

It is unnecessary to go into all the rabbinical attempts to justify the ban on reconciliation. Those who argue that it was to protect the second marriage in case the first husband tried to get her back again. But this overlooks the point that even if her second husband dies, he still cannot have her back again.169

Gordon Wenham tried a different tack. Once a marriage has formed and then dissolved, he argued that to remarry the first husband after a remarriage was incest.170 There are three problems with this solution. First, it assumes that divorce dissolves the first marriage, otherwise getting back together would not be incest. Second, it ignores the fact that the man in 1 Corinthians 6:16 was ‘one flesh’ with his wife and with a prostitute at the same time. He is told to cease being ‘one flesh’ with the prostitute, and to return to his lawful wife.

The sexual encounter with the prostitute did not dissolve his ‘one flesh’ union with his wife, so no incest was incurred by getting back to his first wife, even though he had sexual relations with another woman in the meantime, which amounted to a ‘one flesh’ marriage union. Note that the same term is used of the sexual union with the prostitute as with his wife. He was in a ‘one flesh’ union with both at the same time. If we attribute consistency to God then after the man had become ‘one flesh’ with the prostitute, he should not have been allowed to return to his first wife, because he was a defiled husband.

Third, if an Israelite husband remarried his first wife, after a divorce, and this was considered a ‘type of incest,’ and so prohibited by Yahweh, then, since the laws of incest must necessarily carry over into the New Covenant, and God does not change His value-system, there can be no remarriage to the first wife, under the New Covenant, if divorce dissolves a marriage.

The solution to Deuteronomy 24:4 is that there was no moral objection to a reunion with the first husband, after a remarriage, just as there was no moral objection to the Corinthian man returning to his wife. We must look elsewhere for the reason behind the ban on reconciliation under the Law, and it is in God’s unwillingness to forgive such a heinous crime as divorce. We need look no further for an explanation.

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5.8. HOW FAR CAN OLD TESTAMENT LAWS BE IMPOSED ON THE CHURCH?

This is not the place to write a thesis on the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants. The focus here is solely on the issue of marriage laws. Some Christian teachers believe that the law on virginity should be carried over into Christian marriages. They believe that a Christian man is entitled to marry a virgin and if she is not a virgin on her wedding night then the newly wed husband is entitled to divorce her immediately, but not if he delays to do so. He has a very narrow window of opportunity to make that decision. If he sleeps with her again, then it is assumed that he has forfeited his right to divorce her. God sanctioned that a non-virgin bride be killed, and not allowed to bear children to Him. These teachers believe that since they cannot kill their non-virgin brides, the next best thing is to divorce them, and consider them ‘dead’ for the purposes of remarrying another bride.

The problem with this solution is that if the non-virgin bride is not killed, she is not ‘dead’! And she will go off and marry someone else, and have children by the next man. Is the man who married this ‘dead’ woman in the same category as the man who married a woman divorced for a non-capital offence?

Another insists that if his newly-wed wife reveals a perverted inclination to perform unnatural sex in the honeymoon period and slightly beyond it, that this, too, is a cause for divorce, because he has taken the private interpretation that the term ‘erōtēt dēbār’ in Deuteronomy 24:1 refers specifically to sexual perversion, at the ‘dirty talk’ level only.

These two interpretations claim to have biblical sanction behind them. I am not here dealing with those who take the prescriptive (or directive) interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. They believe that God sanctions divorce for any number of unspecified ‘erōtēt dēbār’ causes. Rather, the focus is on those causes that could not have been foreseen or discovered before the Christian entered into matrimony. From the Christian bridegroom’s point of view he hoped that he was marrying a Christian woman, but she turned out to be anything but that in private, demanding unnatural sex with him, and other disturbing requests, which deeply upset him. He is counselled that causes for divorce, immediately on marrying her, are her non-acceptance of her husband’s headship over her, or not fulfilling her responsibilities at home, as mistress of the house, or bringing her husband into dispute through disorderly behaviour in public, bordering on lewdness and nudity. These traits were unexpected in the bride, and come as a complete surprise. Some teachers feel that these deeply disturbing manifestations of unspirituality warrant a divorce if they are not overcome in the first few weeks of marriage, because they bind the Christian to a wife who is Christian only in name, and that is not what he thought he was marrying.

From the Christian bride’s point of view, she hoped that she was marrying a Christian man, but he turned out to be anything but that in private, demanding unnatural sex with her, and other disturbing requests, which deeply upset her. If these traits appeared in the honeymoon period or slightly later, some marriage advisers, pastors and Christian counsellors among them, recommend that she do not bind herself for the rest of her life to her perverted husband, and advise an immediate divorce. She is mindful that her perverted husband is her head and that she should obey him in everything, as the Scriptures reveal. The prospect of being locked into a relationship that deeply disturbs her Christian faith is absolutely appalling and fills her with revulsion. What is she to do?

Then there is the case where a Christian girl is determined not to marry a young man who had sex outside marriage, because she believes she is entitled to a marry a virgin since she has kept herself pure for her marriage. The same goes for a virgin young man. But in both cases they fall for a partner of the opposite sex who deceives them into believing that they fit the standard they have been looking for, and marry, only to find out that they have been deceived. The betrayal of trust can be deeply unsettling for the stability of their marriage. The betrayal could extend to other issues, such as the ‘Christian’ only ‘became’ a Christian in order to capture a partner, but in real life they were of a different religion. They could have a criminal past, or have or had sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

Many advisers sense that the long-term chances of these marriages being successful are too slim to carry on with, and advise a quick divorce, because they are going to end up divorcing each other anyway, when the blazing rows start up, as they will, as surely as night follows day. Better to cut your losses early and raise your children with someone you can trust, is often the counsel being given, even to Christian couples.

Personally, I do not think it wise to demand, as of right, that the sexual history of a bride or bridgroom be confessed to each other before the marriage takes place. This would do great damage to their self-esteem, and would form the hairline crack for an inevitable divorce, for every marriage must go through at least one huge bust-up, and Satan will exploit their past sins to his advantage when the arguments are flying thick and fast.
I can only speak to Christians marrying Christians. My advice is: Let the past remain in the past, and do not enquire into the other’s sexual history. Let their present walk with Christ Jesus be their new life, and put their old life with its unchristian habits and values into the dustbin of history, never to be resurrected again.

If a Christian man wanted to take advantage of some Old Testament law, such as the expectation that he is entitled to marry a virgin, and if she is not a virgin then he feels entitled to divorce her, then I would argue that he cannot pick and choose which laws to carry over into the Christian Church and which to ignore. Let such a Christian husband become a Jew in all but name, and live as a Jew, and live under Jewish law and among a Jewish community from which he is resolved to take a bride, then he can apply the law of virginity to his proposed bride. But Gentiles cannot stand on the outside and pick and choose some Jewish laws and apply them to the New Covenant Church, and reject the other Mosaic laws.

Contact between prospective wife and husband in Ancient Near Eastern cultures did not permit any intimacy between the couple, but he (through his father) could obtain the assurance and evidence (menstruous cloth) that his bride to be was certainly a virgin, and would be guarded in that condition, right up to the marriage itself. She would be chaperoned at all times to ensure this. The bride-to-be had a vested interest in staying a virgin, because in Hebrew culture she would be stoned to death if she was not.

Obviously, Western culture is the opposite, and very little care is taken of daughters to see that they enter marriage as virgins. But in compensation the prospective husband can soon find out if his bride-to-be has had many boyfriends, or was raped in the past, to find out her virgin status. If she is not a virgin, but he is deeply in love with her, he can marry her. He is not under Torah. Gentiles are not under any obligation to marry virgins, but Hebrew/Jewish young men were.

Provisional wives were not a feature of Hebrew culture. The only requirement demanded of a future wife was that she was a virgin. It was a physical condition. It could be verified. This verification took place before the couple were married to ensure that the resulting marriage was lawful. The long betrothal period also ensured that she was not carrying someone else’s child. So every effort was made to ensure that a man married a virgin.

Westerners would like to apply Hebrew culture to their marriages, but they are working out of an entirely different cultural background, so that it is not possible to make the same demands as the Hebrews did. We are gentiles, not Jews. Only those who live as Jews, keeping all the laws of the Torah, can expect to marry virgins.

Some have tried to see Christ’s Church as the natural successor to the nation of Israel. Israel was a physical nation. It was also a theocracy. The Church is a theocracy, but not a physical nation. Israel had the physical authority from God to carry through the death penalty for over seventy named crimes, including women who lost their virginity, and for adultery.

Now if the Church wants to imitate the state of ancient Israel, in the case of non-virgins and adulteresses, it has no authority from God to subject these women to the death penalty. The death penalty for non-virgins has been done away with by God, and for good reason. They are free to marry if they are repentant of their past sins. They can accept the Lord’s directive, “Go, and sin no more.” The crowd wanted the death penalty applied to the woman taken in adultery (a capital offence, like non-virgins), but Jesus let her live.

From this we learn that Christians who want to see the Church as the new ‘Israel of God,’ are mistaken if they try to bring into the Church laws and regulations that applied only to the physical people of Israel, as a distinct nation. That national stage is obsolete. It no longer exists. But some try to make it exist in the Church.

Only if the Church became a national state in its own right and had supreme power over its citizens (the papacy of the Middle Ages being a good example) would it be able to imitate the old Israel of God, and kill off all non-virgins and adulteresses. By imparting His spirit to all His followers, Jesus ensured that Jews and non-Jews could live out His teaching and show compassion to all nations.

We need to be aware of double standards. If a marriage does not become binding until ‘the man has satisfied himself that the woman is sexually pure in her spirit as well as in her body’ then she is entitled to expect the same standards of him! What if the guy had sex (i.e., one night stands) before marriage? Does this disqualify him from marrying a virgin? If a Western woman is repeatedly rejected after each marriage she goes through, because she was not a virgin, how can she ever be married? If she is made pregnant with each marriage by different grooms, who then reject her the next morning, who is responsible for these children?

Post-coitus knowledge of the sexual history of one’s partner is never a ground to dissolve a lawfully entered into marriage contract. I do not regard lesbianism or the non-virgin status of the bride to be ground to dissolve a lawfully entered into marriage.
In the Christian world, as opposed to the non-Christian world, every effort to make sure of the character of who you are about to marry is your responsibility. You are responsible for your choices, and if you make a bad choice you must live with it. It is a case of what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG). If in doubt, do not marry. In any case single persons are of more value to the Lord than married persons, whose interests are divided. Remain in the marriage status in which you were called to be Christ’s disciple. If you were single, remain single. Even a perfect marriage can be a yoke round your neck, and that yoke is there ‘until death do you part.’

It is not unusual to find Christian writers who have accepted the KJV translation of Matthew 19:9. ‘except for fornication’ as Jesus’ words to state that they believe Jesus based His teaching on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 that was current in His day, and that He allowed divorce for adultery. If so, this would make Him a supporter of Hillel and Shammai’s interpretation that the term ‘eruvat dábár refers to fornication (and adultery). This is a degrading view of the Lord Jesus. First, it brings Jesus down to the level of another human rabbi groping for the truth. It denies that He is the Truth; and that He received His teaching directly from His Father. Secondly, it means that Jesus cannot be infallible in His teaching if that teaching is based on current interpretation, which has been shown to be wrong. We just need to do some joined up theology to see the fallacy of this position. It is evident that if God instituted the death penalty for adultery, how can He also institute divorce for adultery in the same book, at the same time? There is a contradiction here. Refuge is sometimes sought to justify this contradiction by pointing to ‘developments‘ within the unfolding revelation of Scripture. But this misses the point that the contradiction is contained in the same book, and written at the same time. From this we see that no effort is spared by these so-called evangelical writers to get Jesus to agree to divorce for adultery, even if that means that God must be viewed as being inconsistent, confused and ambivalent in His attitude toward divorce for adultery. And the same goes for His Son.

Has the death penalty been commuted to excommunication from the Body of Christ—the Church? The answer is Yes. We can no longer inflict the death penalty for adultery in the church. In 1 Corinthians 5 the man who committed incest would have been put to death under the Mosaic Law, but here Paul tells the Church to excommunicate the man. In this test case we see how the physical penalties of the Law have been transmuted into spiritual penalties, and the greatest of these is excommunication by the righteous Church of God.

If the Church is a true Church of God, and living as a community in accordance with Christ’s spiritual laws, then God will endorse the actions of the Christian community when they discipline their members in love. But if a church goes astray from Christ’s teaching (such as allowing women to speak in the church, and have oversight, and pray with uncovered heads, and the men indulge in all kinds of syncretistic practices, then the righteous in those straying churches will be excommunicated or ostracised. In which case I do not think God will endorse the actions of these compromised churches, and the Elect should not feel they have been excommunicated from the Body of Christ.

So if Christians have remarried, and so are in a state of living an adulterous life, they must be excommunicated if they are not willing to separate from their adulterous partner, or try to argue that it is a righteous manner of living the Christian life. But once remarriage is not only accepted as legitimate, but the church actually marries divorced persons, then you can have no doubt but that that church is not following Christ, but is following the world. It is a pseudo-church.

Confusion over the relationship between Law and Grace led one writer to teach that Christians are prohibited from remarrying their first partner, because he held that Deuteronomy 24:4 still held good under Grace. “According to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, a man may not remarry his divorced wife if she has in the meantime been married to another man.” The implication of this statement is that he believes divorce does dissolve the first marriage union; so that he is living under the Law, and not under Grace. The other implication is that he believes it is the reconciliation that is the abomination in God’s eyes, and not the defiled woman.

CHRISTIAN JEWS AND NON-CHRISTIAN JEWS

Some Christian writers believe that non-Jewish Christians can dip into Jewish law to get what they want to get a divorce on ‘biblical grounds.’ and ignore the rest of the Torah. It seems to me that if one is going to go down the Jewish route to find ‘biblical’ grounds, he must be thoroughly Jewish and thoroughly consistent in his adoption of their customs and their penalty system. He must become a Jew in all but circumcision.

If we take Mary’s case and she had been guilty of unfaithfulness between the time she was officially engaged and officially married to Joseph, then she should have been stoned as an adulterer

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(not as a fornicator), because under Jewish law she was considered ‘married.’ To get out of an engagement involved getting a divorce (‘gil’) as though the marriage had been consummated, that is how serious Jewish custom regarded the engaged state.

I have no problem with Jews who become Christians and want to live according to their traditional Hebrew/Jewish customs with respect to the engagement period, and the expectation that both parties should be virgins when they enter the married state, but that is as far as such customs can go. Jesus’ teaching, that all consummated marriages are for life, applies to both Jew and non-Jew.

But if a Christian Jew wants to apply Jewish law to his marriage then he must be prepared to live by his Jewish customs. I refer to the proof that his wife is a virgin on the night he first sleeps with her. If that proof is not forthcoming in the form of the parents bringing out the blood-stained sheet, or the evidence of menstruation before their daughter slept with her new husband, then he cannot use the internal courts of the Jews to get a divorce (‘gil’). He cannot be a Christian Jew in just one area of his life, and take advantage of his Jewish customs to divorce his wife. Indeed, whatever Jewish traditions exist they are now subject to the new law of Christ. All Jewish law is non-binding on the Christian Jew. He comes under grace, and comes out from under law.

If a Christian Jew is guilty of adultery after consummation, there are no grounds for divorce. Jesus’ law supersedes all Jewish law in this area of life. All Christians, Jew and non-Jew, come under the law of Christ which forbids divorce on any grounds, once the point of consummation has been passed. At consummation, and not before it, do the two become ‘one flesh.’ Up until that point they are not ‘one flesh,’ but two. In the eyes of Jesus the espousal period is not a ‘one flesh’ situation. The two are still two. Consequently, I have a problem with non-Jewish Christians trying to take advantage of Jewish traditions in one area only—marriage customs—to get a divorce.

The statement is made that porneia refers only to pre-marital sex, and it is claimed that there is no text in the New Testament where it can refer to post-marital sex. If this narrow definition of porneia is correct then it can be used to show that Jesus was referring to divorce at the espousal stage, and only at that stage.

So the Betrothal solution depends, and hangs on, this narrow definition of porneia being true. If this narrow definition of porneia is shown not to stand up throughout Greek literature and in every context, then it is undermined.

Jesus stated clearly in Matthew 5:32 that if a man divorced his wife (who had not had sex with any other man up to the point he divorced her), and she is forced out on to the street, where out of necessity she had to join herself to another household, and she committed adultery as a result of her vulnerability and poverty, the husband who sent her away is responsible for her illicit, sexual activity. By divorcing her, he is putting pressure on her to join herself to another man to look after her, because in New Testament times women did not have personal assets to live independently of their husbands. The husband owned everything. The Lord rules that she is committing ‘adultery,’ but her husband will be held accountable for her sexual activity.

The Betrothal solution imposes restrictions on the text, which relate to (a) time, and (b) opportunity. We can analyse these separately.

The restriction on time

On the betrothal view Jesus’ focus is restricted to the few months between the betrothal and the actual wedding. The marriage starts with an engagement to marry. Once this Jewish ceremony has been completed a divorce certificate is required to break off the engagement. Now, according to the betrothal view, from the moment the engagement is concluded Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32 start to apply to this situation. Jesus is said to have this situation firmly in mind when He makes the statement (and I paraphrase part of it to bring out the sense): “But I—I say to you, that who, for instance, may divorce his [‘one flesh’] wife, except if she committed fornication before the marriage was consummated, makes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a [‘one flesh’] woman so put away, commits adultery.”

This would mean that if a Jew divorced his wife before his marriage was consummated, anyone who married his divorced ‘wife’ commits adultery if they marry her. Is this really what Jesus intended to say? Let us see how this would work out in practice. In the case of His mother Mary, if Joseph had gone ahead and divorced her, then any man marrying Mary would be guilty of committing adultery with her. But how can this be so if she is not married? Surely they would be committing fornication, not adultery, with her.

One could argue that after Jesus had taken care of the obvious exception to obtain a divorce, that His mind went back to the divorce of a married woman and He spelled out the danger to her
sexual fidelity, and the blame that would attach to her husband who put her in a position of danger—physical, sexual, mental, and spiritual.

The restriction on opportunity

On the betrothal view, the exception clause only applies to engaged Jewish couples. This is because the meaning of porneia to severely, and artificially restricted to mean pre-marital sex. In which case the translation would read: “But I—say to you, that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—apart from the case where she committed fornication while espoused to him—makes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a ['one flesh'] woman so put away, commits adultery.” But if it can be shown that ‘fornication’ (porneia) cannot be limited in this way then the case collapses.

Is it possible that Jesus’ use of the term ‘fornication’ here, rather than ‘adultery’ was deliberately chosen? Not all fornicators are adulterers, but all adulterers are fornicators. Fornication includes all forms of deviant sexual behaviour, inside and outside marriage.

Adultery is a narrower term, restricted to married persons having sex outside the marriage bond. The term ‘adultery’ assumes knowledge of the marital status of the offenders; whereas ‘fornicators’ can describe any persons indulging in illicit sex. If a single person has illicit sex with a married person, the single would be called a fornicator, while the married would be called an adulterer/adulteress. But if the status of the married person was not known, they would be classed as a fornicator. It would be unusual to find a broad term such as ‘fornication/fornicator’ so carefully used by all Greek writers over many centuries that it was never used of unfaithfulness within a marriage, or only used of pre-marital sex, or always restricted to singles. That is being a hostage to fortune. It just takes a number of cases to collapse it. The rule of thumb is: Not all fornicators are adulterers, but all adulterers are fornicators (see 6.1.3).

It might appear that Jesus permits divorce for infidelity in Matthew 5:32, but not for any other cause, but this is not the case. Jesus’ mind is not on legislation but on culpability. He takes the situation that He finds in front of Him, where divorce is a reality, and everybody is doing it, and He destroys it by pointing out that where a man divorces a sexually faithful wife, the husband will be held responsible for his wife having sex with any other man once he has put her out on the street. The only exception to his culpability for her marital infidelity is when she committed adultery without any compulsion from him, while married to him. Why should he be blamed for her infidelity before he put her out in the street? And in truth, said Jesus, he will not be held culpable for any illicit sexual acts she committed before he divorced her; but the charge still stands, that once he divorces her then all her future illicit sexual acts will be laid at his door, because he is still married to her, even though he thought that his Mosaic divorce dissolved the marriage.

The majority of commentators treat Matthew 5:32 and 19:9f. as Jesus’ new legislation on the circumstances under which divorce can be obtained in the Kingdom of God. However, Jesus is not saying the same thing in both places.

In Matthew 5:32 He puts the spotlight on blame for the consequences of divorcing one’s spouse; and the blame is laid at the door of the one suing for divorce. In Matthew 19:9 He puts the spotlight on the abolition of divorce per se. It cannot exist in the new Kingdom of God He had come to establish on the earth.

It should always be borne in mind that the term ‘except’ was not used by Jesus in Matthew 19:9. It was Erasmus who added the word ‘except’ in 1516 because he thought Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 were saying the same thing in different words, and that both were permitting divorce in the case of ‘fornication,’ which he understood in its wider meaning of all forms of deviant sexual behaviour, inside and outside marriage, and anything else that caused shame to her husband’s self-image.

The betrothal solution is not the answer. It was introduced by modern writers to shield Jesus from granting divorce for fornication, but not for any other cause. But once it is realised that Matthew 5:32 is not talking about establishing the legal grounds for divorce, but on culpability following divorce, and that Matthew 19:9 bans divorce completely for all non-fornication offences, then the need for the betrothal solution loses its primary purpose, which was to safeguard Jesus’ teaching on no divorce on any grounds.

In addition, we now know what the original Greek text read in Matthew 19:9, and it never had the word ‘except’ in it. That was put there by a humanist (Erasmus) who had a distrust of the Roman Catholic doctrine of marriage. Jesus was not making any exceptions for divorce. The only exception He made was in the case where a wife committed fornication before she was divorced by an irate husband (Mt 5:32). Her sin is her sin, and she, not her husband, will be held responsible for it.
But after she has been divorced, her further sins are laid at the feet of her husband, and if he remarries while she is still alive, he will be committing adultery against her.

5.9. THE USE OF DIVORCE AS A METAPHOR

Some Christian writers fail to understand that a word can be used in a metaphorical sense as in the sentence, ‘As belief in Jesus was divorced from its Jewish origins, gentile believers increasingly adopted anti-Semitic biases.’ The writer has used the metaphor of divorce to imagine that there was a marriage between Jesus and Judaism in the early days of the Church, not that there was an actual marriage between them.

Many pro-divorce writers make the mistake of lifting the word ‘divorce’ out of its metaphorical context in the Bible and claiming that God literally divorced the Ten Tribes!

Some Christian writers justify divorce on the grounds that Yahweh divorced the Ten Tribes of Israel. It is argued that if God divorced His people then the act of divorce cannot, in itself, be an evil thing. This howler of a misunderstanding of the use of words is frequently found in academic commentaries and books by those who are intent on imposing a doctrine of divorce on Jesus.

If God can take up any metaphor to convey His mind then it is not legitimate to turn that metaphor into a historical reality. God can come like a thief in the night, but it would be wrong to say that He is a thief. Similarly, He presents Himself as a husband in order to convey His feelings toward Israel and Judah (the two sisters whom He portrays as His two wives). He hates divorce, but Moses consolidated the nation’s divorce culture in order to regulate and alleviate the hardship that this brought about for divorced wives. This does not mean that God (a) stood in a husband relationship to his wife Israel, or (b) that He approves of divorce, but when such a custom (along with stealing) becomes a normal experience, and an integral part of the nation’s daily life, then it can be taken up by God as a metaphor, but only as a metaphor. Where others have gone wrong (in my opinion) is that they have pressed the metaphor to the point that they see it as an actual, historical marriage, which they must know never took place. What did take place was a Covenant ceremony in which Israel participated physically, but there was never a marriage between Yahweh and His people at Mount Sinai or anywhere else.

Hebrew can be very bold and daring in its use of metaphors and anthropomorphisms to describe Yahweh’s character and His various relationships, and I think some have allowed themselves to transform an analogy into a reality in the case of the word ‘divorce.’ They need to stand back and see how the analogy works in terms of conveying God’s feelings. He is a master communicator, and will use the most appropriate words, analogies, metaphors and anthropomorphisms, in the most effective way, to ensure that He gets His message across clearly.

God can tell lies to deceive His enemies. When He wanted to kill Ahab at Ramoth Gilead, He put a lie into the mouths of Ahab’s four hundred prophets counselling him to go to war, with only one prophet dissenting from this advice, namely, Micaiah. Micaiah was so convinced that he alone spoke the truth that he related a vision in which God sent lying spirits into all the prophets of Ahab to deceive him into going to war against the king of Syria. Micaiah followed this up with the statement, ‘The Lord has put a lying spirit into the mouths of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you’ (1 Kgs 22:22). Where does the vision end and reality take over in this scenario? A good angel of God offers to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets (how moral is this?), and God approves of this cunning, devious plan, to trick Ahab to go to war so that He can kill him.

Yahweh’s use of the metaphor of marriage and divorce turns out to be a good choice, because His Church, like an unfaithful wife, had prostituted herself (another analogy) with Assyria and Babylon. He determined to reject the Ten Tribes, and continue with the Two Tribes, so what better analogy to draw on than the divorce one? After all it was endemic in their culture, so if He used it, it would impact enormously on them, what He was about to do in ‘rejecting’ them. He was ‘rejecting’ His ‘wife’–Aholah (the Ten Tribes). They knew what was involved in such a rejection if it was allied to the concept of divorce, as they understood it, which meant that once they were divorced Yahweh would not take them back again, if He continued with the analogy. He could not take them back again, because He, Himself, had added the crucial caveat in Deuteronomy 24:4, that if they used Moses’s ‘bill of divorce’ law, then they must accept the consequence that went with that decision, namely, there was no possibility of reconciliation. How appropriate in the case of ‘divorcing’ the Ten Tribes?

What I think these writers should do is throw out the idea that Yahweh married two sisters as an historical reality, and look carefully at the appropriateness of using something that God hated, namely divorce, as a metaphor of the coming ‘rejection’ of the majority of His people because they did not keep the terms of His Covenant with them. The Covenant vows and the Covenant Ceremony
that understand, Covenant. A marriage is not conditional.

The New Testament Church is likened to a Betrothed Bride and the future is likened to the Marriage of the Bride. Again, the metaphor is so appropriate, because it conveys a lot of beautiful images and conjures up a very pleasant situation, but we cannot press it to expect a huge wedding cake and the best food and drink, followed by exciting entertainment into the night! But I fear this is what some have done with the metaphor of Israel as one of Yahweh’s wives. The danger of pressing the marriage analogy is that these writers end up saying that Aholah only became a prostitute in the eighth-century, whereas Yahweh says elsewhere that she was unfaithful from the moment she left Egypt. The analogy is only a means to get across the idea that the coming rejection of the Ten Tribes is as final as divorce, a concept which they were very familiar with.

Yahweh waited from 1446 to 605 BC before He finally ‘divorced’ (in the metaphorical sense) His wife, Aholah. But it was a Covenant, not a marriage, that He terminated, because the Mosaic Covenant was a conditional Covenant.

Neither Ezekiel nor Jeremiah went beyond the language of metaphor, because only in a parable or simile can God and Israel be viewed as ‘married.’ In reality, no marriage relationship existed. Similarly, in reality no ‘divorce’ existed except in a parable or simile. It is not beyond God to use the sub-human, degenerate state that marriage had descended into, in the Exilic period, for Him to latch onto that debased level and use it as a metaphor, to bring it home to them that ‘divorce’ (on their understanding of that word) is on the cards for them unless they repent immediately. No one can outdo God to find the best means of communicating His mind, and I find the ‘divorce’ metaphor very appropriate under the circumstances.

The idea that divorce is an immoral thing to do has been strongly condemned by those who have attributed the necessity of divorce to Jesus. The fact that Yahweh divorced the Ten Tribes is seen as proof that it cannot be an immoral act. These supporters are going beyond the metaphor to establish divorce as a moral act. Divorce on the ground is always a sinful action because it negates God’s will for every marriage. God can break His Covenant relationship with Israel on the strength of its conditionality which He spelt out clearly to them. He is not breaking any ‘marriage’ vow which He gave to them promising to stay in a permanent ‘one flesh’ relationship with Israel; because such a relationship never existed on the ground.

The Covenant was broken by Israel, so God drew upon their own evil practice of divorcing their wives, to say, ‘This is how I am now going to break my Covenant relationship with you.’ It is a perfectly valid use of something that they could immediately appreciate, without validating the practice as such. Thieves existed, and God can use the metaphor of a thief to convey one aspect of a thief about a proposed action He planned to take, but because He used the thief-metaphor does not mean He approves of thieves, or that He is a thief, any more than He approves of Moses’s consolidation of the institution of divorce for hard-hearted husbands.

God hates divorce as much as He hates theft. Both actions are inherently immoral. But God, being God, can use any metaphor He likes to convey His meaning in the clearest manner possible. God used the witch of Endor to speak to Saul. But God commanded Saul to exterminate all witches. He is sovereign in all His ways. He uses what He condemned to extermination. But we are not to conclude from this incident that because God used witches to mediate His will, then witches should be incorporated into the Church as another office, to stand alongside women deaconesses.

In reading the Old Testament prophets and their use of terminology relating to marriage there is the danger, which many fall into, of using a simile to establish a biblical institution for divorce. God can take up any simile or metaphor to describe His feelings or His relationship, and apply it to Himself and to Israel. He describes Himself as a shepherd, so why not a husband?

Now no marriage ever took place between God and Israel, so there was no permanent, one-flesh union established between the two. Rather, the reality was a conditional Covenant which was entered into between God and His people. There were only Covenant vows to be broken. There were no marriage vows to be broken. The relationship was conditional on Israel keeping the terms of that Covenant. A marriage is not conditional.

Israel did not keep the terms of the Covenant, therefore, to use a metaphor they could understand, Yahweh ‘divorced’ them. But the use of ‘divorce’ does not mean there was a ‘marriage.’ I can use ‘divorce’ in the sentence, ‘I would not like to be divorced from my car,’ but it does not imply that I went through a marriage ceremony with my car! I am using ‘divorce’ as a striking metaphor. And when I scrap my car, I can talk of ‘divorcing’ it, meaning I am well and truly parted from it.

A nun might say, ‘I am married to the Church.’ We know exactly what she means to convey when she uses that simile. But it would stupid to infer that she went through a marriage ceremony!
In this sense Yahweh ‘divorced’ Israel, even though they were never married. The metaphor aptly conveys precisely what Yahweh wanted it to convey between Him and the Ten Tribes. Judah was still ‘married’ to Him. Again, the metaphor conveys the love-relationship that Yahweh wished for between Himself and His people. But it would be wrong to take the metaphor literally. Yahweh sometimes describes Himself as a thief, or an eagle, a lion, a rock, etc. Yahweh was not literally married to two sisters (Aholah and Aholibamah), was He?

Note the use of the marriage metaphor to show up the heinousness of worshipping foreign gods in Malachi 2:10-16. Being unfaithful to God is like being unfaithful in a marriage relationship. The metaphor increases and deepens our understanding. We should not confuse the metaphor with the reality on the ground, which was a Covenant relationship, not a marriage relationship.

5.10. VOCABULARY RELATING TO DIVORCE

Section 6.2. has been specifically devoted to the meaning of παρεκτός meaning ‘discounting, apart from, not including,’ and ἐξ μη meaning ‘except.’

THIS CHAPTER IS IN PROCESS OF COMPLETION
PART 6. JESUS ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

6.1. HOW SHOULD THE DIVORCE TEXTS BE TRANSLATED?

The following texts are a translation of the Majority Greek text based on the author’s unpublished Greek-English Harmony of the four Gospels. Words in italics are needed in English to bring out the meaning of the Greek. Where an explanation is required even after supplying words in italics, to avoid misunderstanding, footnotes are used. Words in italics have no direct Greek behind them, but they are required for translation into understandable English.

6.1.1. Luke 16:18 (Jesus’ absolutist position)

Luke 16:18 reads: “Every husband divorcing his wife, and marrying another woman, commits adultery. And every man marrying a divorced wife, he commits adultery.”

This stark statement leaves no wriggle room to avoid the evil consequences of attempting to dissolve what only death can dissolve.

There can be no doubt about the mind of the Lord Jesus on the issue of divorce, namely, there are no grounds whatsoever to divorce a wife or a husband. God handed over to His Son the governance of all men on the earth. All men are now under an obligation to listen to, and obey the new teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ on divorce and remarriage, and apply it to their lives. Jesus’ teaching, abolishing the man-made institution of divorce for all time to come, is the new standard of righteousness that is required of all men everywhere if they are to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ teaching on divorce is a fully integrated element of what constitutes the Gospel. A Gospel missing His teaching on divorce is another gospel, and a false gospel.

Test every man’s claim to be a Christian and a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus by his endorsement, or otherwise, of Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce, and, following Paul’s example, apply 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 to the situation if required.

6.1.2. Matthew 5:31-32 (the exemption refers to culpability, not to a cause for divorce)

There is no dispute between the majority Byzantine Greek text and the minority Egyptian Greek text for this verse. Because Jesus has the evil consequences of divorce uppermost in His mind, the Greek can be translated as follows:

“No it was said, ‘Who, say’ may have divorced his wife, let him give to her a departure document.’ But I—I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife he makes her to become adulterous—apart from a matter of fornication [by her].” And who if, say, may have married a divorced wife he becomes adulterous [by marrying her].

The crucial verb here is ‘makes’ or forces, or compels, the divorced wife to commit adultery. The exemption goes with the verb ‘makes’ and not with the verb ‘divorces.’ Never had a rabbi in the whole course of Israel’s divorce history made this connection between divorce and committing adultery. This was a totally preposterous idea. The rabbinical ‘roll of divorce’ specifically stated that the divorced woman was free to marry whoever she wished, without the slightest hint that she was

172 Luke states Jesus’ teaching using the indicative mood, His text reads: “all (=collectively/sg masc)—the man putting away (pres act ptc) his woman, and marrying a different—woman—he commits adultery against her ‘against’ his first wife; cf. Mark 10:11). And all (=collectively/sg masc)—the man marrying her having been previously put away (perf pass ptc acc fem sg) from a man—he commits adultery with her (i.e., with another man’s wife).” See also under Appx. B.

173 The small Greek particle ἐν (en) means, ‘suppose,’ ‘let us say,’ ‘for example,’ ‘for instance.’ It introduces a hypothetical situation when used with the subjunctive mood, especially for teaching/didactic purposes.

174 Jesus puts the responsibility on the husband for what happens to a man’s wife after he divorces her. The exemption from blame is when she commits fornication before her husband divorces her. Alternatively, the exemption to his responsibility/culpability is when his divorced wife does not remarry but commits fornication (e.g., prostitution to make a living). She knows that this is an unlawful state, hence she becomes responsible for her own fornication. But if she remarries, thinking that she has been truly set free from her husband, by her husband, then her second marriage is an adulterous relationship, because in God’s eyes she is still the wife of her first husband, because man cannot divorce what He has united in one flesh. Jesus puts the blame for her adultery on her first husband.

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committing adultery if she remarried. Jesus said the exact opposite, thereby declaring the rabbinical and Mosaic permission to be unlawful.

Once again we have Jesus using His authoritative style, ‘but I—I say to you,’ to demolish an edifice that had stood for 1,500 years. To tell half the male population of His country that they would be held responsible for forcing their wives into committing adultery through their second marriages was certain to lead to His death, but Jesus didn’t care for the consequences. He told the truth.

An amplified version would read:

“But I—I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife—discounting an act of fornication [by her]—forces her to commit adultery [through a remarriage]. And who, for instance, may have married a divorced wife he becomes adulterous [by marrying her].”

Here the Greek particle παρεκτός is given its meaning of ‘discounting, apart from, not including’ (see 5.10).

An expanded paraphrase would read, “But I—I say to you, that who, for instance, divorced his faithful wife over a non-fornication issue, he is responsible for forcing her to commit adultery through a remarriage. And who, for instance, married any woman who has been divorced commits adultery against her.”

Jesus is not creating a lawful cause to divorce a wife. He is creating a lawful case to be exempt from the blame of her losing her clean status. This lawful case is independent of the last statement, which states that any marriage with a divorced person, male or female, is an adulterous relationship. This new law is not open to a single exception. No class is exempt from its reach. It reaches from the throne to the shanty-shack.

All remarriages after the death of a spouse are lawful.
All remarriages after the divorce of a spouse are unlawful.

On these two statements hang the entirety of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage.

There can be no doubt about the mind of the Lord Jesus over the man who divorces his wife for a non-fornication (non-capital punishment) reason. The Lord will hold him responsible if his wife sleeps with another man, because, by divorcing her, he forces her into a second marriage, and forces her to commit fornication/adultery against himself.

Being an astute lawyer in His own right, Jesus exempts the husband if his wife commits fornication/adultery while still married to him. She will be held responsible for committing fornication/adultery (cf. Ecclus 23:23) while she was still married to him, not her husband, and that is only fair. This is the only exemption that Jesus is referring to in Matthew 5:32. The exemption refers to culpability. It is not an exemption from Jesus’ total ban on all divorces.

It is not uncommon to find ignorance among commentators over what the exemption in Matthew 5:32 refers to, and this applies increasingly to so-called evangelical writers, who regard Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 as referring to the same thing, namely, an exception to divorce on the grounds of infidelity.

This ignorance is generally found in those pro-divorce writers who are determined to make Jesus a teacher of divorce, and who take Christians back to Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 21 for their understanding of how the born again Christian should regard the bond of marriage. This ‘back to Moses’ drive among evangelicals can only lead to a rabbinic-Christianity, which is not the pure, unadulterated Gospel that Paul preached. We might paraphrase Paul in his warning, ‘cleanse out, therefore, the old leaven of Moses’ teaching, that you may be a new lump, according as you are unleavened, . . . so that we may keep the doctrine, not mixed with the old leaven of Moses’ teaching, . . . but with the unleavened food of sincerity and truth’ (1 Cor 5:7-8). Any attempt to mix the commands of Moses with the commands of Christ, is like mixing leaven in the dough and expecting unleavened bread to emerge from the oven. The Elect need to be on their guard not to import the leaven of Old Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage into the life of Christ’s Church, otherwise they will destroy the unleavened teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels is fully sufficient, in and of itself, to understand His revolutionary new teaching on marriage, without any recourse to the Old Testament writings, which were written for a different dispensation, and without any recourse to rabbinic folklore which was not written down until centuries after Christ established His Church on earth.

Moses is dead, long live the Lord Jesus!
Moses is dead. Hallelujah!
Let us keep it that way in doctrine and practice! Let none of his sub-standards be resurrected and imposed on the Elect of God. Moses has been resurrected again (Moses redivivus) by all those so-called evangelicals who, out of ignorance of the supernatural nature of new birth, put Moses’ teaching into the mouth of the Lord Jesus, and mislead the Elect. The standard Moses settled for belongs to the old man. Paul urges the Elect to put to death the old man, and to be renewed in true knowledge and in the image of the Lord Jesus (not in the image of Moses) (cf. Col 3:10), and allow the true life of Christ to manifest itself through their lives.

Jesus fulfilled the Law during His lifetime and when He called out on the cross, ‘It is finished,’ this applied to the practice of divorce as much as to all the other institutions that constituted the sub-standard Mosaic religion.

Divorce died on the cross, along with our old man. All Christians identify themselves with the resurrection of Christ, for they rise with Christ’s new nature resident within them, and they have renounced and cast off their past manner of life. But that past manner of life will continue in the life of all who do not love the Lord Jesus, and for this unregenerate class of human beings, divorce will continue to form part and parcel of their sub-standard existence, walking in darkness, and governed by the will of Satan.

Once it is realised that Jesus is sitting in judgment on anyone who divorces his wife then this should put the spotlight on culpability, not on looking to see if Jesus’ words can be manipulated to get an excuse to divorce one’s wife. Jesus is issuing a dire warning of eternal damnation to anyone who divorces his wife. When the whole verse is put in this setting, then the exemption clause makes sense, but only if it is an exemption from blame. It would detract from this focus if Jesus is trying to cover two topics at the same time. If this is the case, then in the one He puts the blame for a divorced wife’s adultery fully and squarely on the husband who divorced her; and at the same time He is creating a loophole to get a just divorce from another kind of wife. The greatest clarity comes when we view Jesus as taking a typical couple. The focus is on a single man. That man is responsible for his wife’s sexual fidelity toward him. Jesus informs him that if he divorces his wife, all of her subsequent adultery is still his responsibility, not counting the case where she did not remarry, but lived the life of a prostitute. When one husband, and one wife are the twin subjects of all that Jesus says on who is to blame for what in a post-divorce situation in Matthew 5:32, then all the pieces fall easily into place.

It is sometimes overlooked in the debate that Jesus has a word of comfort for divorced wives. They will have heard that the rabbi from Galilee abolished divorce on any grounds, and that all remarriages are adulterous affairs. These divorced and remarried wives, thinking they had done the right thing in remarrying, would have been made to feel guilty, and believe that they are guilty of the death penalty. What a comfort it would have been for these wives to realise that God would not hold them responsible for their post-divorce remarriages, that God would transfer their sin to their husbands, who divorced them, and they would not be condemned for their adultery in marrying again. Jesus would be seen to be a just judge, and to know that He had exempted them from the sin of their remarriage would have been a huge relief to half the population of Israel.

The shift of blame was, indeed, a new thing in the earth, but now that Jesus had revealed the new standard of morality that all men and women will be judged by on the Day of Judgment, it is now for all husbands and wives to think very carefully about using Satan’s divorce courts to try to dissolve the indissoluble. The one who initiates the divorce, husband or wife, against the express wish of the other, will be the one to bear the brunt of God’s wrath on the Day of Judgment. That is a sobering thought, and that was Jesus’ intended purpose.

Jesus is presenting the divorcer with the strongest possible disincentive to divorce. The exemption from blame is where the divorced wife does not remarry but commits fornication after she has been divorced. In other words, she has taken the decision to live an immoral life, which she knows to be wrong. She is comparable to Yahweh’s two wives in Ezekiel 16 and 23, who are said to commit fornication, while still married to Him. In this case, the Judge—the Lord Jesus Christ—on the Judgment Day will not blame her husband for the deliberate prostitution of herself. And if the divorced wife immediately entered into a life of prostitution, then he will not have caused her to commit adultery, so he will not be charged with her post-divorce sexual activity. This is captured in Jesus’ use of the word parektos, ‘apart from/besides/not counting.’ This word is not the same as ‘except.’ (See §5.10)

6.1.2.1. Are incestuous marriages the target of the exception clauses?

When the Betrothal interpretation was found wanting among conservative-evangelical scholars, the focus shifted to incestuous marriages as the target for Jesus’ so-called exceptive clauses in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Because the term porneia has such a wide base it was not hard to find cases where it referred to incestuous marriages or sexual unions. It is proposed that both exception
views are interpreting Matthew’s ‘except for fornication’ to refer to marriages within the prohibited degrees of marriage as set out in Leviticus 18:6-18. The phrase used repeatedly in this passage, ‘to uncover the nakedness of,’ is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse (Deut 22:30), and presumably refers to marriage (Lev 18:18). In order to safeguard Jesus’ teaching of no divorce and no remarriage, and rule out any real exceptions, the new explanation of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 states that Christ’s abolition of divorce does not apply in the case of an illegal, incestuous marriage, which should never have been allowed to progress to consummation. On this new insight, Jesus permits divorce in the exceptional situation where a marriage has taken place within the prohibited degrees of marriage.

Support for this view is said to come from (1) the lexical meaning of porneia which can refer to incest (1 Cor 5:1). (2) Jewish literature, in the shape of the Dead Sea Scrolls,175 appears to use z’nīṯ, which is most often translated by porneia in the LXX (see LXX Jer 3:2, 9), to refer to incest in the Testament of Judah 13:6; and the Testament of Reuben 1:6. (3) The Jewish context is firm in that the exeptive clauses are only found in Matthew’s Gospel, written by and for the Jews. The readers would link the exceptions to cases of incest. (4) The historical background was probably the incestuous marriage of the Herods—Archelaus, Antipas, and Agrippa II, as reported by Josephus (Antiq. 18. 109-119 [5.4.]; 20. 145-147; Wars 2. 114-116). Herod Antipas married his niece, the former wife of his brother. Archelaus (4 BC–AD 6) divorced his wife and married Glaphyra, the former wife of his half brother, Alexander. Herod Agrippa II (AD 50-100) was reputedly involved in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Berniece.

Jesus was in the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas when He was ‘ambushed’ by the Pharisees’ leading question, hoping that Herod would arrest Jesus for condemning his marriage. (5) Lastly, the immediate context is said to support the specialised use of porneia to indicate incestuous marriages, because God’s plan for every lawful marriage does not include the possibility of divorce, except in the case of unlawful marriages, which should never have taken place in the first place. This narrow view of porneia would also explain the incredulous reaction of the disciples. Had Jesus permitted divorce for fornication, His teaching would not have risen above that of rabbi Shammai, and would not have provoked such a response.

This alternative to the Betrothal view has all the marks of being contrived and forced, and begs the question many times. In a nutshell, the solution states that while porneia is used in a broad sense in the New Testament, the requirements of the context indicate that Jesus must have been using the term ‘fornication’ in a specialised sense to refer exclusively to incestuous marriages. Matthew 19:9 must now be translated as: “But I— I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife—not for incestuous marriages—forces her to commit adultery [through a remarriage]. And who, for instance, may have married a divorced wife he becomes adulterous [by marrying her].”

One can appreciate that conservative-evangelical scholars will stop at nothing until they arrive at a solution that protects Jesus’ ‘no divorce and no remarriage’ teaching at all costs. Almost any interpretation will do so long as the end result that they desperately need is guaranteed. The incestuous marriage solution was born out of the necessity to ensure that Matthew 19:9 must refer to some invalid marriage since there cannot be an exception to permit divorce for a lawful marriage. It is this last point that is behind the search to find other invalid marriages that will safeguard Jesus’ core doctrine of no divorce and no remarriage.

The most decisive objection to the incestuous-marriage solution is that these unions are an abomination in God’s sight, and therefore they come under the same condemnation that the Ezra 9 & 10 unions come under, namely, they must be annulled, not divorced. Consequently, the exception to divorce is not an exception, and so the case collapses.

Since incestuous marriages were as common among Romans and Greeks, why were the exception clauses omitted in Mark and Luke?

6.1.3. Matthew 19:3-12 (a reminder/remainder phrase)

Jesus was asked a very pertinent question; pertinent because it was a question of law. His enemies set out to tempt Him to say something that would trap Him,176 and Jesus gave them the


176 See J. Carl Laney’s contribution in H. Wayne House (ed.), Divorce & Remarriage: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, ENG: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), pp. 31-32, who suggests that the Pharisees may have wanted to lure Jesus into condemning the marriage of Herod Antipas to his brother’s wife (also Antipas’s niece), which was an incestuous marriage (cf. Lev 18:16; 20:12). John the Baptist’s condemnation cost him his life.
opportunity they were looking for. Some weeks or months earlier, Jesus had said, “Everyone divorcing his wife and marrying another commits adultery; and everyone marrying one divorced from a husband commits adultery” (Lk 16:18).\(^{177}\) This was said to the Jewish nation. It did not contain any exceptions for a lawful divorce. He stated His teaching in its starkest terms.

Word of this outrageous new teaching was, no doubt, quickly conveyed to Jesus’ enemies, who had, on eight different occasions, tried to kill him.\(^{178}\) As His new teaching stood, it clearly made a fool of Moses, who had given them permission to write out a bill of divorce for any cause they chose to nominate, provided it did not clash with Moses’s other laws.

The stage was set to trap Jesus over His distinctive teaching on divorce. Here is the biblical record of what Jesus said (my ET) on that occasion.

Matthew 19:3-12 reads: “And the Pharisees came near to him, tempting him, and saying to him if\(^{179}\) it is lawful for a husband to divorce his wife for every accusation. 4 But he, having given answer, said to them, ‘Did you not read, that at the beginning the One having made them, a male and a female he made them? 5 And God said, On account of this a man shall leave behind father and mother, and he shall be fused to his wife, and they shall be—the two—for one flesh? 6 So that no longer are they two flesh, but rather, one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together, let man not put asunder.'\(^{180}\) 7 They say to him, ‘Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a scroll of departure, and to divorce her?'\(^{181}\) 8 He says to them, ‘Moses, on account of your hard-heartedness, permitted you to divorce your wives, but it did not exist like this from the beginning. 9 Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.’

10 His disciples say to him, ‘If it is like this—namely, the case of the husband with the wife—it is not advantageous to marry.’\(^{11}\) But he—he said to them, ‘Not all men do receive this word, but to whom it has already been given. 12 For they are eunuchs, which out of a mother’s womb were born like this; and they are eunuchs, which were made eunuchs by men; and they are eunuchs, which eunuched themselves on account of the reign of the heavens. The one being able to receive it—let him receive it.’\(^{182}\)

It is important to note that the Pharisees had turned the setting into a court of law. They were the prosecutors. Jesus was in the dock. He was asked His position on a question of law: Was it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife for every accusation? The expected answer was, ‘Yes, it is lawful to divorce because no less a person than Moses commanded us to write out a bill of divorce when doing so.’ What they got was a comprehensive ‘No, it is not lawful to divorce your wives for any reason.’ Jesus, a supreme lawyer in His own right, gave a lawyer’s reply. He said, ‘I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not over fornication—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.’

In His skilfully crafted reply Jesus conveyed two messages to the Jewish lawyers. There was a negative aspect, and a positive aspect in His carefully crafted reply. He told them what sins they could not get a divorce for (a reminder); and He told them what sins they were currently getting a divorce for (the remainder). And all of this was conveyed in just three words, ‘not over fornication.’

\(^{177}\) Luke’s Sermon on the Plain (Lk 9:51-18:14) preceded Jesus’ journey up to Jerusalem.

\(^{178}\) Mt 26: 4 (= Mk 14:1 = Lk 22:1); Mt 12:14 (= Mk 3:6); Lk 4:29; Jn 5:16; 7:19; 8:59; 10:31; 11:53. Cf. Mt 2:16 (King Herod).

\(^{179}\) The Pharisees’ question is not recorded, only the report, or content, of their question is given. The same applies at Mark 10:2.

\(^{180}\) Man can ‘separate’ but he cannot ‘dissolve.’ Jesus was fully aware of this truth, hence He chose to use the verb χωρίζω and not δισολέω to deny man what was within his capacity to achieve. It was not within his capacity to ‘dissolve’ what God had achieved.

\(^{181}\) The implication behind their question is that if Moses did not explicitly condemn divorce, but actually regulated it, then it could not be unlawful.

\(^{182}\) Jesus’ comment relates to the expostulation of the disciples, and not to His teaching on divorce. See Joseph A. Webb, Till Death Do Us Part? (Webb Ministries Inc.: Longwood, Florida, 2003 [1983]), pp. 230-32. Others suggest that the one who ‘makes himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom’ is a divorced person who chooses the single life, not remarriage, for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom; see J. Carl Laney’s contribution in H. Wayne House (ed.), Divorce & Remarriage: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, ENG.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), p. 38.
These three words were a reminder to the lawyers that Moses had left them a law which forbade them getting a divorce for adultery and fornication (which would have included all deviant sexual behaviour). As lawyers, they would have had to agree with Jesus that He was right. So Jesus got through that round easily. They could not find fault with Him over His stand against divorce for fornication. But what about the other causes—the remainder, the non-fornication sins?

Jesus had already, and cleverly, given His answer to the ‘remainder’ of the causes by presenting the lawyers with a hypothetical situation, “Suppose,” began Jesus, “a husband may have divorced his wife—not over fornication—and may have married another woman, . . . .” The fact that Jesus reminded them that the Law did not give them permission to divorce for fornication, automatically meant that His hypothetical husband must have got his divorce for a non-fornication charge. And it is these—what is left over when you subtract the sin of fornication, that Jesus then goes on to reject as grounds for divorce.

By using the simple negative, ‘not over fornication,’ Jesus identified the positive grounds that His lawyers had been using to obtain their divorces. By a simple, arithmetical sum, Jesus identified the ‘remainder’ causes, which had to be non-sexual in nature. This was an astute way to identify the hundreds of non-fornication causes that the Jews had been using to get a divorce. By using the ‘remainder’ device He did not have to give a long list of non-fornication ‘accusations’ (πᾶσαν οἶτιναν). The use of a reminder/remainder clause that brought together in a single phrase all that Jesus wanted to convey in the fewest possible words is truly astonishing when it is unpacked.

The ‘reminder’ ruled out divorce for all sins of an unlawful sexual nature committed by married persons, and the ‘remainder’ ruled out divorce for all non-fornication faults committed by married persons. Taken together, this left the lawyers with no foundation in law to obtain a divorce on any grounds. We can now unpack the reminder/remainder aspects of what Jesus condensed into three words, by separating them out, and giving each of them a separate translation.

The ‘reminder clause’: “not he may divorce for fornication”

The traditional or Erasmian translation of Matthew 19:9 reads as follows:

“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” Now if we supply the ellipsis of the omitted verb (in italic script) we get the full sense of the grammar, which now reads: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except he puts her away for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” Jesus, clearly, according to this translation, made an exception for fornication, and if fornication is a general term to embrace all deviant, unlawful sexual intercourse, then it includes adultery.

This is how Erasmus intended his new Greek text to be translated across Europe, and this is how he duped the Protestant Reformers to adopt his personal belief in divorce, and by putting his doctrine on the lips of Jesus Himself, he could be assured that it would be swallowed by the Reformers. It was a devious move on his part, but he succeeded, and today there are evangelical scholars who defend Erasmus and applaud his manipulation to bring back divorce for adultery into Christ’s Church.

However, once we have removed Erasmus’s addition of ἐν before μνὴ, the ‘reminder clause’ would translate 19:9 as: “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not over fornication—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

Now if we supply the ellipsis of the omitted verb (in italic script) we get the full sense of the grammar, “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not he may have divorced over fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

Jesus reminds the Pharisees what the law is regarding God’s death penalty for fornication (Deut 22:20-21; Lev 20:10). The term fornication will cover all of the following (1) death for adultery (Exod 20:14; Lev 20:10), (2) death for incest; a man lying with his father’s wife; (3) death for incest; a man lying with his daughter-in-law (Lev 18:8, 15; 20:11; Deut 22:30); (4) death for incest; where a man marries a daughter and her mother at the same time (Lev 18:17; 20:14); (5) death for incest; if a man takes his father’s daughter, or his mother’s daughter (Lev 18:9; 20:17); (6) death for incest; if a man uncover’s his aunt’s nakedness (Lev 18:12-14; 20:19); (7) death for incest; if a man sleeps with his uncle’s wife (Lev 20:20); death for incest; if a man takes his brother’s wife (while his brother is still
alive)(Lev 20:21). This was Herod Antipas’s sin, (8) intercourse with one’s wife when she is in a menstruous condition (Lev 18:19; 20:18); (9) death for bestiality; where a man or a woman lies with an animal (Exod 22:19; Lev 20:15-16); (10) death for homosexuality; when a man lies with a man as he lies with a woman (Lev 18:22; 20:13).

There are some disgusting, deviant, sexual perversions that married persons can and do indulge in. If they were lawfully married and one partner descends to this disgusting level, while the other partner becomes a Christian, this is no grounds for a divorce in Jesus’ Kingdom. Separation (or temporary ‘divorce,’ as some Early Church Fathers regarded it), to avoid AIDS, or other sexually transmitted diseases, may be the only way to preserve one’s life for the service of Christ, but divorce (the dissolution of the marriage bond) is never an option, under any circumstances.

The ‘remainder clause’: “not over fornication but over some other cause”

The ‘remainder clause’ would read: “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not over fornication but over some other cause—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

The solution to the content-identity clause in Matthew 19:9 is a case of simple subtraction. God had stipulated that men cannot divorce their wives ‘for fornication’; but He did not positively stipulate that they could divorce their wives ‘for non-fornication’ issues, and this is precisely what they had been doing for the past 1,500 years and more. The phrase Jesus used, ‘not over fornication,’ was His way of saying, “excluding fornication, because those sins are not lawful to obtain a divorce, but if you get a divorce apart from that category, I am now telling you that all such divorces are unlawful.”

The rabbinical teaching at the time gave the Jews permission to divorce their wives for non-fornication offences. Along came the prophet from Galilee and He abolished all these non-fornication causes, on His own authority, and declared all of these causes to be unlawful in the eyes of God. This was asking for trouble, because He was accusing every man in Israel who got a divorce over a non-fornication issue (which was the only way that Moses permitted them to get a divorce), and who had remarried, to be living in an adulterous, second marriage. One can imagine the consternation created in the minds of the male population of the land. Not only that, but all the virgins and divorced women who had married these divorced husbands were now deemed to be committing adultery.

Every effort, one would imagine, would have been made to question Jesus again and again as He went about Judea, Galilee and Samaria, to ascertain the certainty of His position over their remarriages. He could not have been a very popular figure. He was too revolutionary; too extreme; too hard; too upsetting; too uncomfortable to be around with, but most of all, too anti-establishment. He had no hope of being elected to the Sanhedrin.

Jesus was a realist, and He knew that the crowds that followed Him did so only to get what they wanted out of Him, which was physical healing, not spiritual healing. Without His phenomenal powers to heal every disease and to heal every single individual who came to Him, He would have been totally ignored. It was through these powers that He could get the attention of the crowds and become a popular figure in His generation, but later on, the same crowds bayed for His blood because He upset the religious establishment.

The apostles fully understood the unlimited range of non-capital causes encapsulated in the phrase ‘not over fornication,’ that from their day onwards the Apostolic and Early Church never endorsed divorce, or agreed to the dissolution of any lawful marriage. They agreed with the

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183 The son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, had an affair with his half-brother Philip’s wife, Herodias. Together, Herod (married to the daughter of the king of Petra) and Herodias (married to Philip) divorced their covenant partners in order to marry each other Josephus, Antiq. 18. 5.4.

184 For a fuller list of twenty commands relating to incest, see Finis Jennings Dake, Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible (Atlanta, Georgia: Dake Bible Sales [1961]), under Lev 18 (col. 4, c.)

185 The two groups of offences can be summed up as ‘for fornication’ (capital offences), and, ‘not over fornication’ (non-capital offences). Moses’ action in commanding hard-hearted, unforgiving, Hebrews to write out a bill of divorce, implicated him in endorsing divorces for non-fornication offences, but only for non-fornication offences. So if Moses did reluctantly give them the right to divorce their wives it could only have been for non-sexual causes. He was bound by the law to punish fornication with the death penalty, not divorce.
thirteenth apostle, Paul, that there could be separation without dissolution of the marriage bond, and that was as far as they were prepared to go. This set the Christian Church apart from every other religion in the world at that time.

Every effort is being made today, within evangelical circles, to pull the Church into line with the practices of all other religions of the world, and to lose its distinctive mark of genuineness, coming, as it does, from God the creator of all men. They want to avoid the image of being too revolutionary; too extreme; too hard; too upsetting; too uncomfortable to be around with, and prefer to be seen shaking hands with world leaders and posing for photographs with non-Christian religious leaders. For a teacher like Jesus, appeasement and compromise were paths that led away from the truth, not toward the truth.

It follows that if Jesus banned divorce for all non-capital offences, and God banned divorce for all capital offences, then this left the Pharisees with no grounds for divorce. He answered their question fully; ‘It is not lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause.’

They were stunned, as people are today, when they discover what exactly Jesus taught on divorce and remarriage. It was new doctrines, such as Jesus taught on the abolition of divorce, that cost Him His life in the end; and anyone who follows Him should expect the same persecution, and possibly the same premature end to their ministry. There is no teaching of Jesus that engenders greater hatred in a nominal Christian than to learn that his or her divorce was unlawful in the eyes of God, and that his or her second marriage is an adulterous relationship. The minister of religion who repeats Jesus’ teaching will very soon have no congregation, and no salary or pension to look forward to.

Lawyers questioned Jesus on a matter of Law: ‘Is it lawful . . . for every cause?’ Jesus, the lawyer, answered them according to the Law, and He could not have made it clearer when He stated that whoever used any non-capital offence to get a divorce, and married another woman, he was committing adultery, which was a capital offence in the eyes of God and the Lord Jesus. No wonder the Apostolic Church and the Early Church Fathers would have nothing to do with remarriages. Those who entered into a remarriage while their spouses were still alive were living in sin. The witness that the Early Church Fathers have left behind could not be clearer.

Conclusion

On a Jewish understanding of Matthew’s text, it comes as no surprise that Matthew does not, and never did, contain an exception clause, once we remove Erasmus’s addition of εἰ before μὴν, and recover the original wording of Matthew’s text. The truth is, that Matthew contains a phrase that was specifically designed to answer the question put by the Pharisees to Jesus, whether divorce could be had ‘for any cause.’ Jesus replied that divorce could not be had for any cause, and He cleverly used a reminder/remainder construction that ruled out divorce on any grounds, sexual or non-sexual, fornication or non-fornication, capital offences or non-capital offences.

Jesus abolished the entire Mosaic dispensation by fulfilling the demands of the Law on behalf of the entire population of the world, past, present and future. Those who lived under the Law did not have the Spirit of Christ living in them. They were expected to walk by faith and keep the commandments of God.

Jesus introduced an entirely new dispensation into the world, in the form of a new Kingdom of God, in which Jesus would raise human beings to a new level of existence, on a completely new plane of living. It is as if the Mosaic dispensation occupied the ground floor of a house, and the new Kingdom of God occupied the first floor. To leave the Mosaic world behind and to enter into this new Kingdom would require a ‘born again’ experience. This ‘born again’ experience is akin to being lifted to another floor in a house where Jesus lives, and to live with Him for ever. We are lifted up by Christ, out of the miry pit; we are raised with Christ

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136 This is the only solution that I am aware of that fully harmonises all of Jesus’ statements on divorce and remarriage. If Jews could get a divorce only for non-fornication issues, and Jesus takes away this category of causes, then this means they have no grounds for divorce. In Mark and Luke Jesus denies all non-Jewish nations the right to divorce their spouses. The abolition of divorce for any cause becomes a universal law of the Kingdom Jesus came to establish on the earth. Only those congregations and individuals who fully embrace Jesus’ teaching on divorce can enter the Kingdom of God.
There are nominal Christians who claim to have entered the Kingdom of God, but the fact that they have got a Jewish divorce, on Jewish/rabbinical terms, shows that they have had to descend to the ground floor to get it. And such a divorce is a sin against the Lord Jesus’ direct teaching on the subject. If they remain in their divorce, they will remain in their sins.

A greater than Moses entered the ground floor and overcame the Devil, the owner of that floor. Moses had left the Jews a command to obey the Prophet that the Lord God would raise up to them in the distant future. The distant future had arrived, bearing the Messiah they were to obey in place of Moses. The time for the great changeover had come, and every Jew was challenged to follow Moses or to follow Christ Jesus. Most preferred to go on following Moses in Jesus’ day, therefore their leaders killed their Messiah, and the majority of Jews today still prefer to be disciples of Moses. But they are not alone. Joining them are a vast horde of Jesus’ followers belonging to every Protestant denomination in every nation on the Earth, much to the glee and delight of Satan and his angels.

6.1.4. Mark 10:2-12 (Jesus’ absolutist position)

There is no major dispute between the majority Byzantine Greek text and the minority Egyptian Greek text for these verses. And Pharisees having come near, questioned him if it is lawful for a husband to divorce a wife, tempting him. But he, having given answer, said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ Now they—they said, ‘Moses permitted a scroll of departure to write, and to divorce her.’ And having given answer Jesus said to them, ‘On account of your hard-heartedness he wrote for you this command, but from the beginning of creation, a male and a female God made them. On account of this a man shall leave behind his father and mother, and he shall be fused unto his wife, and they shall be—the two—for one flesh. So that no longer are they two flesh, but rather one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together, let man not put asunder.’

And in the house his disciples questioned him again concerning the same thing. And he says to them, ‘Who if, for example, may have divorced his wife, and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And if, say, a wife may have divorced her husband, and she may have been married to another man, she becomes adulterous by marrying him.’

It is clear in the mind of the Lord Jesus that there are no circumstances under which a husband or a wife can divorce their spouse and believe that their one flesh union has been dissolved. In the mind of the Lord Jesus a marriage union locks the two persons in a permanent, life-long union that only death can unlock.

Given, on the one hand, the full-time commitment that such a union entails, and given, on the other hand, the full-time commitment that following the Lord Jesus entails, a man’s full-time commitment to the work of the Lord Jesus should take priority over marriage, which can only lessen his commitment to the Lord. But there may be a ‘burning’ for marriage that will mean that some sons of God will, by force of nature and a charisma, have to divide their attention between their wives and their Master, the Lord Jesus. The advantage to the Lord in this situation was not lost on some overzealous Christian teachers who, with good intentions, forbade Christians to marry, thinking that this would bring greater concentration on the missionary work entailed in the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world, in their own generation. But Paul saw this ban on marriage as an unwarranted imposition on the elect, and he rightly rejected it (1 Tim 4:3).

Conclusion

Sins of fornication, such as adultery, were seldom, if ever, punished with the death penalty in Roman and Greek society. There were always exceptions. Divorce could be had ‘for fornication,’ and also ‘not over fornication,’ as these cultures did not have any rigid or law-based distinction, such as governed the Hebrew people.

Consequently, when Mark wrote his Gospel for the Romans, and Luke wrote his Gospel for the Greeks, both of them recorded Jesus as abolishing divorce per se, with no exceptions of any kind, even if at times they did divorce for adultery.

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187 Man can ‘separate’ but he cannot ‘dissolve.’ Jesus was fully aware of this truth, hence He chose to use the verb χωρίζω and not ἀπολύω, to deny man what was within his capacity to achieve. It was not within his capacity to ‘dissolve’ what God had achieved.
However, in the case of Matthew, he wrote his Gospel for the Jews, who did observe a distinction between capital and non-capital offences when it came to marriage issues. Obviously, capital sins could not be commuted to some other punishment, such as divorce. This left only non-capital sins that could be the basis for divorce. Jesus called this basis a ‘not over fornication’ cause.

6.2. GREEK PAREKTOS AND GREEK EI MH ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE

At Matthew 5:32 parektos ‘apart from’ is used in situations where a statement of fact is qualified to allow one exception to a comprehensive positive total count (‘all but one’). We have two further uses of parektos in the New Testament. At Acts 26:29: “Paul said, ‘I would have wished to God, both in a little, and in much, not only you, but also all [= comprehensive positive] those hearing me to-day, to become such as I also am — apart from [parektos] these bonds.’” Paul wishes that all would become totally like him, apart from having his chains. This is his exclusion clause.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul gives a fairly comprehensive catalogue of all the physical dangers he faced in bringing the Gospel to others, and then concludes his list by declining to go into all the problems he faced in tending the many churches he founded, which he passes over with the sentence, “apart from [parektos] the things without — the crowding upon me that is daily — the care of all the assemblies.” Here ‘apart from’ has the meaning of ‘not counting.’ In other words, he is confident that there is no one who could match the physical dangers and beatings that he endured, so that there was no need for him to enumerate a further chapter of his care for all the churches, which, again, no one could match him for.

It is clear from this that in Greek parektos (‘apart from’), and ei mh (‘except’) are not interchangeable as their English forms are. Jesus is saying something completely different in 5:32 and 19:9, and this has been the problem from as early as Codex Vaticanus, which confused Jesus’ two distinct points. Jesus, the lawyer, makes a distinction between pre-divorce and post-divorce fornication. In 5:32 Jesus is saying that the husband who divorces his wife will be held responsible for all of her post-divorce fornication, except the sin of fornication which she committed while she was still in his house, and which was his justification for divorcing her. Jesus assumes that she will remarry, but her remarriage is a sinful state in the eyes of Jesus. There are no innocent parties if both divorcees remarry.

In Matthew 19:9, however, Erasmus turned a ‘content-identity phrase’ into an ‘exception clause,’ in that he printed ei μὴ ‘except’ in place of μὴ ‘not.’ Now ei μὴ, ‘except’ is used in situations where a statement of fact is qualified to allow one exception to a comprehensive negative. The exception is to a zero count (‘none but one’). Compare οὐδεὶς ἄγαθος ei μὴ εἰσ ὁ θεὸς, “No one is good [= comprehensive negative] except one—God” (Matthew 19:17; Luke 18:19; Mark 10:18). Matthew 11:27, “no one knows [= comprehensive negative] the Son except the Father.”

As a general rule, those writers who deny Jesus’ absolutist position, are unaware of the difference between the Greek words parektos (‘apart from’), and ei mh (‘except’), while those who defend Jesus’ absolutist position appreciate the theological differences between them. The former see no difference between the so-called ‘exception clauses’ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9; the latter see two distinct ideas, and two different types of ‘exceptions’ in the two places. The latter are much more careful in their exegesis of the text than the former, who tend to be slipshod and casual in their approach to God’s Word.

In Matthew 5:32, Jesus says, “But I— I say to you that, who, say, may have put away his wife—apart from (παρεκτῶς) the matter of fornication—makes her to be adulterous. And who if, say, may have married one having already been put away he is adulterous.” Here Jesus introduces an exemption-from-responsibility clause, not an exception-to-illegal-divorce clause.

The significance for Jesus’ audience lay in the verb ‘makes.’ To point the finger at any man and tell him that he is responsible for turning his wife into an adulteress is a very grave accusation. The accusation is, ‘whoever may have put away his wife makes her to be adulterous (if she marries again).’ Each man standing in front of Jesus is made to feel guilty for making his wife marry another man.

But Jesus notes an exemption, and the exemption is this. If the man’s wife had been adulterous before he divorced her, then he did not push her into the first act of adultery, she went that way herself. In effect Jesus was saying, By divorcing your wives you have forced her to become adulterous, apart from (= parektos) those wives who made themselves adulterous while still married to you. You are not responsible for their pre-divorce adultery, but only in these special circumstances. But if she was a sexually faithful wife and you pushed her out, then you are responsible for all her
adulteries after she has left you. She will not be held responsible—you will.

That is the significance of the word \textit{παρεκτός} (\textit{parektos}). It means, ‘if we leave aside for the moment the case of adultery within the marriage.’ The exemption clause was there to exempt those husbands who had divorced their wives for committing adultery while still married to them. But that does not mean that they were correct to divorce their wives for adultery in the first place, because God decreed that such wives were to be killed, as there was no divorce for adultery under the Mosaic Law.

Grammatically, it is worth noting that MH ‘not’ does not mean ‘except’ in Greek, and ‘except’ shifts the focus on to Jesus, whereas ‘not’ shifts it to the husband. When Jesus said, ‘not over fornication,’ He was identifying the causes the Jewish husbands were using to obtain their divorces. If He had said, ‘except for fornication,’ He would have been identifying the grounds on which \textit{He} was prepared to allow divorce to occur.

6.3. OBSERVATIONS ON THE DIVORCE TEXTS

It is significant that when Jesus states His own teaching free from any context, He never qualifies His absolute ban on divorce. In private, with His twelve Apostles, He is consistent in denying any validity to any divorce. He stated in Luke: “Every husband divorcing his wife, and marrying another woman, commits adultery.” He stated the same in Mark: “Who if, for example, may have divorced his wife, and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.” But then, lest someone should wonder if the same applies to a wife divorcing her husband, Jesus addresses that possibility directly in Mark, when He added: “And if, say, a wife may have divorced her husband, and she may have been married to another man, she becomes adulterous by marrying him.” So there is no loophole in His teaching. Whether the wife divorces her husband, or the husband divorces his wife, is immaterial: both are committing adultery if they remarry.

But another loophole opens up. The manner in which Jesus states His teaching might suggest that it is the person who initiates the divorce, and who remarries, who is the adulterer. So what is the status of the one who has been the victim of the divorce? Is the victim free to remarry? Jesus closed off that possible loophole by stating in Luke: “And every man marrying a divorced wife, he commits adultery,” and in Matthew: “And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.” So if an unmarried man innocently marries a divorced woman, he is an adulterer in Jesus’ eyes, because the woman he has married is still the wife of another man. Jesus does not recognise the validity of the husband’s Mosaic divorce. Similarly, if a virgin marries a divorced man she is an adulteress in Jesus’ eyes, because the man she has married is still the husband of another woman.

According to some the Romans took away the traditional right of the Sanhedrin to apply the death penalty for adultery, among other capital offences, so that this left the Jews unable, and disabled, to enforce the death penalty for any sin that God required the death penalty for.\footnote{John Ignatius Döllinger, \textit{The First Age of Christianity and the Church}, translated from the German by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (1st ed; London: Allen, 1866), see Appendix II. “The Right of the Sanhedrin over Life and Death” (pp. 304-09). It is thought by many that Jn 18:31 implies that the Roman government had deprived the Sanhedrin of the power of life and death. Josephus says that the Sanhedrin could not hold a court without the Roman Procurator’s consent (Jos. Arch. xx. 9, 1). The Talmud notes that forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem (in AD 70), Israel lost the power of life and death. Against this, it would be strange if Pilate, in telling the Jews to judge Christ themselves, publicly insulted the rulers, if they knew that they could not do what he told them to do. Döllinger points to the Romans allowing subjected people to live by their own laws (p. 305), and Josephus makes the high priest, Ananus, and Titus himself declare that the Romans had confirmed and secured to the Jews the free use of their laws; even after war broke out Titus offered to the Jews autonomy, if they would submit, which, they, therefore, clearly had not lost (Jos. Arch. xvi. 9, 4; Cf. 13, 1. Bell. Jud. vi. 6, 2; 3,5). Döllinger claims that all Jewish writing of that date speak of ‘autonomy’ as the thing to strive for and retain.} This was to fulfil Jesus’ own prophecy of the manner of His death, which was decreed to be by crucifixion. To be deprived of the ability to obey God’s commands was surely an indictment of the ruling class—the high priesthood—by God Himself.

Jesus was well aware that God had not granted the Jews the option to divorce their wives for adultery/fornication, so that sexual offences by females (married and unmarried) could never be commuted to divorce without direct authority from God, and no such right was ever granted to the Jews by God. So, \textit{to commute the death penalty to divorce was unlawful in the eyes of God}. Consequently
when Jesus referred to the upper limits of the causes the Jews were traditionally using to divorce their wives, from the time they came out of Egypt to the day Jesus spoke, these limits embraced every possible cause, from the most trivial cause, going right up the most heinous crime of fornication (which embraced adultery), but not including that offence, which had to be punished by death, Jesus’ statement in effect covered every conceivable cause that a Jew might nominate to be a ‘cause’ for divorce, and He condemned all divorces based on any cause that they traditionally used to get rid of their wives.

Up until the time that the Romans took away the Jews’ right to live according to the laws of God, they were under a strict obligation not to divorce for fornication. That particular sin, and the judgment God imposed on it, was not up for discussion. Divorce for fornication was never an option. So, when Jesus said, ‘not over fornication,’ He used it as the limit up to which the Jews had been traditionally able to get a divorce for non-fornication causes. And it was the current practice, without explicitly breaking any law of God (for divorce per se was not outlawed by God), that Jesus now condemned and abolished it in His new kingdom, the Church.

Jesus, in effect was saying, that any man who got a divorce for any cause up to the most heinous of all deserving causes, namely, fornication, which was to be punished by death, did so unlawfully. So the practice of the Hebrew/Jews from the time they multiplied in Egypt until Jesus’ day was tolerated by God as an evil manifestation of unregenerated men. God did not forcibly prevent the evil of divorce from being part and parcel of the evil condition that Adam’s sin had brought into being in the lives of all men toward their wives.

So Jesus’ use of ‘not over fornication’ (or, ‘not over fornication’) meant that He had in mind all the other causes that the Jews had been traditionally employing to get a divorce right up to the crime of fornication, and He condemned all these other causes. It was as comprehensive a way of referring to all causes as He could encompass in the minimum of words. It was lawful for the Jews to apply the death penalty for all capital offences, including all sins of fornication and adultery (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). It was not lawful for them to divorce their wives for capital offences, such as fornication, and the Pharisees who questioned Jesus knew the law. So when they asked Jesus, “Is it lawful... ?” Jesus replied in the language of the lawyer, “Anyone who divorces his wife for a non-capital offence and marries another commits adultery.” The phrase ‘for a non-capital offence’ is the same thing as ‘not over fornication.’ Jesus used the legal negative to point to whatever is left over.

The Jews knew that it was unlawful to get a divorce on the grounds of fornication, because God had specifically laid down the death penalty for that particular ‘cause’ (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). So, while Jesus used a negative statement, ‘not over fornication,’ He was, in effect, using it in a positive manner to define the upper limit of what constituted a ‘cause’ for divorce (which was the way the question had been framed by the Pharisees). He defined the upper limit as well as the lower limit, when He used the phrase ‘not over fornication,’ and it was within these boundaries that the Jews had traditionally obtained their grounds to divorce their wives.

In a head-to-head confrontation if you can corner your opponent to end up on the wrong side of the law, then he is broken. Jesus knew that no Jewish lawyer could change the law of God over the capital punishment for the sin of fornication/adultery. Everyone knew that the lawful penalty was death, not divorce, and no lawyer had ever tried to rewrite the law. So both Jesus and the Pharisees were on the right side of the law in not permitting divorce for fornication. To the question, ‘Is it lawful to divorce for fornication?’ the Jews would be forced to reply, ‘It is unlawful to divorce for fornication’ but under their breath they would mutter, ‘If we can’t divorce her for fornication, we will get rid of her using our traditional ‘erovat dābār excuse.’ So the metaphorical use of ‘erovat dābār in Deuteronomy 24:1 could not refer to fornication (so rabbi Shammai was wrong). It could only refer to a non-capital offence in the description that God gives of the evil man who divorces his wife in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

The revolution that Jesus brought about was that He declared that all divorces obtained for non-capital offences (such as through an ‘erovat dābār or hatred) were now a sin against His Father’s new dispensation of Grace into which Jew and non-Jew were invited to enter by faith, and by faith to appropriate the life and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the ‘righteousness of God’ is obtained only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Regarding the hardness of man’s heart, and God’s unwillingness to forcibly change it, the Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) was composed of sinners who retained their old natures, but still they constituted God’s people—His Church. If the unregenerate nature of man is likened to a carpet, then the men of the Old Testament Church walked on this carpet throughout their history. While walking on this carpet they committed evil deeds, and it is these evil deeds, and not the underlying carpet/heart, that is addressed in the Law of God. The focus of the Law was to curb the evil deeds that emanate from the evil heart, and not to ‘cure’ the evil heart itself. This is captured in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where He contrasts the Old with the New Covenant. Under the Old the law
was kept if a man did not physically commit adultery. He could think about it, but that was not considered to be breaking the Law. But in the New Covenant Church, it is different: whoever looks at a woman to desire sex with her has sinned before he has committed the act. The carpet has been removed and God’s followers no longer walk in the flesh but in the Spirit. The old nature has been removed and a new heart and a new spirit have been given to all members of the New Covenant people of God. This is a major change in God’s dealings with His chosen people under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant.

Many evangelical preachers regard Jesus as just another Moses, who did not drastically revise the old Mosaic Law, but retained the provisions for divorce as laid down in Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 21. The only reform Jesus made was to do away with the death penalty for fornication and allow His disciples to substitute divorce in its place. Consequently, Christians are encouraged to take advantage of all the causes of divorce as set out in the Old Testament, and to ignore the reforms brought in by Shamai and Hillel. These preachers claim that divorce is not a sin provided the grounds for it are based on Scriptural texts.

Hard-heartedness was at the core of life under the Old Covenant. The Law could not remove it. Hard-heartedness has been totally removed from the core of every Christian’s new life in Christ Jesus. It is the absence of this hard-heartedness that constitutes the genuine Christian. Its presence is a sure sign that the individual is a Christian in name only. And there are more of the latter than there are of the former in the visible Church of Christ today.

There can be no doubt about the challenge that Jesus mounted against the Mosaic law on divorce. He deliberately invalidates all divorces obtained through Deuteronomy 24:1-3 and Exodus 21:1-10. This is another case where Jesus might have said, “You heard that it was said of old, a man may divorce his wife for anything that displeases him, especially adultery and desertion, but I say to you that if any man obtains such a divorce he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

The challenge Jesus mounted against Moses’s acceptance of divorce meant that all marriages entered into, following a divorce, were adulterous relationships. Jesus, quite bluntly, and implicitly condemned Moses’s action, when Moses issued a command regulating divorce. This command gave credence to the worldwide custom of his time that divorce dissolved a lawful marriage. It didn’t. But both God and Moses realised that divorce was an unavoidable consequence of, and an integral constituent of, Adam’s fallen nature.

Jesus recognised that Moses was forced into issuing such a command, because of the hardness of men’s hearts. But giving in to the hardness of men’s hearts compromised the original teaching on marriage that God instituted ‘in the beginning,’ between Adam and Eve, and it is to the glory of the Lord Jesus that He alone can raise man and woman out of their fallen Adamic nature and give them His own nature, so that they cannot sin while walking in that new nature. A good tree brings forth good fruit, and an bad tree brings forth bad fruit. We are one or the other, not both.

Jesus brushed away man’s degrading law of divorce which was created by men for men to gratify their lusts, and He reinstated the original law of marriage, which ruled out any divorce on any grounds. By undercutting Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 21 with His return to Genesis 2:24, Jesus totally undermined the rationale for divorce. It meant that Jesus lifted His disciples on to a different plane of experience and living, one in which His spirit would indwell every believer and remove the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, of feeling, of compassion, of forgiveness, and mercy. Jesus took away the right of all of His followers not to forgive. And once He took that away, then divorce could never become a possibility. The unbelieving spouse could separate, but they could not break the marriage bond.

6.3.1. Jesus’ new teaching on divorce seen from His enemies’ point of view

We have examined Jesus’ statements about divorce which He gave in private. Now let us examine how He handled questions about His absolutist position. News, no doubt, soon spread about Jesus’ abolition of divorce on any grounds. His enemies must have heard this news with astonishment. But astonishment soon turned to glee, because here was a clear case where this ‘country rabbi’ took on Moses in a head-to-head confrontation. Moses was clearly superior to this ignorant, self-appointed rabbi from Galilee, they must have thought. Jesus’ reputation, as a national leader, would be lost overnight if they could trap Him in a direct confrontation with Moses. To claim to be a higher authority than Moses would ensure His rejection by the nation, for who could condemn Moses and win the respect of the nation? The entire religious establishment was united behind Moses’s personal authority and his command to the people that every divorce be accompanied by a ‘roll of severance’ which was to be handed to the divorced woman. In commanding that a ‘roll of severance’ be handed to every divorced woman, Moses implicated himself in approving of divorce as a legitimate practice among God’s elect people. His reputation and
standing in God’s eyes ensured that his approval of divorce made it a permanent feature of Hebrew and Jewish society.

The trap to set Jesus in a head-to-head confrontation with Moses’ reputation as God’s authoritative lawyer posed a significant threat to Jesus’ reputation and standing among the Jews. Jesus was fully aware of the open-endedness of the term ‘eravat dâbîr in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, by which hardhearted husbands had obtained a divorce for virtually any cause that a husband chose to nominate to divorce his wife, apart from sins requiring the death penalty, such as fornication and adultery (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). In order to capture this limitless category, the negative is put for the positive. The issue was clear to Jesus. Since divorce could never be obtained ‘for fornication,’ which sins were punished with death, it could only be obtained ‘not over fornication,’ which were non-death penalty offences. This simple division, based on punishment, permitted Jesus to cover every offence that a Jew could nominate to divorce his wife, and then comprehensively bracket all these non-fornication, non-death penalty excuses as invalid and unlawful in His new Kingdom of God.

So when Jesus said, “Whoever divorces his wife— not over fornication—” He was referring to every non-death penalty offence that a Jew had used to get his divorce.

**God took away the claim of any man to divorce his wife for fornication, and God’s Son took away the claim of any man to divorce his wife for a non-fornication cause.**

Together, they comprehensively abolished divorce for any cause—fornication or non-fornication.

From the giving of the Torah in 1446 B.C. to Jesus’ day, Hebrew and Jewish men had granted themselves divorces for all causes other than fornication. They would have divorced their wives ‘for fornication’ had God not stepped in and demanded the death penalty for this particular category of sin (Deut 22:22; Lev 20:10). So they were left to get their divorces on a ‘not over fornication’ basis. So, legally, Jesus did not leave them a leg to stand on, because it was never lawful to get a divorce for adultery/fornication under the Torah (see 6.4.). In this, Moses supported Jesus’ position.

The question the Pharisees put to Jesus was not one of expediency, such as, ‘The Romans do not allow us to put our wives to death for fornication, so can we divorce them instead?’ Their disdain for Jesus would not allow them to ask Jesus (a nobody from Galilee) to modify the Torah to allow divorce ‘for fornication.’ Rather, the question they put to Jesus was one of law, Is it lawful to divorce our wives for every cause? Jesus took them to the law and to God’s fixed punishments. He and they knew that it was unlawful to get a divorce ‘for fornication,’ so the question boiled down to how Jesus would react to the phrase ‘for every cause,’ which amounted to the same thing as ‘not over fornication,’ because Jesus’ frame of reference is still the law, and its two-fold, fixed penalty categories of (1) ‘for fornication’ (death penalty), and (2) ‘not over fornication’ (used to obtain divorces).

The Pharisees failed to get Jesus to speak evil of Moses, as they had hoped. Instead of getting Jesus to go head-to-head against Moses, Jesus demonstrated by His teaching that it is possible to obtain spiritual wings and rise above the sordid life that Moses tried to manage. Jesus exposed the real engine behind divorce which was the unregenerate, hard heart of every man born into this world.

Sometimes, at the end of a discussion, those who cannot envisage Jesus without a doctrine of divorce, desperately latch on to the negative particle MH in the hope that somewhere in Greek literature a single case can be found where it means ‘except.’ That is how desperate the situation has become for them.

Wenham & Heth made the point, “it is a general principle of interpretation to accept the least semantic content in a word or phrase that makes sense of the passage.” The ‘least semantic content’ of the negation particle, MH, is ‘not.’ The least semantic content for MH EPI PORNEIA is ‘not over fornication.’ Taking this at its face value means that Jesus is saying whoever divorces his wife for a cause other than fornication and remarries is an adulterer, because all such divorces are unlawful in His Kingdom. This might imply that if a man divorced his wife for fornication that the divorce would be valid. There is just one snag with this, the Jews could not get a divorce for fornication (adultery) because God decreed the death penalty for it. By using the simple negative Jesus cut off the only grounds that the Jews had been using for millennia to get their divorces, using the minimum of words, ‘not over fornication.’

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Note the statement, ‘This might imply that if a man divorced his wife for fornication that the divorce would be valid.’ In Greek and Roman society a man could get a divorce for fornication and not over fornication.’ So Jesus’ statement (His content-identity phrase ‘not over fornication,’ meaning all other non-fornication causes) would not have made sense if it had been addressed to Greeks or Romans. This is the reason why Mark and Luke could not include it. Jesus’ statement ‘not over fornication’ only made sense when addressed to a Jewish audience who could not get a divorce for fornication. This cultural difference is what set Jews off from Greeks and Romans, and this is what sets Matthew off from Mark and Luke. To each of these three cultures, the Holy Spirit guided three Gospel writers to convey, in different ways, and masterfully tailored to meet the needs of these three diverse cultures, Jesus’ teaching that divorce on any grounds was now null and void.

6.3.2. The logic behind the ‘exceptive clause’ in Matthew 5:32

The context of Jesus’ abolition of the age-old custom of divorce is His Sermon on the Mount. The following outline has been taken from my Harmony of the Four Gospels.

**Matthew 4:23—8:13 The Sermon on the Mount**

- 1. Matthew 4:23—5:1 Nationwide recognition for Jesus’ miraculous powers
- 2. Matthew 5:2—7:29 The sermon on the Mount
- 1. Matthew 5:2-12 Nine states of blessedness
- 2. Matthew 5:13-16 His disciples are the salt and light of the world
- 3. Matthew 5:17-48 Regulations that exceed those of the Pharisees
- 1. 3. 1. Matthew 5:17-20 The permanence of the Law
- 2. 3. 2. Matthew 5:21-26 ‘You shall not kill’
- 3. 3. 3. Matthew 5:27-30 Its better to lose one body part than the whole
- 4. 3. 4. Matthew 5:31-32 Divorce only proliferates adultery
- 5. 3. 5. Matthew 5:33-37 ‘You shall not swear falsely’
- 6. 3. 6. Matthew 5:38-42 Retaliation outlawed
- 7. 3. 7. Matthew 5:43-48 ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’
- 4. Matthew 6:1-18 Righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees
- 1. 4. 1. Matthew 6:1-4 ‘Do your good deeds secretly’
- 2. 4. 2. Matthew 6:5-15 ‘When you pray . . . .’
- 2. 4. 2. 1. Matthew 6:5-6 ‘Say your prayers privately’
- 2. 4. 2. 2. Matthew 6:7-8 ‘Avoid vain repetitions in prayer’
- 2. 4. 2. 3. Matthew 6:9-13 (=Luke 11:1-4) Example of true prayer (the Lord’s Prayer)
- 2. 4. 2. 4. Matthew 6:14-15 ‘Be as forgiving as the Father’
- 2. 4. 3. Matthew 6:16-18 ‘Do your fasting secretly’
- 2. 4. 5. Matthew 6:19-24 Resolutions that exceed those of the Pharisees
- 2. 4. 5. 1. Matthew 6:19-21 ‘Set your heart on a different kind of riches’
- 2. 4. 5. 2. Matthew 6:22-23 ‘Set your sights on a different kind of light’
- 2. 4. 5. 3. Matthew 6:24 ‘Set your energies to serve a different kind of Master’
- 2. 4. 6. Matthew 6:25—7:12 Rules for living that exceed those of the Pharisees
- 2. 4. 6. 1. Matthew 6:25-32 ‘Value the inside more than the outside’
- 2. 4. 6. 2. Matthew 6:33-34. ‘Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness’
- 2. 4. 6. 3. Matthew 7:1-2 ‘Judge others as you would want to be judged yourself’
- 2. 4. 6. 4. Matthew 7:3-5 ‘Remove your own fault first before you remove it in others’
- 2. 4. 6. 5. Matthew 7:6 ‘Be discerning to whom you reveal spiritual truths’
- 2. 4. 6. 6. Matthew 7:7-11 ‘Request the Father for all your daily needs’
- 2. 4. 6. 7. Matthew 7:12 Conclusion. The Golden Rule
- 2. 4. 7. Matthew 7:13-29. A Readiness that exceeds that of the Pharisees
- 2. 4. 7. 1. Matthew 7:13-14 ‘Be always alert to seek the narrow way.’
- 2. 4. 7. 2. Matthew 7:15-20 ‘Be always alert to avoid false prophets’
- 2. 4. 7. 2. 1. Matthew 7:15 Avoid false prophets
- 2. 4. 7. 2. 2. Matthew 7:16-18 ‘How to recognise false prophets
- 2. 4. 7. 2. 3. Matthew 7:19 Warning to false prophets
- 2. 4. 7. 2. 4. Matthew 7:20 Criterion restated for recognising false prophets
- 2. 4. 7. 3. Matthew 7:21-23 ‘Be always alert to do the will of God’
- 2. 4. 7. 3. 1. Matthew 7:21 ‘Criterion for admission to the Kingdom of God’
§25  2.  7.  3.  2.  Matthew 7:22-23  Many so-called disciples will not be admitted into it
§25  2.  7.  4.  Matthew 7:24-29.  ‘Be always alert to hear and carry out the teaching of Jesus’
§25  3.  Matthew 8:1-4  (=Mark 1:40-45 = Luke 5:12-16)  A leper is healed but told to tell no one
§25  4.  Matthew 8:5-13  (=Luke 7:1-10)  Centurion’s servant is healed (request made in person)

Jesus’ reform of the divorce laws that God’s people had been living under comes very early on in His sermon, under the section, Matthew 5:17-48. Regulations that exceed those of the Pharisees. This section is made up of seven distinct insights, the middle one of which concerns divorce. His teaching is addressed to His disciples, not to the crowds whom He had just come from, having healed every sickness among them. However, by the time Jesus finished His teaching, crowds had arrived and were impressed with His authoritative style (Mt 7:28-29). Jesus begins this series of seven lessons by taking up the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder.”

6.3.2.1. How to keep the Sixth Commandment

The first lesson sets out the principle that unless the lifestyle of His disciples was superior to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they will never enter into the Kingdom of God (5:20). The Pharisees lived out the Law as closely as they could, and had a national reputation for being holy men of God. Outwardly, they were as perfect as humans could get in their zeal to follow every demand that the Law imposed on them. But outwardly was not good enough. The ‘outwardly’ was attainable by human effort. This is illustrated in the story of the rich young ruler who claimed to have kept all the commandments that Jesus listed in Matthew 19:19-20 from his youth. Jesus began His list with the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder,” and continued with the seventh, “You shall not commit adultery.” Outwardly, the rich, young ruler could tick off these commandments, but Jesus knew that inwardly he could not keep any of the Ten Commandments from the heart, because the human heart is deceitful and thoroughly diseased and deformed, and not capable of being healed. Man requires a spiritual operation to remove the old heart and implant a new heart in him, donated by Christ Himself. He alone can perform the operation. No other religion, or founder of a world religion, can do this.

Jesus attained the outward standard of the Law, so that His achievement—His righteousness—could be handed on to all those who became His disciples. But Jesus knew that reaching the outward standard did nothing to change the inward nature of fallen man, and that was why the Father sent Him into the world.

Jesus came to impart His own Spirit into the physical bodies of all His disciples which would enable each of them to keep the higher calling of the Law—to keep it from the inside out and not from the outside in. He came to plant the love of God right in the centre of each disciple’s being; in the mind and in the heart, transforming not just the quality of the life they would have, but its very nature, once they bowed their heads to God in total submission to do His will, which will was, that they do the will of His Son, whom He had made head over all His creation.

What Jesus was offering to His disciples on the mountain-side was nothing short of offering to indwell their bodies with His own spirit. This indwelling would guarantee that their whole life would be pleasing to God. His indwelling would enable them to see into the spiritual world, and walk in the light, and understand the motive behind each of God’s commands in a totally natural way, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus promised would set His disciples on a totally new elevation, far above the purely physical keeping of the letter of the Law. By having His presence on board they would naturally understand the mind of God, and naturally know how to please Him in any given situation, or temptation, or persecution. They would not be aping the lifestyle of some holy man.

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191 Matthew follows the canonical order of the commandments here and in his list in 19:18. In the latter place, however, the parallels in Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20 reverse the order and list keeping the seventh commandment (on adultery) before the sixth commandment (on murder). Both Mark and Luke were writing to non-Jews in the Roman empire, which may have a bearing on the switch. For other minor switches of order see Mt 4:5-7 and Lk 4:9-12 (Jesus’ temptations); Mt 14:21; 15:7-9; 15:19; 19:18; lastly, Mt 24:9b; 24:14 and Mk 13:10; 27:35.

192 Jesus exposed the rich ruler’s priorities by asking him to sell up everything he had and follow Him. A Christian will not sell up Jesus for anything. Nothing is more valuable to him or her than their love for Him and His. They will still be intensely joyful if their house burns down around them, for they have in Jesus something they can never be robbed of in this life. They can say with Paul, ‘I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ’ (Phil 3:8).
The presence of Christ in the believer did not guarantee that they would not revert to their old nature from time to time, but this old nature was no longer their true nature, and they would experience remorse any time they followed their old nature and not their new, spiritual nature, which was none other than Christ living in them.

God sent His Son into the world to transform men’s spirits into the likeness of His Son’s nature, something that keeping the outward demands of the Law could not do, and this Jesus sets out to show by contrasting the weakness of the Law over against the strength of His indwelling spirit.

His first contrast is the keeping of the command, ‘You shall not kill.’ In the flesh, the ordinary man can keep this law fully. But Jesus drew attention to another dimension where the same law was broken repeatedly by those who kept the outward letter of the law. He said, ‘You heard that it was said to the ancients, “You shall not murder,” . . . but I— I say to you that everyone who is angry at his brother rashly, shall be liable to the judgment.’ By the term ‘anceints’ Jesus was referring to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai in 1446 BC to the Hebrew fathers.

The crime of murder has its origin in a tiny seed of anger, which builds up inside the mind and eventually manifests itself in a physical deed. What Jesus brought to light was that the first, infinitesimal spark of anger is no different in substance and nature than the anger that results in the death of another human being. Jesus puts His finger on the origin of murder, and it begins in the fallen nature of the natural man. In other words, every human being, male and female, has the potential to murder written into their fallen, human nature. It lies dormant until the circumstances arise which are conducive to stirring up this murderous anger. Many factors of upbringing may prevent this anger going to term, and anger management may cause the end result (violence and murder) to be aborted. But what Jesus is offering His people is the extinction of the flame of this anger that leads to violence and murder. It is exterminated while He is in control of the mind and heart of each of His followers.

Jesus shows that there is a surface keeping of the law ‘Do not kill,’ which does not exhaust the fulfilment of that command. He exposed the deep-seated root that produced the fruit of murder, and unless that root is killed, it will kill human beings, starting with a spark of anger.

The application that Jesus drew out of His own insight into the depth of the depravity inherent in human nature was to suggest a way of avoiding a rift developing between themselves and their fellow human beings. He desires no conflict between human beings. Therefore if another human being has something against you, which is the first manifestation of the anger that results in murder, ‘first, be reconciled to your brother, and then bring forward your gift’ to God.

The act of reconciliation defuses the anger and prevents it building up inside your brother, and we are to consider ourselves responsible for fanning the flame of this evil fire deep in the psyche of our fellow human beings. Jesus puts the emphasis on defusing or dissipating the anger of our opponents (as Jesus calls them), if we have given them just cause to be angry with us, and to do it quickly, before the anger has time to consolidate and result in a heavy price to assuage.

Christians should not allow anger to fester in the minds of their opponents, because by delaying to be reconciled, they are directly contributing to the growing sense of frustration and the bottling up of anger in the minds of their opponents. We are driving them toward an act of murder.

Jesus is the only known rabbi to realise that there is no difference between the anger that comes from the tongue (abusive language to a brother) and the anger that results in the death of a fellow human being. It is the same anger that gives rise to both manifestations. This anger must not reside in any of His followers. If it does then they will never enter into the Kingdom of God.

What Jesus is demanding of each of His followers is nothing short of the death of their old nature and the acceptance of His offer to abide in each one of them. Only in this way would they be able to keep the Sixth Commandment right to its core, and not just on the surface. By putting to death the anger that curses our fellow human beings, we put to death the anger that kills another human being. Consequently, Jesus funnels every would-be worshipper of God to come to Him, for He alone, of all world religious leaders, is able to impart the spirit of God to man. He alone, is the Way back to God, and only in Him can eternal life be found.

Having dealt with the Sixth Commandment, Jesus moved on to how the Seventh Commandment should be kept.

6.3.2.2. How to keep the Seventh Commandment

Jesus reminded His disciples of the words of the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery,” as something that they had heard many times. The seventh commandment is οὐ ψαρεύεσθαι not οὐ τορέψεως ‘Do not commit fornication.’ The reason for this is that a child of fornication would not inherit anything from his father. He would be considered an illegitimate child (like Jephthah). The danger lay in a married man producing offspring through another man’s wife.
This would contaminate the wife’s offspring, whose child might well be, unknowingly, accepted by her husband as his child. It was to avoid this genealogical contamination that the the Seventh Commandment made it a capital offence. We have an instance of this in David’s affair with Bathsheba. If Uriah had slept with her after David had caused her to conceive, this would have covered up his deed, and Uriah would have not known that it was David’s son that was born to Bathsheba. It was because Uriah refused to sleep with Bathsheba that he had to die to cover up David’s adultery. The goal behind the Seventh Commandment was to avoid genealogical lines becoming contaminated, so that the line leading from Abraham to David and thence to Jesus was a pure, unbroken, blood-line. Joseph, Jesus’ putative father, was in the loins of Abraham and David.

Probably every Pharisee in the land could say that he kept the seventh commandment. But Jesus knows differently. “But I—I say to you that, everyone viewing a woman, with the motive to desire her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” This opened up a completely new angle on the keeping of this commandment. Those who had ticked off keeping this commandment outwardly, were suddenly confronted with the possibility that they had broken this commandment many times at another level of interpretation.

As in the case of the origin of the anger that results in the death of another human being, Jesus traced the origin of adultery to a sinful desire. In substance and nature there was no difference between the desire and the act (the result). No rabbi before Jesus had made this connection. It had never dawned on them that the two things were one and the same thing. The fact that the idea of having sex with another man’s wife arose in the mind of man, showed that the mind was under the control of the man. However, his mind was under the control of his fallen, human nature. This was the core centre that fed the mind. Man was trapped inside his fallen nature, and unable to free himself from it. In the absence of the spirit of Christ overpowering and killing off this old man nature, men will go on committing adultery in their minds until the day they die. Only the intervention of Jesus can save him from himself.

In order to bring home to all men the inability of man to free himself from his own fallen nature, Jesus, with some irony and with tongue in cheek, suggests some ways they could try to free themselves from committing sins. He suggests that if their hand causes them to sin against God, then they should try cutting off the offending hand, so that they cannot repeat the offending action. He suggests the same thing about their right eye—pluck it out, and you cannot repeat the sin. Behind these two suggestions lies the unspoken one, namely, that they make themselves eunuchs so that they cannot physically commit adultery.

The stupidity inherent in these drastic solutions to avoid sinning against God would be evident to all His hearers. They knew that the problem did not lie in the physical hand or the physical eye, but in the mind, and cutting off parts of the physical body would leave the real culprit—the mind—untouched. Only the fool would take Jesus literally, and he would be no better off as a result of these self-mutilations.

Jesus, in His own subtle way, indicated that man could not reach into his mind to cut off the real offending parts—those parts that were generating the evil ideas and the evil desires. Once again, Jesus brings it home to His disciples that there is nothing man can do to change his fallen, human nature. He is stuck with a nature that has degenerated to such an extent that it cannot repair itself, or be repaired, even by God. No amount of religiosity or seeking after knowledge can get him out of his inexorable, downward slide toward and into eternal death.

Man will go on committing adultery ‘in his heart,’ said Jesus; because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Only a new heart, and a new mind, is the solution, and that solution cannot be bought or worked for. The solution lies within the power of the Lord Jesus to give or to withhold. The price to receive it is none other than to forsake everything for it, and become His full-time slave and servant. He demands nothing short of total surrender to Him as the Son of God, who is the one who will judge all the nations of the earth in the last day.

6.3.2.3. The futility of a divorce that does not dissolve a marriage

Having concentrated the mind of His disciples on the futility of man to change his own nature, He turns their attention to the futility of a divorce that does not dissolve a marriage. Jesus does not introduce His new teaching by referring to what was said to the ‘ancestors’ (distant ancestors), but intimates that it was more recent, and the content suggests that Jesus is referring to an unwritten command of Moses which would have read: ‘Who, for instance, may have divorced his wife, let him give her a divorce document.’ If divorce was of God, then what was wrong with this humane law? It protected the woman’s new, single status, and it protected a prospective second husband from committing adultery with another man’s wife. Where is the evil in this commonsense provision? But if divorce was not of God, everything was wrong with this law.
When a pirate hijacks a ship the witness of the passengers to his kindness and thoughtfulness for their well-being, and the glowing reports of the crew that his treatment of them surpassed that of the captain and his offices, counts for nothing, since his initial action was unlawful. So it is with any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman. The provision of a divorce document may have many good points, as mentioned above, but these ‘good points’ are carried on the back of an evil deed. In the Last Judgment there will be many Christian leaders, bishops, and archbishops, who will catalogue the many miracles they did in Christ’s name, but as far as Jesus is concerned they were done on the back of an evil deed—they despised Him and His commands, and for that initial evil deed their life was worthless in His sight, and they are turned into hell.

Jesus countermands the provision of a divorce document on His own authority, ‘But I—I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife, apart from a matter of fornication [by her], forces her to commit adultery, and who, for instance, may have married a woman having been divorced, he is adulterous with her.’

The central thought in Jesus’ teaching is, Whoever divorces his wife for a non-fornication issue, he forces his wife to be adulterous against him, unless she had already committed fornication before he divorced her (which was hidden from him, but not from God), in which case he will not be held responsible for her pre-divorce sexual sins, but he will be held responsible for her post-divorce sexual sins.

In most Jewish divorces in Jesus’ day a divorce means that the husband—for only the husband had the right to divorce—compels his wife to become what she was not before, through the act of divorcing her, but if she became what she was not before by her own action of being adulterous toward him while still married to him, then he is not responsible for her changed state from pure to defiled. If she was adulterous through fornication before he divorced her, then she becomes liable for the death penalty, if she could be caught in the act.

The clause, ‘apart from a matter of fornication [by her],’ goes with what follows, and not with what precedes. The husband forces her to lose her clean status by compelling her to have sex with another man. However, if he divorced her because he suspected—but could not prove—that she slept with another man (and it was true), then she is the cause of losing her clean status, and not her first husband. Nevertheless, Jesus pointed out, he is culpable for all her post-divorce sexual sins if he divorced her for a non-sexual cause and she married again.

Jesus is clear that a divorced woman must remain single for the rest of her life, because she is still married to her husband. Anyone who marries her is committing adultery. The same goes for a divorced husband. No one should marry a divorced person while their first spouse is still alive.

Jesus has nothing good to say about divorce. For Him it is the work of His enemy—Satan. The concept of divorce is a sham, because it cannot dissolve a lawful marriage. It is a lie when it claims to dissolve a marriage. It is for this reason that Jesus has nothing to do with divorce.

Jesus, as ever, goes to the heart of the matter, and He traced the origin of divorce to the old nature that all men inherit from Adam. Out of this degenerate nature comes the anger that results in murder, and the lust that results in adultery, and the hard-heartedness that results in divorce. They all come out of the same stable, whose owner is Satan. Whoever shows evidence of these three evils, shows evidence that they have not yet been born again of the Spirit of God. They live, but Christ does not live in them. Their divorce is that evidence.

Jesus must have often heard it said, If you are going to divorce your wife, give her a written statement to that effect and be done with her. Instantly, he recognised an evil heart behind that statement. He had traced murder back to the tongue and to angry words. People did not see any connection between cursing and swearing at a fellow human being and the crime of murder; but Jesus saw a direct and inevitable connection between the two things. He had traced adultery back to a lustful look. People did not see any connection between talking about sex with another human being other than the man’s own wife and the crime of adultery, but Jesus saw a direct and inevitable connection between the two things. Adultery had already been committed in the mind before it was committed in real life.

The lesson His disciples got from this revelation was that sin begins in the mind, and unless one can control the mind the anger-murder and the leer-adultery connections will always be present at the core of every person’s being. But who can control the mind of man? It requires a mind sitting above the mind to control what goes into the mind, but no such supra-mind exists in man, so that if anger and leer take root in the mind, then the door is open to their end results, namely murder and

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193 The fact that a woman may commit adultery through fornication (aside from adultery through adultery) is stated in Ecclesiasticus 23:23 (see 5.10. for the text).
adultery. Man is a prisoner of his own mind, and man will always please himself and put his core interests above the core interests of others.

So when Jesus heard the advice If you are going to divorce your wife, give her a written statement to that effect and be done with her, He recognised instantly that this was the opposite of love. Those words opened up a scenario of a man wanting to turning the distance that had opened up between him and his wife over a period of time into a permanent state. The flame of love that had once burned so intensely that a man gave up his independence to become ‘one flesh’ with his beloved had diminished to a dot and then was extinguished completely. Divorce was his only way out, and he took it. How could this happen?

Jesus put His finger on the cause. Hard-heartedness. A soft, tender, affectionate heart, became hard, unfeeling, unforgiving, and selfish. Divorce does not happen overnight. Divorce has a root, and that root manifests itself in its earliest stage in a feeling of resentment over something very small, insignificant, and inconsequential. It is at that very point that divorce came into existence. A tiny gap opened up in that instant which was to get larger and larger. As the mental distance increased, so did the physical, sexual intimacy decrease in like proportion, until the tongue took over and harsh words began to flow, tiny at first, then the flow became a torrent, and the torrent became a violent flood of abuse. The end result of this process, that began with a tiny rift, was a permanent parting of the ways, ending up in a divorce court.

Because all divorces have their origin in a hairline crack of resentment, every marriage, no matter how strong the bond is at the beginning, is never immune from losing its initial hot-blooded affection for its object of desire. But Jesus knows the heart better than anyone, and He, alone of all the rabbis of His day, made the connection between hard-heartedness and divorce. They were two sides of the one coin, just as anger and murder were, and just a lustful leer and adultery were.

The insight that Jesus gave to the world was that if you want to avoid murder, then you must kill anger; if you want to avoid adultery, then you must kill the lustful leer, and if you want to avoid divorce, then you kill hardheartedness. Murder, adultery, and divorce are evils that emanate from a degenerate heart. They are all manifestations of sin. Anger multiplies murder; leers multiply fornication; and divorce multiplies adulterers and adulteresses. No good can come from these evils.

But Jesus goes on to examine an unforeseen consequence of divorce in some detail. Suppose a man comes to a state of utter contempt and hatred for his wife, who has never been unfaithful to him all her life, but he wants rid of her just the same. He has been led to believe that if he divorces her that the marriage bond will be dissolved between them, and they would be as if they had never been married. He sees himself and his wife as single persons again, who are free to remarry whoever they choose to. He delights in the provision of divorce to be free again, and so he divorces her. Both are released from a bond that they have come to hate. Both look forward to finding love again in their lives. The future is bright. They have left a horrible relationship in their wake and they can look forward to peace and happiness once again. Divorce is a welcome release mechanism that they thoroughly approve of. But Jesus thinks differently. The marriage bond is for life, He revealed. There is no way out of a marriage except through the death of one of the spouses. This revelation came as a bombshell to his nation and to His disciples, who expostulated that if is so it is better not to marry. But the Pharisees expostulated that this cannot be so because Moses approved of divorce by commanding them to write out a bill of divorce whenever they divorced their wives.194 Jesus’ reply was to ask them to examine the reason why Moses commanded them to write out a bill of divorce. Without waiting for their reply He divulged that it was to accommodate their hard-hearted, unforgiving, attitude toward their wives.

The Pharisees could not point back to the beginning of humankind on the earth, and urge that God made provision for divorce when He performed the first marriage ceremony between the first pair of human beings. The furthest back they could go was to Moses. Jesus trumped them by being able to reveal the Creator’s will for marriage right at the beginning, and that will was that marriage was an indissoluble union between a man and a woman. Jesus took away divorce, which was not from the beginning, that he might establish what was from the beginning. The purpose of Christ was to restore all things to their pre-fall condition. This is contradicted if Jesus made an exception for adultery, which did not exist in the beginning.

What Jesus did not reveal to the Pharisees was that God’s will was appropriate for unfallen, sinless human beings. What brought the anger-murder, leer-adultery, hard-heartedness-divorce,

194 It is odd that Carl Laney denies that Moses commanded the issuance of a divorce document (op. cit., p. 33). Yet Jesus specifically states, “For your hard-heartedness he [Moses] wrote this command for you” (Mk 10:5). What C. Laney did not take into account is that this written command by Moses was deliberately not permitted to enter God’s Torah, because He detested it. The command that Moses issued had to transmitted outside God’s Word, and Jesus was fully aware that this was so.
situation about was the first sin of Adam. Through the sin of Adam death entered into humanity and all his descendants would die as a result of his first sin of rebellion against his Creator and God. Through his first sin, the immortal life that he was created with was altered by God to be a mortal life. Adam was created out of the dust, never to return back to dust, but through his first sin, he, and all his descendants would return to the dust. That was not the only permanent change that came over him. He lost the ability not to sin. Sin became his master. Death became his end. What an inglorious beginning Adam bequeathed to his future offspring.

But Jesus came to restore the inner, spiritual life that Adam had experienced for the first few days of his life on Earth, before it evaporated with his first sin. What Jesus came to this Earth to offer to all men was none other than a return to the state that Adam once enjoyed briefly of being in a position of being able not to sin. But the catch was, if such a word can be used, that this could only be achieved by allowing Jesus to become master of their lives. Becoming master of their lives meant that He would take up residence at the core of their being, which would enable them to please God in everything they did. He would give to each of His followers a new spirit, a new heart, a new mind, and send the love of God into their being, transforming every part of their being to being cloned versions of Himself. Jesus would break the seemingly unbreakable connection between anger and murder, between lust and adultery, and between hard-heartedness and divorce, and infuse His followers with His mind, His will, and His affections, and make them new, born again, men and women. He would reverse all the results that Adam’s sin brought into being, except the physical death of their bodies.

It is to this new life that Jesus would give to all the members of His Church that His teaching on divorce and remarriage relates. If they have this new life then they are to reckon their old, Adamic life to have died within them, and reckon Christ to be living in their physical bodies, and they are to foster the new life they have been given by avoiding all their old ways of thinking, and putting to death all their old standards and moral codes, and being transformed and translated to a higher plane of spiritual life. The gap between their old life and their new life is such that divorce would never enter into their heads. It would be a denial of the transformation that should have taken place if Christ truly was at the helm of their life, and infusing His thoughts into their mind.

Jesus was fully aware that by entering into this Earth and making disciples of all nations, He was entering into the kingdom of Satan, who is the ruler of this world. Robbing Satan of his citizens was not going to please him. Satan does not want any human beings to transfer into the kingdom of his enemy.

His citizens are marked by their old, Adamic natures, and can be identified through their hatred of Christ’s citizens. The battle between Christ and Satan for the allegiance of Adam’s descendants is unrelenting and deadly. The mark of Satan’s citizens is anger (leading to murder), lustful eyes (leading to adultery and fornication), and hard-heartedness and an unforgiving nature (leading to divorce). These are unmistakable signs that all of Satan’s followers manifest in their ordinary day lives.

Where divorce is, there is Satan; where Satan is, there is divorce. Satan loves divorce. God hates divorce. Satan separates couples. God binds couples. They are opposed one to the other at all levels, and this deadly opposition is mirrored in their respective citizens on Earth. ‘Whoever is not for Me is against Me,’ said Jesus. There is no neutral position. By default all human beings are born citizens of Satan’s kingdom, and he will control their minds so long as they live a natural life. He will determine their moral standards through the powers that be (redefining what marriage is), and moulding the minds of his infants through parents who owe their allegiance to him, and also by abiding in his citizens.

Before every human being dies they must escape from Satan’s kingdom and come under the control of Christ, and allow Him to determine their moral standards by abiding in them. This is the central thought and goal behind the endeavours of every evangelist. Every world religion and philosophy is a means of holding Satan’s citizens together under his control. He cares not what they believe so long as they are zealous for it, for in that zeal they are sealed citizens of his kingdom. Their zeal is his insurance that he will have them, and their descendants, for life.

6.3.2.4. The unforeseen consequences of divorce (Mt 5:32)

Jesus often heard it said, If you are going to divorce your wife, give her a written statement to that effect and be done with her. The person who gave this advice was convinced that by going into, and coming out of, a divorce court, a person could dissolve the marriage bond, and leave them free to remarry. They were in for a shock, when Jesus informed them that no such dissolution took place; that they came out of the courtroom still married in the eyes of God. That is not what they had been led to believe.
Jesus then pointed out that if a Jewish husband divorced his wife, using a divorce court to do so, and his wife went off and remarried, she would be committing adultery because she was still married to him. He could claim that when he divorced her he did not intend her to sin the sin of adultery. He thought she was single. Jesus pointed out that if his wife had never committed adultery the whole time she was married to him, but that he divorced her because they fell out and could not live with each other, Jesus said that by his act of divorcing her he directed her into a second marriage, in which another man would sleep with his wife. This made her a defiled woman in God’s eyes. She was an abomination through adultery. This was bad enough, but to be told that he would be held responsible for making her a defiled, unclean woman in God’s eyes, this was unheard of. This was preposterous.

The only exception that Jesus made to his culpability for her unclean state was if she defiled herself before he divorced her. His culpability, therefore, depended on how her unclean status came about.

If she was an innocent, faithful woman when he divorced her, then her defilement was his responsibility. If she was unfaithful and committed adultery, she should have been stoned to death, not divorced.

However, if her adultery was not found out, and he divorced her for a non-sexual reason, she still goes out a defiled woman, but God, who sees all things, will not hold the husband responsible for her defilement because he knew nothing about it. She would bear that herself, whether he divorced her or not.

However, the post-divorce remarriage of his secretly adulterous wife is an unlawful, and a defiling relationship, for which he will be held responsible on the Judgment Day. His act of divorce and its consequences are his responsibility irrespective of the reasons he gives for divorcing her. There are no valid reasons to dissolve any lawful marriage.

The revolutionary aspect of Jesus’ new doctrine of marriage was that He overturned the common assumption that what happened after a divorce was not the responsibility of either spouse. Everyone believed that both spouses were independent, and responsible for their own decisions and who they married. Not so, said Jesus, there is no way out of marriage but through death.

The Jewish husband who heard Jesus in the flesh deliver this new, revolutionary way of looking at marriage and divorce, would look at Jesus and hope that He was just a man, with his own opinions, and that He was wrong. Because if He was more than a mere man, and if He was right, then he was in a terrible predicament.

The only course open to the Jewish husband would be to divorce his second wife and be reconciled to his first wife, but God would not allow him to do that. It was His way of punishing Jewish husbands who sinned against Him. They would die in their sins. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God, and He detested divorce, and detested those who stooped to divorce their lawful wives, and give them such a hard life (see 5.5.3.).

6.3.3. The logic behind the ‘exceptive clause’ in Matthew 19:9

If we examine the first statement as Erasmus printed it, and as the KJV has it, it states: “whoever may divorce his wife, except for fornication, and may marry another, he commits adultery. And whoever marries a woman commits adultery.”

If we take the final statement, ‘And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.’ to apply to the whole verse, then Jesus would allow divorce for fornication/adultery, but would not allow remarriage to occur as a consequence of the divorce. So whether a man divorced (ἀπολύω) his wife, or ‘separated’ (σφημα) from his wife, the consequence is the same—remarriage is forbidden in both cases. In the case of ‘separation’ there is always the possibility of reconciliation. Presumably, in the case of divorce for adultery, there would have to be a remarriage to the reconciled husband, if the divorce did what it claimed to do, namely, dissolve the marriage bond. But this raises the possibility that Jesus agreed in principle and in practice to divorce, and in the case of adultery, He agreed to the dissolution of a lawful marriage. This flatly contradicts the message taken out to the Greeks and the Romans by Luke and Mark. Only the Roman Catholic Church has adhered to the traditional interpretation that Jesus abolished divorce on any grounds.395

395 Augustine was persuaded that marrying after a lawful divorce (which was only granted by the Church for fornication/adultery) was forbidden in Scripture; yet it was not so clearly forbidden, as to render a man incapable of baptism. See Joseph Bingham [1668-1723], Origines ecclesiasticæ; or, the antiquities of the Christian Church; and Other Works. Revised by R. Bingham. 9 vols. (London, 1829), vol. 6. p. 374.
The more usual way of reading the texts is to argue, If Jesus truly made an exception for divorce on the ground of ‘fornication,’ then the logic of His position would mean that if a man obtained a divorce because of his wife’s adultery, Jesus would have approved of him remarrying another woman without any accusation of being an adulterer. But if a man obtained a divorce due to a non-adulterous act, then Jesus would not approve of him remarrying another woman, and would regard him as an adulterer if he did remarry. However, the logic of the grammar means that what Jesus goes on to say next: “and may marry another, he commits adultery,” can only apply to the man who divorced his wife over a non-adulterous act, because her non-adulterous act did not sever the marriage bond.

The second half of 19:9 must also apply only to the man who divorced his wife over a non-adulterous act, for it says: “and he who marries her who has been divorced commits adultery,” because her marriage bond has not been severed. This would suggest that it is the act of adultery/fornication that severs the marriage bond and no other named cause does this. But this raises the same problems that the previous interpretation raised.

Given this second scenario and interpretation, Jesus has said nothing about the position of the wife who was divorced for adultery/fornication. If the bond between her husband and her has been severed, and if he is free to remarry, then she is also free to remarry. It follows then that if a man marries her, then he is not committing adultery. So the statement Jesus made, that if a man marries a divorced woman he is committing adultery, requires a second exception clause to allow the woman who was divorced for adultery/fornication to remarry.

In the absence of a second exceptive clause, clearing the way for the innocent party to remarry after adultery, the most that can be deduced from Jesus’ statements in Matthew 19:9 is that following any divorce, be it for adultery or a non-adulterous act, no one can marry a divorced husband or a divorced wife, because the marriage bond can only be severed by God, not by man, and He uses only death, not divorce, to sever the bond. In which case we are back to the first interpretation given above.

There is not a single statement anywhere in the Gospels, or in Paul’s writings, that mentions remarriage after divorce, or after a separation, as a lawful act. The focus of Jesus is entirely on the evil consequences of anyone attempting to sever the marriage bond. And every mention of remarriage on the lips of Jesus is in the context of it being an adulterous relationship.

Even if we grant that Jesus made divorce for fornication/adultery an exception, the Jews would have rightfully accused Him of making the Torah law of no effect by His own new tradition. However, Jesus acknowledged the justice of His Father’s decision to punish adultery with death, because when the woman taken in the act of adultery was brought before Him He asked that the stoning of her be commenced by someone who was sinless.

In mock surprise Jesus asked the adulteress, “Where are your accusers?” Her accusers had been eyewitnesses to her sin, but because they were not without sin themselves (albeit different sins from hers), they did not qualify on the terms set by Jesus to carry out her execution. Because no one had passed the death sentence on her, she was free to go when Jesus said to her, “Neither do I pass sentence on you. Go, and sin no more.” Jesus used the authority given to Him by His Father to forgive sins on the earth, and this was one occasion that He chose to exercise that authority. Under the Old Covenant, David was forgiven his act of adultery by God Himself, albeit with a price to pay which would lie on his genealogical descendants. No doubt he resolved to ‘Go and sin no more.’

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196 This was the position held by the Greek Orthodox Church in AD 1030; Canons of Alexius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The second canon reads: A woman divorced from her husband by reason of her husband's adultery is blameless if she desires to marry; the priest is blameless who blesses her marriage; the husband is blameless in marrying again when he is divorced by reason of his wife's adultery. (Taken from Davies Morgan, op. cit. II. 202)

197 The absence of the Pericope Adultery in some Caesarean manuscripts, and in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, may have been due to a perceived disagreement between the Father and the Son over the right punishment to mete out to the adulteress. Since Jesus was sinless, then He should have commenced the stoning in order to ‘fulfil the law of Moses’ that the accusers wanted to inflict on her. Some early Jewish Christians would have perceived a flaw in the impossible terms that Jesus demanded before any violation of the Law could be punished. It would have been argued that if the judge and eyewitness had to be sinless before any crime could be punished, then no violator of the Law could ever be punished. No wonder that a small handful of copyists deleted this story from John’s Gospel.
If Erasmus’s exceptive clause represents Jesus’ teaching then Mark and Luke have misrepresented His teaching, because there is a world of difference in excluding divorce for any cause, and excluding divorce with a single, large exception. If Jesus allowed but one exception for divorce then He drops down to the level of another Moses.

By allowing one exception Jesus has conceded the principle of divorce, that certain marriages can be dissolved, and dissolved lawfully, such that the one flesh becomes two individuals again, and remarriages in these cases are lawful second marriages. By conceding the principle of divorce, Jesus also concedes that divorce is a necessary evil among the citizens of His kingdom.

Now once the principle and the practice of dissolving marriages is conceded as a lawful act in the eyes of God and the Lord Jesus, this opens the door to extending the principle to other causes such as desertion (the so-called Pauline Privilege), and once two sheep have got through the fence the whole flock will follow, so that all the causes that the rabbis permitted, using biblical texts as their justification, can also become legitimate causes to dissolve any marriage. The slide takes the Church back to Moses and his command (given in his own authority) to write out a bill of divorce and all the remarriages that follow are lawful.

It is argued that God, not Moses, created the lawful conditions under which His chosen people could obtain lawful dissolutions of their marriages, and these lawful conditions are said to be set out in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 and Exodus 21:3-10. The conditions, however, are so generous that almost anything that upsets a husband can become a lawful condition to divorce his wife. It is argued that God cannot be wrong in allowing the principle of divorce to operate among His elect, either under Law or under Grace, and so for Jesus to permit divorce for fornication is not seen as a revolutionary new teaching.

It is claimed that Jesus approved of His Father’s generous conditions, but that Hillel and others exploited God’s generosity and opened the door to the most trivial grounds to divorce their wives, and that all Jesus did was to curb the excesses that had crept in to make divorce as easy as possible. If so, then Matthew’s so-called exceptive clauses do not do that. As the exceptive clauses stand they permit divorce for fornication and nothing else, on a pro-divorce reading of the text. At best this can be construed to mean that all sexual sins involving the state of the wife’s purity and faithfulness can become lawful grounds to divorce her. The exception clause rules out non-sexual misdemeanours as being legitimate causes to divorce a wife. On this reading, Jesus would have ruled out all the non-sexual causes that Hillel and others had introduced, but it still leaves Him conceding the principle of divorce to operate in cases of fornication, which would include adultery.

If there is no rift between Jesus and His Father, then Jesus would have had to accept the generous conditions that God handed to His people in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, which are not restricted to fornication and adultery—which last sins were punished with death, not divorce.

On a pro-divorce reading of the biblical texts, the generous conditions in the Torah are summed up in the phrase ‘the uncovering of a matter that displeases the husband,’ which cannot be fornication or adultery, so they must be non-sexual, non-capital offences. God, we are assured, also allows simple ‘dislike’ to be a lawful condition to divorce a wife, on a pro-divorce reading of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

This licence to divorce a wife on such a broad band of nebulous conditions has been thought to represent the position held by the School of Hillel, which held that it was lawful to divorce a wife if she burned the family dinner, and rabbi Akiba said it was lawful to divorce an old wife for a younger one because God permitted him to divorce his wife if she did not find favour in his eyes. He based this on the words of Scripture. Scripture backed him up. Scripture justified his action. His reasoning, and that of the School of Hillel, was impregnable, because it was built on the rock of Scripture (or so they thought).

If Jesus rescinded all the generous conditions that His Father regarded as lawful—which all related to non-fornication grounds for divorce—where does this leave Jesus? The opponents of Christianity were quick to exploit this apparent conflict between God and His Son, and to postulate that there were two Gods; the God of the Old Testament, and a God of the New Testament. These early opponents simplified the issue to say that the God of the Old Testament held to the dissolubility of the marriage bond, while the God of the New Testament held to the indissolubility of the marriage bond. They make no mention of Matthew’s exceptive clause, which means that they did not read them as exceptive clauses, and neither did Christ’s Church for the first four hundred years of its existence. So these early heretics become unintended witnesses to the way the early Church interpreted the so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew’s Gospel.

6.3.3.1. The solution to the apparent conflict between God and Jesus
The solution to the apparent conflict between Jesus and His Father is that God did not give His people any generous conditions to divorce their wives. The people gave themselves these generous conditions. In Deuteronomy 24:1-3 God simply describes what happened when they availed themselves of these self-assumed powers in order to condemn it in verse 4. That He thoroughly disapproved of what He was describing is brought out in the punishment He lays on any husband who avails himself of these divorce provisions—they are not permitted to be reconciled to their divorced wives. This action of theirs resulted in their wives remarrying, and this in turn resulted in them becoming defiled, unclean, and an abomination in God's eyes, as all divorced and remarried persons are to this day.

God excluded these defiled women from being reconciled to their husbands in order to control the spread of their defilement. Their defilement was contagious. Whoever remarried them became defiled. A divorced woman was considered a slut, and no man would raise a family through her unclean body, because his children would be tainted. Her only hope of remarriage would be with elderly men, probably widowed, who had already raised a ‘clean’ family. Josephus despised any man who married a divorced woman, considering him the lowest of the lowest of the male kind.

There may be another reason why God would not allow a defiled wife to return to her first husband. He is concerned about contagion. After she has remarried, the act of having sex with two living men makes her a defiled, unclean, woman, and an abomination in God's eyes, because this is not what He intended her to be. If the first husband takes her back this will cause the land to sin against God. By this God means that if He allows one man to take her back, then He allows all men to take back their wives, and this will result in chaos in the genealogical records. Wife-swapping would be the norm, not the exception. Because God despises a divorced and remarried wife (even if her defilement was imposed on her against her will), any offspring that she might have of a second husband will not be legitimate, and will be registered in her name, if registered at all. He might even see to it that she is barren, for children are of the Lord. God is concerned about the bigger picture at all times, and He can see the implications quicker than anyone else, therefore the ban on reconciliation was made with a view to limiting the contagion of uncleanness, so that the rest of the population are preserved from her like. God holds out no hope for a divorced and remarried woman ever regaining her clean status. She is unclean for life. She has passed her sale-by date and is totally useless to God and man. But this is all due to the hard-heartedness of her first husband. He is to blame for her being discarded by God. She is no longer fit for purpose. But Jesus holds out hope for these divorced wives because He taught that the punishment for their adulterous second marriages would be laid on their first husbands, and not on them (Mt 5:32).

Jesus was totally aware of the evil consequences that Moses's consolidation of divorce would bring on these divorced wives, and for the first time He reveals that the defiled status that remarriage brings on the divorced and remarried wife would, in future, be laid at the door of the husband. He would be held responsible for her defilement when she remarries, because his action brought an end to her clean status. The only exception Jesus makes to his culpability is when his wife ends her clean status herself by committing fornication while still married to him. She, not he, ended her clean status, so in the Judgment Day he will not be held responsible for causing her to lose her clean status. That is what the so-called ‘exception clause’ refers to in Matthew 5:32, which should read, “But I—I say to you, that who, say, may put away his wife makes her to commit adultery—apart from the matter of her own fornication—and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

Jesus is not creating a lawful cause to divorce a wife. He is creating a lawful case to be exempt from the blame of her losing her clean status. This lawful case is independent of the last statement, which states that any marriage with a divorced person, male or female, is an adulterous relationship, which will exclude those persons from entering the Kingdom of God.

Once it is realised that God is not prescribing in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 how a law on divorce is to operate, and that divorce did not originate with Him or with Moses, nor was it ever sanctioned by Him, there is no conflict between God and the Lord Jesus. Both are firmly against divorce for any reason. The clue that Deuteronomy 24:1-3 describes something that is abhorrent to God lies in the punishment clause in verse 4.

6.3.3.2. Did Jesus change the death penalty into a ground for divorce?

It is conceded by Judaism that the death penalty for adultery was in operation throughout the Old Testament period and up until they lost their political independence to Rome. We have no evidence—not a single case—where divorce was substituted for the death penalty even under Roman occupation. In the eyes of a Roman governor of Judea, Jesus was an obscure figure, who lived on the fringes of the religious establishment which constituted the force that Rome had to deal with and appease. If this religious establishment threatened to disturb the peace, and they were quite capable of doing so, Rome had to listen to them. Consequently, when they kicked up a row over the
punishment that they wanted to mete out to their prisoner, Jesus, they appealed to have him crucified by the Roman authorities. Jesus was arrested by Jewish law-enforcement officials, not on the authority of the Roman governor, nor by Roman soldiers, because He was arrested on a religious charge, not a civil charge.

The unjust nature of this request was not lost on the Roman governor, who thought he could shift the blame for Jesus’ death on to the religious establishment itself, by giving them the right to judge Jesus by their Law, and he was quite prepared to accept the outcome, even if it resulted in the death of the prisoner.

Here we have a clear, historical account where the death of an individual who incurred a breach of the Law of God was allowed by the Roman authorities to be put to death by the native religious authorities. So the death penalty for religious capital offences was conceded by the Roman authorities. As far as they were concerned this was an internal matter that did not concern them. Their concern was to keep public order and collect the taxes.

Given permission by the Roman governor to carry out the death penalty on an obscure rabble-rousing preacher who claimed to be king, but had no army, the religious authorities could have put Jesus to death for blasphemy—which was a death penalty offence—immediately. But for some unexplained reason they feared to carry out their own sentence of death. Instead, they wanted the Roman authorities to kill Jesus, so they changed the religious charge into a non-religious charge, which put the ball back into the Roman governor’s court. Pilate found Jesus not guilty of the charge of civil disobedience, or causing a riot, or anything else that would justify the death penalty. Four times he pronounces a ‘Not guilty’ verdict. But mindful of the powder keg that he was sitting on, it was expedient to kill an isolated individual (for all forsook Him) than risk the wrath of the powerful religious establishment whom he had to placate if he wanted to keep the peace, and appear to be in control of his delegated Roman province in the eyes of the Emperor back in Rome.

Against his better judgement, and the warning conveyed to him by his wife, the gentile Roman governor condemned an innocent man to death out of fear of what trouble the Jewish religious establishment might cause him in the future if he did not carry out their demand. He had nothing to lose, and he could gain a long period of respite if he could put smiles on the faces of the men of the sanhedrin. Huge grins spread over their faces when he sentenced Jesus to be crucified as a criminal. They had got what they wanted: Jesus’ blood would not be on their hands, but on the hands of the Roman authorities. It was exactly the outcome they had prayed to God to give them, and they were absolutely delighted and over the moon with unspeakable joy when they heard the verdict. The governor became their best friend overnight. He would have peace throughout his governorship, and throughout the land, as a result of his action.

When the leaders of the religious establishment appealed to the governor to set a seal on the tomb where Jesus was laid, he granted it immediately. They could get whatever they demanded.

In the light of the readiness of the Roman governor to grant the religious establishment the right to rule their own house as regards implementing the punishments laid down in their law, there can be little doubt but that the Roman governors of Judea left the sanhedrin to prosecute their own religious offenders, and that the death penalty for adultery and blasphemy, etc., would be nodded through by the Roman authorities, as an indifferent matter, and a small matter of religious house-keeping. If the religious establishment put Jesus to death for blasphemy, they would have had to stone him (Lev 24:23; 14-16; Exod 20:7), not hang Him on a tree, or crucify Him.

Pilate’s action may have been typical when he threw back the execution of religious criminals to the religious authorities to carry out in the manner prescribed in their law, be it stoning or hanging, or burning them to death. The execution of religious criminals was not the task of the Roman authorities, and in any case, death by crucifixion was not in conformity with the method laid down in the Law of Moses. Consequently, in the eyes of the religious establishment, Jesus did not die for breaking the law of God, the highest law that there is, but for the lower law of the Roman empire. This was a shame on them, because he broke no Roman law, as Pilate stated on four separate occasions; but they were adamant that He blasphemed God by ‘making Himself God’ (Jn 10:33 Mt 26:65; Mk 14:64).

In the light of this glimpse into life in Judea under Roman dominance it is very likely that the death penalty was carried out by the sanhedrin in accordance with their law, for all capital offences, including adultery, and that this set-up was viewed by the Romans as an internal matter about which they would not interfere. There was no threat to the stability of their rule in allowing the sanhedrin to carry on their normal religious duties.

But the question still has to be answered, Did Jesus commute the death penalty for adultery/fornication to divorce? The answer lies in how the Church dealt with other capital offences. In the case of the man who slept with his father’s wife, this was a capital offence, but the
Church excommunicated him from their company until he repented and was brought back into fellowship. Paul mentions converted adulterers and adulteresses as members of the churches he founded. If they were Jews they should have been stoned to death, or at least excommunicated, but they were accepted into membership upon conversion. We search the New Testament scriptures in vain to find an example where divorce was demanded for adultery, and whether such divorced persons could remarry.

Everything comes back to how we interpret and translate Matthew 19:9. If we accept Erasmus's text then Jesus made an exception to His no remarriage stand, but only in the case of fornication (which is generally held to include adultery). If we accept the Nestle-Aland text (2013) then the Erasmian doctrine becomes problematic.

There is only one solution that brings all the elements of the puzzle together and that is that Jesus upheld the death penalty for fornication (adultery) and consequently God never allowed divorce for it. This left only non-fornication issues by which the Hebrews and the Jews could obtain their divorces. Now, Jesus referred to these non-fornication issues when He said, ‘Who, for example, may have divorced his wife over a non-fornication issue, and may have married another woman he becomes adulterous by marrying her.’

The phrase, ‘over a non-fornication issue,’ is exactly what μη ἕπι πορνεία conveys. The phrase covers everything left over once the capital offences for fornication (adultery) have been removed. God ruled out divorce for fornication (adultery) under Moses's dispensation of Law, and His Son followed the Father's lead in the new dispensation of Grace.

6.4. THE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE JESUS’ TEACHING IN MATTHEW 5:31-32 & 19:9

One writer who researched the so-called exegetical clauses over a life-time declared that he knew of no scholar who disputed the consensus that the two Matthean exception clauses were intended to teach the same point. He went on to note that this helped many to use one clause to throw light on the other clause. The object of this section is to challenge that consensus.

It might seem redundant to some to have a section bringing together the difference between what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and what He taught in Matthew 19:9, but in researching commentaries old and modern it is surprising how often these two passages are misunderstood. The chief cause of this misunderstanding has been Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, which became the basis behind most of the Reformation translations, and the commentaries that soon followed.

It is understandable that taken in isolation the two phrases appear to say the same thing:

“except for fornication” (εἰ μη ἕπι πορνεία = Erasmus's text) (Mt 5:32)
“apart from the matter of fornication” (παρέκτος λόγου πορνείας) (Mt 19:9)

There are two observations to make. First, the correct text is not εἰ μη but simply μη, Erasmus has translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek. He did not follow the evidence of the manuscripts he had before him, none of which had the word εἰ in them. If we remove Erasmus’s addition the English should read “not over fornication.” Now this new translation of the original Greek introduces us to a hidden meaning behind Jesus’ words, for He was asked if it was lawful to divorce for every cause. By ‘lawful’ the Pharisees wanted to know if their pre-Mosaic, age-long practice of divorcing their wives for any cause was according to the law given by God at Mount Sinai. Jesus said it was not. God had not given them permission to divorce their wives for adultery (fornication), neither had He given them permission to divorce their wives for any non-fornication offence. So the Pharisees had no basis in law to divorce their wives for non-fornication offences. So when Jesus said, Whoever divorces his wife for a non-fornication offence (‘not over fornication’) and remarries he is committing adultery, He cancelled out ‘every cause’ that the Pharisees had been traditionally using since the time of Moses to divorce their wives. So Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question directly and fully, when He told them it was unlawful to divorce for every non-fornication offence.

Second, there is a marked linguistic difference between the simple negative ‘not’ (μη) and ‘apart from, besides, not counting’ (παρέκτος), which has been set out under section 5.10. above.

The removal of Erasmus’s addition of εἰ by Lachmann in 1842 came too late to halt the momentum that Erasmus’s faulty text had generated. From Lachmann’s day to the present day no critical edition of the Greek New Testament has followed Erasmus’s addition of εἰ in Matthew 19:9. The Reformers had based their European translations on Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, and so they
translated eἰ μὴ ἤπτι πορνείᾳ as Erasmus hoped they would as an exception to Jesus’ apparent total ban on divorce.

In the many English translations that followed the publication of Erasmus’s Greek text, right up to the present day, without exception, not one of them went back to Lachmann’s discovery that Erasmus had bequeathed a false Greek text to the Reformation churches, who had built their theology around his text, and introduced his exception into their newly created Confessions of Faith. And once Erasmus’s exception for divorce got into these Confessions it was impossible to change them without undermining other doctrines. It was imperative to appear to have recovered all the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles in their pristine glory, without spot or stain, or any hint of fallibility.

It would have been an enormous embarrassment to all the Protestant denominations that emerged out of the Reformation to admit that they followed a faulty Greek text, and so, in this instance, they were fooled into misrepresenting Jesus’ teaching on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

Today, even though it is becoming more widely known that Erasmus’s Greek text caused the Reformers to miss out on Jesus’ teaching over divorce, not a single denomination has revised its doctrinal basis to reflect Jesus’ total ban on divorce. The same goes for every modern English translation to date. Not a single English translation reads, ‘not over fornication’ at Matthew 19:9. Why is this? The answer is simple: they all love Erasmus’s exception and want to retain it.

Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, scores of thousands of Christians have got a divorce on the strength of Erasmus’s faulty Greek text. Among these scores have been bishops and church leaders, and especially members of various translation committees, many of whose members had already availed themselves of Erasmus’s exceptive clause to divorce their wives.

If those in leadership positions had got a divorce and had remarried they were not going to turn around and say that they were wrong, and get out of their second marriages. Rather than do that, they preferred to grant divorces to all who applied for a divorce on the same grounds that they got theirs. The more that divorce spread throughout Christ’s Church, the harder it would become to say that they were all wrong.

When some leaders then added ‘desertion’ to adultery as a second, lawful cause to divorce a spouse, this multiplied the number of those divorcing their wives. When some other leaders advocated following the Jewish practice of divorcing for other ‘biblical’ causes, this opened the flood gates to divorce for a whole string of new grounds for divorce, so that today there is practically no difference between the grounds that Christians and non-Christians use to get a divorce. It has been shown that the percentage of divorces among Christians is, on average, the same as among non-Christians. Christ’s teaching has been totally nullified among His followers. He has nothing distinctive to say about divorce. He is made to agree with the world, and to grant divorce for any reasonable cause. His Church and the world have joined hands in singing from the same hymn sheet. On the issue of divorce, Moses has come alive again in Christ’s Church, and his voice and opinion once again dominates among the People of God, and drowns out the voice of Christ. The Lord comes across as ideal; Moses comes across as real. Moses is flexible and sympathetic; Jesus is hard and unyielding. Moses speaks commonsense; Jesus speaks nonsense. Because of this, Moses has more disciples than Christ, in Christ’s own Church.

6.4.1. Is ‘except for fornication’ the same thing as ‘not over fornication’?

There is a move to exonerate Erasmus’s instinctive awareness of the truth and to say that even if we remove his addition of ἤπτι this would not do away with his exception, because it is argued that, ‘except for fornication,’ is the same as ‘not over fornication.’ But let us examine this in more detail.

Jesus, like no man before Him, could see the evils of divorce. We have in Matthew 5:31-32 His thoughts on the implications of divorce. Here He is not spelling out His absolutist position, but commenting on the implications of going ahead with a divorce. And the implications are extremely serious, as He is about to explain to them. He said, “Now it was said, ‘Who, say, may have divorced his wife, let him give to her a departure document.’ But I, I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife he makes her to become adulterous—apart from the case of [her] fornication. And who if, say, may have married a divorced wife he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

Note the insinuation of Jesus. The man who divorces makes his wife commit adultery. Josephus noted that according to Jewish law only the man “is permitted by us to do this [initiate a divorce], and not even a divorced woman may marry again on her own initiative unless her former
husband consents” (Ant. vol. 8. Bk 15. §259 [= 7.10]). A later bill of divorce contained the following words:198

. . . I . . . have voluntarily, with the willingness of my soul, without constraint, both dismissed, and left, and put away, thee, N. the daughter of N. . . . who has been my wife heretofore; but now I dismiss thee, leave thee, and put thee away, that thou mayest be free and have power over thine own soul, to go away, to be married to any man whom thou wilt; and that no man be refused of thine hand for my name from this day and for ever. And thus thou art lawful for any man: and this bill is unto thee from me a writing of divorcement, and bill of dismissal, and epistle of putting away, according to the law of Moses and Israel.

{Signed:}

N. son of N. witness
N. son of N. witness

The culpability for the divorced wife’s remarriage is laid at the feet of the husband in Jesus’ statement, and Josephus’s statement confirms the background to Jesus’ teaching. The husband would vehemently dispute the implication that Jesus has imposed on his act of divorce. He would argue that once he had handed to her her bill of divorce, setting her free to marry whoever she pleased, that what she did after that was none of his business. This Jesus challenged head on.

Under His new Covenant rule over all men, the man who divorced his wife would be held responsible for his wife’s subsequent adultery when she remarried. The implication of this new ruling was that it was impossible to get a divorce and remain innocent, and that is exactly the point Jesus was determined to push all men to. Divorce was now abolished worldwide, and anyone who thought they could go on living under the old Mosaic provisions would be excluded from God’s presence.

Matthew 5:31-32 must be set in the context of who is culpable for the consequences of divorcing one’s partner. Jesus puts the responsibility on the husband for what happens to a man’s wife after he divorces her.

Jesus’ words are, “Whoever may divorce his wife makes her to commit adultery.” Note that adultery is the sin of a married woman. This is an important observation. Jesus chooses His words very carefully. If divorce did what it claims to do, then she is not a married woman once she is divorced, and therefore she cannot be committing adultery as a single woman. If divorce did what it claims to do then Jesus used the wrong verb. He should have said, “makes her to commit fornication (not adultery),” because she is an unmarried woman if she is truly divorced. An unmarried woman cannot commit adultery; she can only commit fornication.

Jesus goes on to say, “and who, if so say, marries a woman having been divorced commits adultery.” Now if divorce truly means what its claims, then the divorced woman is no longer a married woman, she is single again, therefore the bachelor who marries her cannot be said to be committing adultery with her. Adultery is a sin that only married persons can commit. Jesus abolished the idea that if she has been divorced then she is not married, and He abolished the idea that neither she, nor her bachelor second husband are exempt from committing adultery in their new, loving relationship.

The clear inference in Jesus’ mind is that the divorce procedure did not do what it claimed to do, namely, sever the ‘one flesh’ union of the first marriage. As a consequence, after the divorce she is still married to her first husband. She is not a single person. As a married woman she cannot marry a second husband, as that is bigamy, and this is how Jesus views her post-divorce remarriage. She is in a state of sin, and living in sin with her second ‘husband’ (who is not her husband). She is living the life of an adulteress, and as such she will not enter the Kingdom of God. She is, to use God’s own words from Deuteronomy 24:4, an unclean or defiled woman, and one whom He regards as an abomination.

If we take the view that Jesus did not use the wrong verbs, then He is clear in His mind that divorce did not do what it claimed to do. Nothing happened to the union between husband and wife during the divorce proceedings. Once this is accepted then it becomes obvious that Jesus did not use the wrong verbs. His choice of verbs indicates quite clearly that after the husband issued his wife with a ‘roll of severance’ nothing changed. The husband might well have handed her a roll of toilet paper for all the difference it made to their married status in the eyes of God.

Jesus was the first rabbi in history to realise that the ‘roll of severance’ was completely bogus and a sham—a scam. He overturned one of the central tenets of Judaism in an instant, as surely as He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple. Judaism could never be the same again.

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198 Taken from Davies Morgan, op. cit., p. 36.
Jesus, through the force of His personality, rewrote the foundation document of the New Judaism. He abolished the millennia-long tradition of divorce showing that it was incompatible with His Father's stated will for all marriages as encapsulated in Genesis 2:24.

The implication of Jesus' new revelation over the ineffectualness of the obsolete 'roll of severance' (or 'bill of divorce') was that every divorce (with or without a written statement) since the dawn of time was bogus. God never sanctioned man's creation of divorce at any time in the history of mankind. Every divorced couple since the beginning of the world were, and are, adulterers through their remarriages.

As far as Jesus' disciples were concerned, who sat listening to His Sermon on the Mount, this meant that every divorce since the time of Moses was a bogus 'divorce,' and every remarriage based on this bogus divorce was an adulterous relationship, because they were still married. Every 'divorce' was ineffectual and a fraud. This was a truly breathtaking and astounding statement to make on that hillside.

As the rabbis took stock of this unbelievable statement, the enormity of the accusation and its implication must have struck home to them. For Jesus to claim that no divorce was ever effectual since the time of Moses meant that all the children of remarriages were defiled or unclean children. It also meant that if anywhere in their genealogical records they discovered that they were the offspring of a remarriage then they were the descendants of defiled parents. Rather than accept Jesus' reinterpretation of their genealogical descent they would have dismissed Him as a crank.

Once Jesus' teaching on the bogus nature of divorce got out, He would have been surrounded with Jewish lawyers plying Him with supposedly difficult questions to which only they had the answers (or so they thought). They were the experts in such matters. The people would listen to them.

One of the implications that must have disturbed the unbelieving Pharisees enormously was that in the entire history of Israel there was not a single case of a legitimate divorce. If Jesus was correct then God never dissolved a single marriage through divorce, because all divorces were bogus divorces. This revelation would have stunned the entire judicial system in Israel. The consensus of the entire religious establishment could only be that Jesus had over-reached Himself, and made a fool of Himself to make such a claim. The enormity of the implications were too great to contemplate, and for the majority in the religious establishment this is the point at which they knew Jesus was a bogus messiah. They would not have any respect for Him from this point onwards. He was finished. They could despise Him with impunity, knowing that He was just a country bumpkin saying outlandish things, which were so obviously wrong.

It must have greatly damaged Jesus' reputation among the masses when they learned that no divorce since the time of Moses was valid. This was just too preposterous to be true. 'It is a crazy thing to say,' His sympathisers would have said to one another. 'Why did He have to say that?' others of His friends would have asked, shaking their heads in disbelief.

The claim that only death ended a marriage meant that all other means for ending a marriage were bogus, false, spurious, a sham, and a deception. This was revolutionary stuff. If death alone ended a marriage, then indeed, divorce could not end a marriage. Many would have seen the logic of Jesus' teaching, without necessarily agreeing that He was right. For them, the fact that Moses commanded them to write out a 'roll of severance' clearly implied that Moses believed it did what was claimed for it. By regulating a divorce procedure Moses showed that he was not anti-divorce, and so Moses must have believed that divorce did dissolve a lawful marriage if the procedure was properly carried out.

Those who saw in Jesus the long-awaited Messiah, whom Moses had prophesied would come, when they looked more closely and carefully at Deuteronomy 24:1-4, noticed that there God was only describing the sin of divorce. He was not condoning it, legitimising it, or incorporating it into His Law. Rather, He condemned it by punishing anyone who took advantage of this worldwide custom and tradition, which had legal force behind it in all Near Eastern civilisations.

Jesus, in one bold statement, took away from man the claim to be able to end a marriage through divorce, when He said, "they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate (χωρίζομαι)." With this one statement Jesus dismissed all divorce courts throughout the world. Jesus has restored to God the sole right to end a marriage, and the only instrument He has chosen to use is death (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2).

The abolition by Jesus of all Jewish courts throughout Israel that handled divorce issues was another step too far for many of Jesus' sympathisers. They must have groaned repeatedly the more they heard of His unbelievable claims and His revolutionary reforms. It was all too much, too soon, to have a hope of being welcomed by the masses, particularly when not a single rabbi in the land could be found to endorse His preposterous claims. If Jesus had moderated His teaching, and toned down the more unacceptable elements of His revolutionary ideas, then maybe He could make Himself more
appealing to the masses, would have been the advice of His closest friends, especially those in high places, among the movers and shakers in the nation.

But Jesus was not looking solely at His contemporary world. His was to be a kingdom that would fill the Earth. He was laying out His manifesto which would never need to be revised as long as the Earth existed. Humanly speaking, He was head-strong, because He knew right from wrong as no other rabbi did. He could not be deflected to gain the favour of the masses of His day. His was a global vision. He saw Abraham’s day (looking backward) and He saw our day (looking forward), and He catered for both, and for all time to come. His teaching was set in stone during His earthly ministry. It cannot be altered by any preacher or teacher. Jesus presents us with the stark choice: ‘Take it or leave it; but do not interfere with it.’

Another aspect of Jesus’ teaching on divorce that must have come under close scrutiny by contemporary Jewish lawyers was Jesus’ claim that a wife cannot have sexual relations with two living men. Jesus taught that she must wait until her first husband died, and only then could she remarry. This was a fixed law in His teaching on marriage and remarriage. So the sequence was: marriage: death: remarriage. The wrong sequence was: marriage: remarriage: death. Death must come between ‘marriage’ and ‘remarriage’ to be valid.

This divine sequence was unacceptable to sinful man, so man (not God) introduced the bogus step of divorce between ‘marriage’ and ‘remarriage.’ Man claimed that he could turn back the ‘one flesh’ union into its two constituent parts, and begin the sequence all over again as though the first union was completely reversed. The claim was bogus in the eyes of the Son of Man.

Nations will go on claiming to have power to ‘put asunder’ what God has fused together in a ‘one flesh’ union. They are on the same level that Moses was on. Those who believe in this bogus power and get a divorce, and then remarry, are in an adulterous relationship. If they want to come to Christ to seek His forgiveness, then they must retrace their steps by dissolving their second marriages, either unilaterally or by retracing the legal procedure that got them into their mess, and stay single or be reconciled to their first partner. Only then can they have a clear conscience and devote the rest of their lives to ‘preaching’ the Gospel in whatever form their gender dictated for them. This could take the form of personal evangelism, writing, singing, etc.

Jewish lawyers may have thought they spotted a flaw in Jesus’ teaching that a woman can only have sexual relations with one man during his life time. The perceived flaw in Jesus’ teaching is that He stated that if a husband ‘divorces’ his wife he becomes responsible for all her sins of adultery, because he put her out in the street with a written document which told her that she was free to marry whoever she choose. From Jesus’ point of view the written document does not give the divorced wife freedom to marry whoever she chooses. Jesus still views her as married to his first husband, who has now given her permission to have sexual relations with any other man. Her husband has given her permission to commit adultery. The husband would insist that he followed the legal procedure correctly and so his marriage was dissolved. Jesus has to inform him that he is mistaken in his belief that divorce dissolved the union. The union still stands, and consequently he will be held accountable for his wife’s sins of adultery following the divorcement.

Lawyers would have been quick to point out that if the wife had sexual relations before her divorce with a second man, without the knowledge of the husband, the husband could not be held accountable for her defilement, since it occurred before he divorced her. It was a subtle point, and one which a lawyer would spot. And of course they were right.

Jesus (supreme lawyer and teacher in His own right) had already anticipated this perceived flaw—being more knowledgeable in the Law than any lawyer alive or dead—when, in His carefully crafted statement in 5:32, He said, “But I—I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife—apart from a deed of fornication [by her]—makes her to commit adultery [through a remarriage].”

If the wife had committed adultery against her husband she would have been stoned to death. Jesus recognised the distinction between ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ by a married woman and a married husband. A married husband could commit fornication with a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:15-16), or sleep with his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5:1; cf. Deut 22:30). These are not sins of adultery. These are sins of fornication. Given the fact that in the Graeco-Roman world one could have a mistress without being guilty of adultery by Roman standards, and that sexual relations with prostitutes, boys, or slaves were not illegal by Roman standards, and were considered a part of normal life, it is not surprising that the Council of Jerusalem specifically excluded fornication from

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the lives of Christ’s followers (Acts 15:29). Fornication, in this context, would have included adultery and homosexuality of any kind.

Jesus is quite explicit in telling the married husband that if he divorces his wife, and in written form permits her to sleep with a second man, he will be held responsible for her sleeping with a second man. But the husband could rightly point out that when his wife committed fornication while still married to him, it was her choice to sleep with the second man, and not his. He only divorced her after, and because, she slept with a second man. Jesus concurs that if his wife slept with a second man before her husband divorced her, then he could not be held accountable for her first sin of fornication, but once he had divorced her because of her first sin, then all subsequent relations with other living men would be charged to his account. This was a very sobering prospect. The husband would be exempt from punishment for his wife’s first act of fornication (and breach of marriage covenant), but because, in the eyes of Jesus, he is still married to her after the legal divorce has gone through, he will be punished for her remarriage.

If, however, the divorced wife does not remarry but becomes a prostitute, or sleeps around with other men, she knows that this is wrong, and so her divorced husband will not be held accountable for these sins of fornication. She will bear these herself. But he will still be held accountable for putting her out in the street.

Now here comes the ‘exemption clause’. Note that the so-called exception is not a loophole to Jesus’ absolutist position, but an exemption (note the change in terminology) to the man’s culpability for what happens to his wife after he has set her out in the street. It should be borne in mind what a divorce document could have said:

“. . . I . . . with entire consent of mind, and without any compulsion, have divorced, dismissed, and expelled thee – thee, I say, M. the daughter of M. . . . who wast heretofore my wife: but now I have dismissed thee . . . so as to be free, and at thine own disposal, to marry whomsoever thou pleasest, without hindrance from any one, from this day for ever. Thou art therefore free for any man. Let this be thy bill of divorce from me, a writing of separation and expulsion, according to the law of Moses and Israel. . . .”

There can be no doubt about the blank cheque that the husband was handing to his wife “to marry whomsoever thou pleasest, . . . Thou art therefore free for any man.”

However, in the case of Jesus’ teaching on marriage, His exemption covers only the case where she commits fornication during her marriage and/or after her husband has divorced her. Jesus would not be unjust to blame a man for his wife’s unfaithfulness while she was living with him. Neither would Jesus hold a man responsible for his wife’s sexual sins after he divorced her if she prostitutes herself. She knows that this is an unlawful state, hence she becomes responsible for her own sins. But if she remarries, thinking that she has been truly set free by her husband, then her second marriage is an adulterous relationship, because in God’s eyes she is still the wife of her first husband. In this case, Jesus puts the blame for her adultery on her first husband, but He makes an exemption if his wife, of her own free will, does not remarry but lives a life of fornication. This is the explanation for the exemption clause in Matthew 5:31-32.

Likewise, if a wife divorces her husband for fornication while they were still married, she is not held responsible for his sin. When he leaves her, if he chooses not to remarry, but lives a life of fornication, then she will not be held responsible for his sins. However, if he believes that she has given him his freedom to remarry, then she will be held responsible for his sin of adultery, because in God’s eyes he is still married to her.

But there was another dimension to the Pharisees’ trap. They had heard Jesus preach the sum of the Law as, ‘Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.’ He had also preached that unless we forgive others their sins, God would not forgive us our sins (Luke 11:4). It implied that the sin of adultery had to be forgiven should the offender ask for it (cf. Luke 17:3). The ancients had preached, ‘Love your neighbour, and hate your enemy’ (Matthew 5:43), but Jesus turned this on its head and commanded His followers to ‘love your enemies’ (Matthew 5:43). They were to bless those cursing them. They were to do good to those hating them. They were to pray for their persecutors and those saying all manner of evil things about them. They were to turn the other cheek, when hit by their enemies. The Pharisees could not understand this new teaching of the ‘Kingdom of God’ that Jesus preached everywhere as ‘being within you’ (Luke 17:22), and as having ‘come near’ to the nation of Israel. Jesus prayed to His Father to forgive those who crucified Him. He was true to His own teaching right up to the end.

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The trap the Pharisees laid for Him was simple. They tempted Him to name some sins that would justify divorce. They dictated the shape of Jesus’ answer by posing the question in a loaded manner. They asked, Is it lawful to divorce for every cause? If He had replied: ‘for every cause,’ then He would have agreed with rabbi Hillel’s list and his interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-3, which consisted of (1) adultery, (2) desertion, (3) abuse, (4) hard-heartedness, (5) neglect, and (6) any other cause a husband wished to nominate, such as burning his dinner.

No doubt, as they discussed the possibilities that Jesus might give in His answer, they would have assumed that He would mention fornication as the number one sin worthy of a divorce, as this was universally agreed to be the most heinous sin against the marriage union. It was also commonsense. How far His list would agree with Shamma’i’s or Hillel’s was, no doubt, also on their minds. But if Jesus had agreed with them to nominate one sin that should not be forgiven, then He was a hypocrite, and they would have laughed Him to scorn. Why? Because He preached that men should forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-23), and seven times a day (Luke 17). Now if Jesus had an exception clause tucked away somewhere in His teaching, to His own absolute position on forgiving all sins, then He misled Peter. An exception for the sin of fornication would have undermined His own teaching that men must forgive others all their sins. But has Jesus nominated a sin that should not be forgiven? If He has, that would not be in keeping with the Lord’s Prayer (‘forgive us our sins as we forgive others their sins’). And significantly, it would be the only sin that Jesus taught should be punished, rather than forgiven.

Jesus saw through their trap easily and in His answer He put them on the spot. The one sin that they felt sure He would agree not to forgive would be fornication, but it was precisely this sin that He side-lined when He said: “Whoever divorces his wife—not over fornication [which God has specifically singled out for the death penalty]—and marries another commits adultery.” Jesus taught that no sin was too great that it could not be forgiven unilaterally, even fornication, or adultery. Jesus easily evaded the trap because His teaching on love and forgiveness was at the heart of His Gospel. God had continually forgiven Israel her ‘adultery’ for 1500 years. Hoshea had forgiven his wife her adultery. Neither divorced their spouses in real historical time. Jesus found the golden rule in the Scriptures: “All things, therefore, that you wish that men should do to you, do likewise to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Jesus came through the trap laid for Him without compromising His absolutist position regarding the illegitimacy and unlawfulness of divorce among His followers. He upheld His Father’s teaching: “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

The exemption clause in Matthew 5:32 is a genuine exemption clause. The evil came about through Codex Vaticanus and other corrupt manuscripts, which transferred this grammatically, genuine exemption clause into Matthew 19:9, where it does not belong. Matthew 19:9 contains an exclusion clause, not an exemption clause.

From an examination of the above texts it is clear that Jesus has abolished divorce *per se*. There are now no grounds for divorce. Divorce was the creation of man. Marriage was the creation of God.

It follows that if the man-made creation of divorce has been abolished for all time to come then remarriage is out of the question. All remarriages are adulterous relationships while both spouses are still alive. Both fornicators and adulterers are excluded from heaven:

Have you not known that the unrighteous the reign of God shall not inherit? Be not led astray; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminates, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, the reign of God shall inherit. And certain of you were these! But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were declared righteous, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9).

When Codex Vaticanus transferred the exemption clause in Matthew 5:32 into Matthew 19:9, and when Erasmus added *ei* (EI) before *πάντα* in Matthew 19:9, both of these changes introduced a completely new idea. Where Jesus had said, ‘not over fornication,’ meaning, a man may not divorce for a non-fornication cause, Erasmus changed it to read, he may not divorce ‘except for fornication,’ which Erasmus then translated into Latin to read, ‘except for indecency,’ thereby permitting divorce

201 Many in Paul’s churches had been adulterers and fornicators (1 Corinthians 6:11) before their conversion but they were ‘cleansed’ of this sin before they were permitted to become church members. Jesus did envisage church discipline, see Matthew 19:15-17, and excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) with the object of restoring the sinner to full membership again.
for fornication and virtually ‘every cause’ that a man could squeeze into the term ‘indecency.’ He is rabbi Hillel come alive again.

The Torah ruled out divorce for fornication, and Jesus specifically ruled out non-fornication issues as grounds for divorce, but Erasmus turned the text into grounds for divorce. You could not get a more blatant contradiction that this, and this blatant misrepresentation of Jesus’ teaching is present in every major English translation from the Reformation to the present day. It is these mistranslations which are the cause of sin among all Protestant denominations.

A large number of Christian leaders are in an adulterous, second-marriage situation. These men are never going to abide by the standard that Jesus has set for His people. It is from among these men that translation committees are formed, ensuring that the ‘exceptional clauses’ remain embedded in each succeeding new translation.

6.4.2. Does ‘making her an adulteress’ have any exceptions?

In order to correctly understand the implications of Matthew 5:32 it is helpful to restate its propositions clearly:

1. Anyone who divorces his wife for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulterer.
2. Anyone who divorces his wife for marital unfaithfulness, does not cause her to become an adulteress.

Proposition (1) clearly states that the practice of divorcing one’s wife has the ultimate effect of turning her into an adulteress, given that she would inevitably remarry.

Proposition (2), on the other hand, states that if a man divorces his wife because she has committed adultery, then he would not cause her to become an adulteress because she would already be an adulteress. Thus, her moral status would not change if she married again. This is the reason why Matthew specifies an exception at this point. If the exception was not present, Matthew’s statement that the divorced woman would subsequently be made into an adulteress given that she would inevitably remarry, becomes superfluous because her adultery was the reason for the divorce in the first place.

The objection to this interpretation is this. If the husband divorced his wife for her adultery, this was an unlawful act while he lived under the Torah. He should be seeking a death certificate for her not a divorce certificate. He had no right to divorce her. Consequently, if he divorced her, then he is causing her to commit adultery against himself because in the eyes of God and the Lord Jesus, she is still his wife, because only her death can sever the marriage bond. And whoever marries her after she has been divorced for adultery becomes an adulterer.

The exemption must relate to the same woman throughout verse 32, otherwise the statement “...and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery” becomes grammatically independent of the exemption clause (which some writers want to do) and would state that a man who marries a faithful but divorced woman (i.e., a woman who was divorced for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness) commits adultery. But this ‘faithful but divorced woman’ is not under scrutiny by Jesus at this point in time. But it is implied. If the ‘unfaithful’ woman is divorced and remarried and she makes her second husband an adulterer, so also must be the case of the ‘faithful’ woman who is divorced and remarried. The truth is that Jesus is focussed on who is responsible for the sins of a divorced woman who remarries. And He lays the blame on the husband who divorces her.

The diagram below shows the gulf that exists between the life of the Lord Jesus and the life of the Pharisees. Jesus was ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world.’ His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom. To enter His kingdom a man had to be ‘born-from-above.’ To remain within His kingdom one had to have the Spirit of Christ living within him. The contrasts could not be greater. Jesus knew that His kingdom had invaded the realm of the kingdom of Satan, and from Satan’s kingdom would be rescued a remnant of humanity. The mindset of that remnant would be increasingly conformed to His own image—an image of freely forgiving all who sinned and an intense love to do all in one’s power to urge all men to be reconciled to God, their Maker. Jesus called on His disciples to live a life totally different from that of the Pharisees. A crucial area of difference was one’s attitude to the marriage bond.

The diagram shows that where the Pharisees could not forgive their wives they resorted to divorce. Jesus taught that this act was incompatible with His forgiving spirit. That clearly marked off His disciples from the disciples of Moses. Indeed, an unbridgeable gulf separated the two life-styles.

The diagram shows that where the Pharisees introduced remarriage, Jesus permitted His followers to accept enforced separation, the separation that comes from sin—and to patiently wait for
reconciliation. If reconciliation did not look probable, His followers were not to be anxious about it, but to devote their new status as ‘freed from marriage’ to give more time to His cause.

The diagram also shows that Jesus put remarriage on the same level as adultery. Remarriages can only occur in the worldly realm, in the kingdom of Satan, among those living ‘according to the flesh,’ in other words among those who are perishing, who are living without the Spirit of Christ. Remarriage after a divorce is a sin, because it opposes what God has required of all men from the beginning of the creation.

The constant danger facing the Elect remnant is to forsake the spiritual realm and go back into Satan’s kingdom to take advantage of his Divorce Certificate, thinking that it will free him from his unwanted wife. But to do so will lead to spiritual death. If he can’t forgive, then neither will he be forgiven.

Jesus put marriage in its place when He avoided it in order to concentrate body, mind, and spirit on doing the will of God for Him. Paul put marriage in its place when he advised every brother in Christ to avoid it if he could and, like Jesus and himself, fasten their eyes on doing the will of God. This avoidance of marriage should not be construed that Jesus and Paul were anti-marriage. Did not Jesus do His first miracle while attending a marriage with His disciples? Satan has a vested interest in portraying Jesus and Paul as deficient in sexuality themselves, and despisers of those who ‘give in’ to their sexual desires. But though a blanket of abuse has been thrown over Jesus and Paul and countless monks, and other unmarried saints down through the ages, the Elect are not fooled by these slurs, and they are given insight into the wisdom of God in calling single men and women to follow Him as they are.
A woman who has sex with two living men is a defiled woman and an abomination to God and the Lord Jesus Christ from the Creation of the World to the End of Time.

Both are considered adultery by the Lord Jesus Christ issued in place of forgiveness.

A fixed guilt: the transition from man to God is through a 'born-from-above' experience.

Marriage considered to be permanent.

Marriage considered to be non-permanent.

Physical death under the Old Covenant, spiritual death under the New Covenant.

Life with the Spirit of Christ:
- Spiritual Realm
- Christian
- Jesus Christ

Life without the Spirit of Christ:
- Worldly Realm
- Non-Christian
- Moses

A woman who has sex with two living men is a defiled woman and an abomination to God and the Lord Jesus Christ from the Creation of the World to the End of Time.
6.4.3. Summary of difference between Matthew 5:32 and 19:9

Matthew 5:32 contains an exemption from blame clause; Matthew 19 is an exclusion to divorce. The two words that sum up the difference are ‘exemption’ and ‘exclusion.’

The exemption clause
Matthew 5:32, “But I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife makes her to commit adultery—apart from the matter of her own fornication—and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

The exclusion clause
Matthew 19:9, “And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may marry another commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away commits adultery.”

The difference between Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is that in the former Jesus warns every man divorcing his wife, that if another man sleeps with his wife, he is guilty of making her commit adultery, unless, and this is where the exemption comes in, unless she commits fornication of her own accord while still married to him, then he is not guilty for her sin under those circumstances. But he is guilty if she remarryes.

In the case of Matthew 19:9, Jesus warns all Jewish men that divorce on the grounds of a non-sexual offence is against God’s will. There is no exception under Jesus’ content-identity clause, ‘not over fornication,’ because the death penalty covered the sin of fornication and adultery.

There are some who, through carelessness or indifference, do not want to understand the two distinct, spiritual truths that Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. They import the legitimate exemption clause in 5:32 into 19:9 where it is illegitimate, and they cause Jesus to be a teacher of divorce.

There will always be some Christians who will want to insist that Jesus provided for divorce for adultery. In this work I have shown that the original text of Matthew 19:9, which is now followed by all printed Greek texts, did not have the Erasmian exceptive clause. Instead, it had a content-identity phrase, specifically identifying non-sexual grounds for divorce as invalid. Those who want to use Erasmus’s Greek text to get a divorce from their spouses are choosing to ignore the fact that no critical text of the Greek New Testament agrees with Erasmus’s text in Matthew 19:9.

Even if some Christians want to go on believing that Erasmus’s Greek text is the original text, because it is the Textus Receptus, then they should spell out the difference between the two, so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew 5 and 19. Through this exercise they will recognise that Matthew 5 teaches an exemption from blame not an exception to divorce, whereas Matthew 19 teaches the abolition of divorce for any cause currently being used by the Jews in Jesus’ day.

Now we know that the exception for divorce in Matthew 19:9 depends solely on Erasmus’s text, but if they concede that that text is now wrong then they lose the Erasmian text, and they lose the textual basis for their exception for divorce. In other words, the Lord Jesus deliberately and pointedly excluded divorce for any cause currently being used by the Jews Jesus took the position that a wife is for life, and once joined physically, then only death could part a married couple.

6.5. WHY ARE THE EXEMPTION AND EXCLUSION CLAUSES ONLY IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL?

The Pharisees had heard of Jesus’ absolute ban on divorce as recorded in Luke 16:18, which pre-dates Matthew 19/ Mark 10 by a few months. It must have come as a shock to them to hear that He had totally abolished their carefully crafted list of grounds for divorce. Jesus must have come across as an extremist. No doubt they debated among themselves the implications of His teaching on account of the multitudes that had obtained divorces on their authority. So a trap was set for Jesus. They crafted their question in such a way that He would have to state unambiguously before witnesses on what grounds He would or would not grant divorces. They decided to ask Jesus if it was lawful to divorce for every cause. They could have asked directly if He agreed with Shammai and condemned Hillel’s quickie, divorce-on-demand (if such existed). They probably took for granted that Jesus would go along with both rabbis in granting divorce for fornication, seeing that was universally conceded by the entire nation (so we are told), but they wanted to probe further and see if Jesus would go beyond their number one grounds for divorce, and list a few other grounds for
divorce, possibly including some of rabbi Hillel’s non-sexual grounds. Indeed, if the group of Pharisees who asked the question were opposed to Hillel’s ‘any cause’ grounds for divorce, they may have hoped to use Jesus as an ally to condemn the quick divorces handed out by the Hillel school (if it existed at that time). So they were both testing and tempting Jesus to say something that they could later on use against Him, or against the Hillelites. But Jesus knew the entire background to the coming temptation and testing. He knew their motives and He knew that they relied on their own interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.

Jesus knew that Deuteronomy 24:1-3 portrayed and highlighted the evil of divorce, which came by men, and for men’s advantage. Women were given no rights to divorce their husbands. It was a one-sided, private, family law. It was a very unfair law, an evil law. It was a sexist law. It was a cloak for bullying. It could not have come from God, or originated with Him. And Jesus very pointedly stated that Moses consolidated an unlawful practice, which was not sanctioned by His Father. He distanced His Father from the practice, and He distanced Himself from it. It was an evil tradition, concocted by evil men, to gratify their evil lusts. It exploited women. It degraded women. It treated women like chattels. Jesus put His finger directly on the origin of the idea of divorce. It arose out of the evil heart of man, from man’s hard-heartedness. By pinpointing the origin of the idea Jesus showed that it was evil in essence.

6.5.1. Why did Mark leave out Matthew’s content-identity clause?

So the clearest explanation for the presence of the exemption and the exclusion clauses in Matthew is that (1) this Gospel was written for Jews and Jewish believers in particular, and (2) that Matthew deliberately chose the complete wording of the question that the Pharisees asked, which included ‘for any cause,’ because he wanted to convince the Jews that there was no cause that could dissolve a lawful marriage.

This explains why Mark curtailed the Pharisees’ question. Mark and Luke knew there were no exceptions, and this they conveyed to their respective audiences. Matthew was saying the same thing. So Matthew’s exclusion clause in Jesus’ reply is directly related to the Pharisees’ words: ‘for any cause.’ Because Matthew made the conscious decision to include the words ‘for any cause’ in his account, he was obliged to include Jesus’ exclusion of all non-fornication causes, so that Jesus was seen to give a direct and full answer to the Pharisees’ loaded question. If Matthew had left out the clause, then Jesus would not have given a full answer to the question that He was asked.

Because Mark did not include the words ‘for any cause’ in his account, he was under no obligation to include the content-identity clause. So with or without the words ‘for any cause,’ Jesus gives a full answer in both Gospels on where He stood over the issue of divorce.

We can now appreciate the appropriateness of the Spirit guiding Matthew to include the longer version of the question, so that the Jews would be left without excuse.

We noted that what Matthew said in 19:7-9 was passed over by Mark because Jesus’ answer was tailor-made to answer a Jewish question about Jewish law (“Is it lawful to put away a wife for all [non-fornication] causes?”). If a Roman or a Greek had asked the same question, “Is it lawful to put away a wife for all causes—sexual or non-sexual?” the answer would have been an unambiguous No, because as a matter of law the Gentiles had written their own law-codes, and gave themselves that privilege.

Matthew passed over what Mark included in 10:11-12, because it would have been a repetition of Jesus’ position on divorce. However, Mark chose to reveal to his readership what Jesus said in the house to His own disciples, who asked for clarification of His position. Jesus’ reply was tailor-made to suit a Gentile audience, or rather, a universal audience, because not only did Jesus condemn husbands taking the initiative to divorce their wives, but He condemned wives taking the initiative to divorce their husbands. Only in non-Jewish cultures did wives have the right in law to divorce their husbands. No Jewish woman, living in Israel, had that right, as Josephtus and Philo inform us.

There are no ‘exceptional clauses’ in Mark or Luke because there are no exceptional clauses in Matthew. The so-called ‘exceptional clause’ in Matthew turns out to be a content-identity phrase informing the Pharisees that all cases of divorce based on non-fornication, non-capital offences were unlawful, and were unlawful from the beginning of the creation of Adam and Eve.

The implication of Jesus’ new teaching was that Moses was forced to give in to the hard men of his day and buckle under social pressure to allow them to continue their current tradition of divorcing their wives ‘for all [non-capital] causes.’ Having lost the moral battle, and aware that Yahweh had instituted the death penalty for sexual misdemeanours, Moses commanded the males (for he bowed to male privilege) to write out a private bill of divorce when they sent away their wives,
in order to avoid the death penalty for adultery. His command, which never entered Scripture, was directly influenced by the death penalty for adultery and fornication of any kind. He would never have issued his command if the death penalty had not been instituted for fornication by Yahweh.

Moses did not institute divorce in Israel. It existed in his day as a tradition of the elders, and he could not change it, or abolish it. He succumbed to national pressure to retain it. Not so, did the second Moses. Jesus stood up and abolished divorce ‘for all causes’ and took the nation back to the will of Yahweh as expressed in Genesis 2:24. His boldness was like poking a bees’ nest, and the entire religious establishment descended on Him and crushed Him by having Him nailed to a Roman cross. They thought that in silencing the man they had silenced His teaching, but twelve Spirit-filled apostles took His teaching out into all the world.

Jesus’ teaching has been retained only by the Roman Catholic Church to the present day. It was retained by the Church of England up until 1856 when a Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was passed in Parliament allowing “the principle of divorce a vinculo [from bond] for adultery,” but not for desertion.

6.5.2. The unity of the Gospels over Jesus’ no divorce teaching

We now have a situation where all three Gospels are united in excluding any grounds for severing any marriage where God has fused man and woman into a ‘one-flesh’ union. No man, or human court, must attempt to undo that ‘one-flesh’ union. The Synoptic Gospels speak with a united voice and in perfect harmony on the issue of disallowing remarriage on any grounds while both spouses were alive, and the practice of the Early Church is in accordance with this finding.

We now know that if Jesus did make a single exception for divorce then His doctrine of forgiveness must also include an exception clause in it to match it. So we are faced with a dilemma. If Jesus taught that there were no exception clauses when it comes to forgiving our neighbour his sins, but then He allows us not to forgive the sin of fornication, where does this leave His claim that we are to forgive our neighbour all his sins? There is an inherent contradiction here.

The way to resolve this is to say (1) that He did not mean we were to forgive 70 x 7 times. That in His mind He always knew that we did not have to forgive our neighbour the sin of fornication unilaterally. Or (2) He really meant that there were no exceptions when it comes to forgiving our neighbour his trespasses, and consequently there could be no grounds for withholding forgiveness for the sin of fornication or adultery.

Jesus’ absolutist position comes out strongly in Mark 10:10-12, when the disciples in private asked Jesus about the divorce issue again, to which He replied: “Who, for instance, may put away his wife, and may marry again, commits adultery against her; and if a woman may put away her husband and is married to another, she commits adultery against him.” There is no need for an exception clause. We could paraphrase Mark as follows: “Who, for instance, may put away his wife for fornication or not over fornication, and may marry again, commits adultery against her; and if a woman may put away her husband for fornication or not over fornication, and is married to another, she commits adultery against him.”

If, for a moment, we remove the words ‘not over fornication’ from Matthew’s account, then his text would read:

Now I say to you that who, for example, may have divorced his wife and may have married another, he becomes adulterous.

Now compare this with Mark 10:9

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202 William E. Gladstone, Gleanings of Past Years, 1843–1878. Vol. VI. Ecclesiastical (London: John Murray, 1879), “The Bill for Divorce (1857),” pp. 47-107. Reprinted from the Quarterly Review, July 1857. Available at: www.wisereaction.org/ebooks/Gleanings_of_Past_Years.pdf. Gladstone (29 Dec 1809 to 19 May 1898) was Prime Minister of England on four separate occasions, 1868-74; 1880-85; Feb-July 1886; and 1892-94. He was still PM at 84 years of age, when he resigned. But for following Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, Gladstone may have arrived at the present author’s solution. Gladstone relied on Hector Davies Morgan, The Doctrine and Law of Marriage (2 vols; Oxford: W. Baxter, 1826), and an anonymous article, Barrister at Law, Considerations, which I have not been able to trace. The full title of Morgan’s book is: The doctrine and law of marriage, adultery, and divorce: exhibiting a theological and practical view of the divine institution of marriage; the religious ratification of marriage; the impediments which preclude and vitiate the contract of marriage; the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives; the sinful and criminal character of adultery; and the difficulties which embarrass the principle and practice of divorce; with an appendix (Cambridge University Library, England, book ref. Ant.c.28.1239-1240).
And he says to them, ‘Who if, for example, may have divorced his wife, and may have married another, he becomes adulterous.

Now compare this with Luke 16:18

Everyone divorcing his wife, and marrying another, commits adultery.

By temporarily removing the content-identity phrase in Matthew 19:9 it becomes absolutely clear that in the new Kingdom that Jesus came to set up on the earth, divorce has no place among His people. It is incompatible with the new nature that He gives to each of His followers, and it is incompatible with His teaching on forgiveness.

Mark wrote for the Romans, and Luke for the Greeks, and those nations had adopted their own laws governing how they wanted to live. They were a law unto themselves. The Gospel they sent to these Gentile nations stated very clearly that divorce, according to their law, which allowed divorce for sexual and non-sexual causes alike, as there was no consistent death penalty for fornication, was incompatible with being a disciple of Jesus. Their message meant that there were no exceptions. Jesus’ teaching was absolute, for Jew and non-Jew, and we can appreciate why this is so, and why it had to be so.

Matthew wrote for the Jews who had a very strong culture of divorcing their wives for any reason apart from sexual misdemeanours, which had to be punished by death. Consequently, unlike the Greeks and Romans, the Jews could only obtain a divorce for non-sexual, non-capital offences, and it was these non-sexual offences that Jesus referred to when He used the phrase ‘not over fornication,’ which is the same as saying, ‘for non-fornication causes.’ By means of this content-identity clause Jesus was positively identifying all the causes of divorce that were unlawful to the Jews by subtracting all the capital offences that male Jews could not use in the past to obtain their divorces. What better way to cover this multitude of unlawful causes than by saying (I paraphrase Him), ‘Whoever got a divorce for a cause that was not subject to the death penalty ‘[not over fornication’], it is an unlawful divorce.’ In plain language this was just another way of saying that divorce ‘for any cause’ was unlawful, and this was how the Pharisees understood Jesus, and explains their incredulity when they heard it.

Jesus had just robbed them of their two primary grounds for divorcing their wives by abolishing their ‘eravat dābār, and their ‘hate’ causes (cf. Deut 24:1-3). These terms were aptly chosen by Yahweh because they were vague enough to include any cause the Hebrews chose to nominate, even something as trivial as burning the evening meal could come under the term ‘eravat dābār.

The implications of ruling out fornication as a ground for divorce was not lost on the Pharisees, because they immediately countered Jesus’ new teaching with the old practice that they had inherited from Moses’s day. They were not to know that a greater than Moses stood in their midst who would abolish the low life that Moses permitted to hard-hearted men, because Moses could not change the fallen, Adamic nature of the evil generation he was leader of.

When writing to non-Jews, if Mark and Luke had stated that anyone who got a divorce ‘apart from fornication’ and remarried they were adulterers, non-Jews could rightly conclude that Jesus was allowing them to divorce their spouses for fornication, because they had been in the habit of doing this for centuries. It was because Mark and Luke knew that the Greeks and Romans were able to divorce their wives for sexual and non-sexual misdemeanours that they were able to ban divorce using absolute terms. This total ban on divorce for any cause, brought their Gospels into line with Matthew’s Gospel, which, likewise, placed a total ban on all the causes that the Jews had been traditionally able to use to get a divorce.

Read in this light, Jesus is consistent in all three Gospels in ruling out divorce on any grounds for the Romans, Greeks, and the Jews. All the world was to know that divorce was incompatible with being a disciple of Jesus. In one sentence Jesus abolished the sub-standard life that Moses, Shamai and Hillel had brought the people down to, and, unfortunately, there are some so-called evangelical leaders who are determined to bring Christ’s followers back to Moses’s sub-standard way of living, and reintroduce divorce into Christ’s Kingdom.

What makes divorce impossible among Christians is the nature of the new life that Jesus gives to each of His disciples. We have our old nature (the old man) and the new nature (the new man) struggling for mastery of our minds. The new nature cannot sin, because it is Christ living in us, so that when we do sin it is our old nature which has gained the upper hand at that moment. We are told to continually crucify the old nature and all that emanates from it, and live according to our new nature. Hatred and hard-heartedness, and an unforgiving spirit, emanate from the old nature, not from the new nature. This is why divorce is incompatible with having the Spirit of Christ dominating our mind, will, and heart. We are to forgive unilaterally, not conditionally, all who sin against us, or abuse us, or murder us; such is the Spirit of Christ living in us. Paul could say, ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.’
Incidentally, if the Jews had been in the habit of getting divorces for adultery/fornication before Jesus was born, as some believe, then the distinction that Jesus made between ‘for fornication’ and ‘not over fornication’ would not have made sense, any more than it would if addressed to Greeks and Romans. Thus Jesus’ distinction between the two types of offences becomes indirect evidence that the Jews kept the distinction in law between punishment for fornication and punishment for non-fornication offences. They were in the habit of issuing a Death Certificate for the offence of fornication, and a Divorce Certificate for all other non-fornication offences. It is this latter Certificate that Jesus made null and void, which left the Jews with no grounds at all to divorce their wives.

6.5.3. Was there a Hebrew version of Matthew’s Gospel?

That the Gospel of Matthew was written primarily for the Hebrew nation has been recognised from the earliest extant writings of the Church Fathers. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that it was first written in Hebrew and only after the Jews (as a whole) turned away from accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah was it turned into a language that the Gentiles could benefit from, namely, Greek, the lingua franca of the entire, civilised world at that time.

The fourth-century Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, recorded the statement of Papias, who is said to have been a direct disciple of the apostle John (who wrote John’s Gospel), to this effect: “Matthew put together the oracles [of Messiah-Jesus] in the Hebrew tongue, and each one interpreted them as best he could.”

Irenaeus (2nd. cent.) was another very early Christian writer, who is reported to have learned that “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure [i.e. their death], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”

Another witness to a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew was Origen (245-248) who wrote, “Concerning the four Gospels which alone are uncontroverted in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew, who was at one time a publican and afterwards an Apostle of Jesus Christ, was written first; and that he composed it in the Hebrew tongue and published it for the converts from Judaism. The second written [Gospel] was that according to Mark, who wrote it according to the instruction of Peter, who, in his General Epistle, acknowledged him as a son, saying, ‘The church that is in Babylon, elect together with you, salutes you; and so does Mark my son.’ [cf.1Pet 5:13] And the third was that according to Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, which he composed for the converts from the Gentiles. Last of all [was written] that according to John.”

6.5.4. The split between Jew and Gentile Christians

Now Peter was the apostle appointed by Jesus to oversee the Gospel being taken to the Jews (Acts 15:7, 14; Gal 2:8), and Paul was appointed to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13; 15:16; Acts 9:15; Gal 2:8; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). But Paul’s missionary policy was to take the Gospel to the Jews first wherever he travelled in the Roman Empire, because he was acutely aware that they were the chosen people of God, and to them belonged the oracles of God (Rom 3:2; Acts 7:38; Heb 5:12; cf. 1 Pet 4:11). This was the policy followed by Paul’s mentor, the Lord Jesus, who commanded His apostles to take His Gospel exclusively to the Jews. “These twelve Jesus sent out, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans, rather go the lost sheep of the House of Israel” (Mt 10:5).

The Gospel contained the next collection of the oracles of God, so it was only natural that the Jews should be the first to receive the latest issue of God’s messages to them in the same language in

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204 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book III, Ch 1, 1. Source: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 1 (available in e-Sword at 1.06.02).
205 Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 9, Origen’s Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. (Available in e-Sword at 9.13.17). (Cf. Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., vi. 25). Gal 2:7 mentions a ‘gospel for the uncircumcised,’ and one for the circumcised. This is not proof that the canonical Gospels were already in circulation this early (c. AD 52).
which He had delivered all the previous oracles, which would complete and complement all that God had communicated to them in the past.

Paul strove mightily to convince his fellow-countrypeople that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah promised by God through Moses, but when they attacked him and rejected his message he made the memorable and momentous decision to turn away from the Jews and concentrate on the Gentiles. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken  to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. . . . from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles’” (Acts 13:46; 18:6; cf. 22:11; 26:17; 28:28).

This turning point was probably the point at which the Holy Spirit caused Matthew to reissue his Gospel in Greek for the benefit of those Jews who had thrown in their lot with Jesus’ Gentile converts and were prepared to put their Jewishness behind them and identify with the Gentiles in a single Church (Rom 3:29; 9:24; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 3:6). It was very appropriate, therefore, that Matthew’s Hebrew Gospel should not disappear off the face of the earth, but should be retained for the benefit of the Jewish-Gentile Church, hence its contents were translated into the common language of the Gentiles, Koine Greek, and thus the Church of the Lord Jesus did not lose the unique contents of a Gospel that was specifically written throughout with Jews in mind.

The Jewishness of Matthew’s Gospel has been fully documented elsewhere by others, so it is only necessary to cream off the more salient points here. It is well known that the Jews had no dealing with the Samaritans, and Peter seems to have moved in distinct racial groups of Christians, so that he willingly ate with groups of Gentile Christians, but when a group of Christian Jews arrived at his place, he withdrew from the Gentile Christians and separated himself from them ‘fearing those who were of the circumcision’ sent to him from the apostle James (Gal 2:12). This suggests that the Christian Jews who came from the Church in Jerusalem had not yet come to terms with the implications that their food laws were no longer mandatory. It took some time for Christian Jews to realise that they were to share their inheritance with the Gentiles as fellow-heirs, and constitute one body (Gal 3:28).

Paul was not alone in thinking that Jews came from a cultivated olive-tree, but Gentiles came from an uncultivated olive-tree (Rom 11:17). Paul was aware that the Jews came under the direct upbringing of God their Creator and parent, through His management of them for 1,500 years and this had shaped the nation’s psyche so that he could discern a difference between the Jews as a deeply religious people over against the ignorant Gentiles whom God left to their own devices and their own laws (“you were Gentiles carried away unto these dumb idols, even as you were led . . . Gentiles who walk in the vanity of their mind” 1 Cor 12:2 and Eph 4:17 [cf. 1 Pet 4:3]). God winked at their past, lawless history (Acts 17:30). The long-term effect of living under God’s direct rule had a profound effect on the Jews, so that Paul could say, “We are Jews, and not sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal 2:15). The ghetto-mentality that kept Jew and Gentile apart in the dispersion of the Jews probably lies behind the Jewish thought that if Jesus left them and went away to teach the Gentiles that this would explain how they would not be able to find Him (Jn 7:35).

It came as a shock to Jewish Christians that God would give the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, of all people. Up until the time that Peter met Cornelius he could honestly say, “I have never eaten anything common or unclean” (Acts 10:15), but Jesus was to teach Peter a lesson that he was not to call any Gentile ‘common or unclean’ when He let down a sheet containing animals that Peter had never eaten before in his entire life, being a rigorous keeper of the Torah. He might be a Christian, but he was still wedded to keeping the food laws.

When Peter was introduced to Cornelius and his gathered relatives and friends, he reminded Cornelius, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). God had to intervene in a supernatural way to break the ghetto-mentality that held the Jewish people in dread of contaminating themselves by keeping company with Gentiles, otherwise the wall of partition would have kept Gentile Christians apart from their Jewish brothers and sisters. In that moment the realisation dawned on Peter that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

When the Holy Spirit ‘fell’ on the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house, the Christian Jews who accompanied Peter were astonished that God would give His Holy Spirit to ‘common and unclean’ people (Acts 10:45). When Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Christian Jews were extremely angry with him for breaking the law that Jews are not to, in Peter’s own words, “keep company with or go to one of another nation.” Their accusation read, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with

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206 We could add in: [and written]. . .

207 We could add in: [Matthew’s Gospel]. . .
them.” Yes, it was ‘unlawful’ to do what he did, but he explained that that law was no longer mandatory because of something that God did, and that changed everything. God poured out His Holy Spirit on these ‘common and unclean’ uncircumcised, Gentile, baptised Christians, thereby making no distinction between His followers.

This single event was like emptying out the helium in a balloon, or draining the power out of a battery, for overnight the Torah was lifted off the shoulders of all God’s New Covenant people. Its power over men was gone. It lost its control over the lives of God’s people. It was a catastrophic collapse of the whole Mosaic system and way of life. It had become obsolete overnight.

However, through force of habit, Jewish Christians could not divest themselves overnight of their Jewishness, as one would divest himself of an overcoat, and change into another item of clothing. They wrapped their Jewish coat even more tightly around their bodies as they ventured into the new world that Jesus had opened up for them. It took a long time for Jewish Christians to realise that what they were clinging on to was creating a two-tier Church, especially when the Council of Jerusalem rejected their call that all Gentile converts to Jesus must be circumcised in order to join them (Acts 15:1), and especially when the appointed Apostle to the Gentiles declared that all the food laws were optional, not compulsory, and the same applied to the holy days of the Jewish calendar; and that the requirement that all Christian men, Jew and Gentile, had to appear before God in Jerusalem three times a year, was all gone. This was a hard pill for Christian Jews to swallow. They were not happy with this new dispensation.

Up until now, their way of life, their culture, their customs, their whole outlook on life was completely foreign to the outsider. It was not surprising that if a Gospel was written specifically for them that it would address issues that would be incomprehensible to non-Jews without a good deal of explaining beforehand. Thus it is that Matthew refers to things that any Jew would be expected to know from his upbringing without any necessity on Matthew’s part to fill in the background, which he would need to do if his audience included Gentiles. Matthew knew his Old Covenant Scriptures extremely well because it has been estimated that he makes about 53 direct quotations from the Scriptures, plus another 70 allusions. This is a very large number, and was clearly intended to show that Jesus was the focus of the entire Old Covenant Scriptures. A Jewish reader would have been hugely impressed with Matthew’s skillful use of these Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God.

6.5.5. Evidence that Matthew wrote for his fellow-countrymen

A common thread in all works supporting the betrothal interpretation is their strong emphasis on the Jewishness of Matthew’s Gospel. For some this is the key to understanding the term πορνεία in that Gospel. While the standard Greek lexicons and dictionaries agree that the term is an ambiguous word that can refer to all types of sexual sin, betrothal supporters are agreed that the specific context in which it is used in Matthew’s Gospel narrows down its range to fornication within the betrothal period. But this is only so once the presupposition is accepted. Labosier wrote, “It is the context of Matthew 5 and 19 that provides the strongest evidence for this interpretation of πορνεία as referring to such things as ... betrothal unfaithfulness.”

Seeing that the new solution being put forward in this work also makes much of the Jewishness of Matthew’s Gospel it will make for a good background to spell out the Jewish nature of this Gospel.

Matthew includes material that would not be relevant to a Gentile audience, such as
(1) the priests in the Temple breaking the law of the Sabbath day, and yet they are blameless (Mt 12:5-7).
(2) The Pharisaic rule that you must not do good on the Sabbath day, lest you profane it (Mt 12:11-12).
(3) The long quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4 (Mt 12:18-21).
(4) Only Matthew records Peter walking on the water (Mt 14:28-31), even though Mark gives the lead up to the event, and continues again immediately after the event. Did Mark deliberately omit the event lest it be ridiculed as yet another example of Jewish myths, of which there were many doing the rounds?

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208 When Mark includes non-Greek words, he is obliged to translate them (Mk 7:34), which would be redundant to do in Matthew’s Gospel.

(5) Matthew alone has the local formula for forecasting the weather (Mt 16:2-3), which would have been familiar to Jews, but not to Romans or Greeks.

(6) Matthew alone notes that a prominent Jew, not a Roman or a Greek, would be the rock upon which Jesus would build His universal empire/assembly (Mt 16:17-19).

(7) Mark only records that Jesus entered into Jerusalem and then went into the Temple, whereas Matthew gives the same information but dwells on the rapturous reception that Jesus got from the Jews as a prophet (Mt 21:10).

(8) Matthew alone links events happening in Jesus’ life to specific prophecies, such as His entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (Mt 21:4-5).

(9) Matthew alone records that the Jewish Gospel he has written up will be taken out (by the Jews, understood) into the ‘whole civilisation.’ This appeal to the centrality of a Jewish leader, sending out His Jewish (Hebrew?) Gospel into all the nations of the world, as a witness, would make a strong impression on his readers. They could miss out if they do not side with their Messiah; but there is the price of persecution to endure to be saved (Mt 24:9b-14).

(10) Matthew alone refers to Noah and his Flood (Mt 24:7-9), which may not have resonated with Mark and Luke’s audiences. Included here is the warning that the Second Coming could happen at any moment, so be ready! (Mt 24:40-51).

(11) Only Matthew follows this up with parables inculcating the need to be vigilant (Mt 25:1-46).

(12) Matthew alone records that Jesus could call upon twelve legions of angels to defend Him (Mt 26:53-54), talk of which would raise military eyebrows in Rome, so Mark wisely omitted this section.

(13) In the trial of Jesus, Pilate comes across as a righteous governor, who, having judged Jesus to be not guilty washes his hands saying he was innocent of the blood of ‘this righteous one’ (referring to Jesus), to which the crowd responds, ‘Let His blood be on our heads, and upon our children’s heads,’ which only Matthew records (Mt 27:24-25).

(14) Matthew alone records a local earthquake in Jerusalem at the very moment that Jesus expired, which burst open some local tombs of Christ’s saints, who rose from the dead only after Jesus rose from the dead (Mt 27:51b-53), and went into the ‘Holy City,’ a term that would endear Matthew to his fellow-countrymen.

(15) Matthew alone views the Great Commission as being given to eleven Jewish leaders to go into the whole world and baptize all the nations (Mt 28:16-20).

Now Matthew, because he is addressing knowledgeable Jews, can take a lot for granted. For instance, in Matthew’s Gospel, the Jews challenge Jesus with the accusation, ‘Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders?’ No explanation is required to explain what is going on here. But if we turn to the parallel passage written for Gentiles, Mark has to break off and explain what lies behind the question, as the following layout illustrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 15:1-2</th>
<th>Mark 7:1-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Then come to Jesus do they from Jerusalem—scribes and Pharisees—</td>
<td>1. And gathered together to him are the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, having come from Jerusalem,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 and having seen certain of his disciples with defiled hands—that is, unwashed—eating bread, they found fault;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 for the Pharisees, and all the Jews, if they do not wash the hands to the wrist, do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 and, coming from the market-place, if they do not baptize themselves, they do not eat; and many other things there are that they received to hold, baptisms of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and couches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ‘Wherefore do your disciple transgress the tradition of the elders? for they do not wash their hands when</td>
<td>5 Then question him do the Pharisees and the scribes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Wherefore do thy disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but with unwashed hands do eat the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice that Mark has to use up three verses to get his Gentile readers to the same place that the Jews were at naturally.

Matthew 27:16-17

16 and they had then a noted prisoner, called Barabbas,
17 they therefore having been gathered together,

Mark 15:7-8

7 and there was [one] named Barabbas,
8 And the multitude having cried out,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 27:16-17</th>
<th>Mark 15:7-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 and they had then a noted prisoner, called Barabbas,</td>
<td>7 and there was [one] named Barabbas, bound with those making insurrection with him, who had in the insurrection committed murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 they therefore having been gathered together,</td>
<td>8 And the multitude having cried out,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that Mark has to pause to explain to his audience who Barabbas was, because they would not be expected to know who this intifada leader was.

6.5.6. Deuteronomy 22:20-21 as the background to the exemption clause in Matthew 5:32

Because Matthew’s readers were Jews, there was no need for him to treat them like children and explain what they already knew. Matthew can take for granted that his readers know what he is referring to, and this is the key to understanding the two so-called exception clauses in his Gospel. If Jesus used a phrase that meant something to a Jew, but which would be an enigma to a non-Jew, then once we have identified what lies behind that phrase, then we will be in a position to understand the cryptic phrase and recover the teaching in which the phrase formed an integral part.

If we take the first cryptic phrase in Matthew 5:32, it reads, “but I—I say to you, that whoever may put away his wife, not counting the matter of fornication, makes her to commit adultery; and whoever may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

Now, when Matthew’s Jewish readers heard the phrase λόγου πωρείας ‘a matter of fornication’ what Scripture would this instantly bring to his mind? Well, the only place in the entire Old Testament where the components of this phrase occur together is in Deuteronomy 22:21, where the Septuagint translates the Hebrew as follows:

13. ‘Now, if, say, a man may have taken a wife, and has lived with her, and may have hated210 her, 14 and laid against her accusing words λύοντας, and may have brought over her an evil name, and he may say, “This woman I had received,211 and having drawn near to her, I did not find her [tokens212 of] virginity.” 15 And the father of the young person—and her mother—having retrieved, they shall bring out the [tokens of] virginity of the young person to the council by the gate. 16 And the father of the young person shall say to the council, “This daughter of mine I had given213 to this man for a wife, and he has hated her. 17 The same [man] now places on her accusing words λύοντας, saying, “I did not find [tokens of] virginity [belonging] to your daughter,”—and these are the [tokens of the] virginity of my daughter! And they shall spread out the garment before the council of the city. 18 And the council of that city shall take the man, and discipline him, 19 and they shall punish him a hundred shekels, and they shall give them to the father of the young woman, because he brought out an evil name upon an Israelite virgin, and she shall be to him for a wife. He is not able to send her out the whole time [s/he is alive].

20 Now, if, say, upon [investigation] this word (ὁ λόγος ὑποτός) is borne out to be truthful—and [tokens of] virginity were not found for the young woman . . . 21 And they

210 In Deut 24:3 ‘hate’ was a successful route to take to get a divorce, but here (and when applied to the second scenario) the hate is geared not toward obtaining a divorce, but to have her killed for fornication. It is hatred+accusation of fornication. The ‘hate’ in Deut 24:3 must have been hatred+a non-fornication issue, because he was successful in getting it.

211 This is the perfect tense: ‘had received and still have.’ The ET is mine.

212 The idea of ‘proofs’ might be in mind here throughout the narrative. This is how it is seen in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), A New English Translation of the Septuagint (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

213 This is the perfect tense: ‘had given and still give.’
shall lead away the young woman by the doors of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones, and she shall be killed, because she acted foolishly among the sons of Israel, to fornicate [πορνεύσει] in the house of her father; and you shall remove the evil from among you.

We might suitably entitle this pericope: The matter (λόγος) of pre-marital fornication investigated. Two scenarios are described. In the first, the newly married bride is accused of not being a virgin, but her parents prove that she was. The punishment for the husband is that his cultural privilege to divorce his wife on any charge is removed from him for as his wife is alive. He played for high stakes, which rebounded on him.

In the second scenario the newly married bride is accused of not being a virgin, and her parents cannot prove that she was. The punishment for the newly married bride is that she loses her life, and the innocent husband is permitted to remarry another bride.

The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has an interesting addition (written as capitals below) in its paraphrase of Deut 22:25-27, which reads: . . . if a man find a damsel in the wilderness, and does violence to her and lies with her, the man only shall die who lay with her, for the damsel is not guilty of death; BUT HER HUSBAND MAY PUT HER AWAY FROM HIM BY A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT; for as when a man lies in wait for his neighbour and takes his life, so is this matter (πράγμα): he found her upon the face of the field; the betrothed damsel cried out for help, but there was no one to deliver her.24

The reason for the addition was triggered by the statement in 22:19 “he cannot divorce her all the days of his life.” Targumists were driven by analogies and parallels, and a penchant to tidy up loose ends. If nothing else it tells us that when this targum was written (c. 35–120 AD) divorce was by way of a bill of divorcement and very likely applied to the situation described in Deut 22:25-27.

In the case of Deuteronomy 22:26 the incident is called a πράγμα ‘an event/occurrence, a deed.’ However, the earlier incident in 22:20-21 is called a λόγος ‘a word/thing, a matter/deed.’ Deuteronomy 22:20 uses the term λόγος of actual words, the words that constituted the accusation of fornication, hence ‘report’ would suit the context precisely. This then becomes a ‘report of fornication,’ which occurs in 5:32 as λόγου πορνείας (logou porneias). This will throw new light on the so-called exeptive clause in Matthew 5:32, which would then read: “but I—I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife, not counting the report of fornication, makes her to commit adultery; and whoever may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.” The Greek particle παρικτός means ‘not taking into account/apart from/excluding’ What Jesus is pointing out is that if one divorces his wife, serious repercussions will follow, chief of which is that when his wife remarries she will be committing adultery, but all her adulteries will be laid at the feet of her divorcer. The only sin that will not be laid at his feet is her sin of fornication which she committed before he divorced her.

It is very likely that Jesus examined every law of the Torah with His laser-sharp eye backed by a razor-sharp mind absorbing every minute detail of the Law, and He pondered the wisdom of His Father in how He handled two accusations of pre-marital fornication that were potentially devastating to a husband’s genealogy. In the one case the λόγος πορνεία (logos porneia) was false, but in the other case the λόγος πορνεία was true.

Jesus was a realist, and He knew that not every bride would be as innocent or as white as she appeared to be on the outside. There would also be unscrupulous parents who would pass off their promiscuous daughters as virgins in order to get the bride price to claw back the expense in bringing her up. Evidence of virginity could be faked, falsified, or borrowed from another virgin, tgo outwit the prospective buyer of their daughter. It happens. And Jesus, no doubt, with His superior knowledge of all things necessary for His mission on earth, would take this into account when it came to wording His teaching. And so it was, when He wanted to scare the daylights out of every male in Israel, He informed them that when they got a divorce, nothing happened; they were as much one flesh after they got their divorce as they were before it. Even the most bumb of Jewish males could work out that that meant if their wives ‘married’ another man, they were committing adultery, because the marriage bond had never been dissolved, and couldn’t be except by death. Once the penny had dropped that all married men were stuck with their first wives for life, with no prospect of ever getting release from them, their hearts must have died within them.

But then, some of them would have confessed to Jesus that they had already divorced (as they thought) their wives. Jesus does not feel any sympathy for them. He tells them bluntly that if they put their wives out into the street and they remarried other men, then the acts of adultery that their wives were committing would be laid at the husband’s feet.

The only concession He makes for their culpability was that if their wives were found guilty of pre-marital intercourse with another male, then these sins of fornication would not be charged to their husbands, but the general charge of getting a divorce on the grounds of her pre-marriage fornication still stood, because there were no grounds, not even pre-marital fornication, to get a divorce, because it did not exist in the life of God.

The fact that Jesus thought it necessary to exonerate the husband for his wife’s pre-marital fornication reveals His view that every man is responsible for his wife’s sexual history. Every man started off his married life joined to a virgin for life. Her sexuality belongs to him (and vice versa. 1 Cor 7:4). Jesus, like any professional judge would, took into account that the husband cannot be held legally responsible for his wife’s infidelity before he married her, and this is what the exemption clause refers to in Matthew 5:32.

God had fixed penalties to cope with newly married brides who were not virgins, namely, death, not divorce. The same went for adultery. In neither case could any man get a divorce, because God never instituted it in Israel. The only options open to a righteous man under the law, as regards punishment of his wife was death or stay married-for-life. There was nothing in between these two options. God made no provision for divorce of any description. That was the reality that Jesus was commissioned by His Father to bring to this earth and make known to all men on this planet, through the Great Commission.

6.5.7. The death penalty as the background to the content-identity clause in Matthew 19:9

We have shown that Matthew’s Gospel was written for Jews, and that Matthew could take it for granted that his readers knew the laws of the Torah inside out and back the front more closely than any modern expert or academic scholar can ever hope to reach or match. We have also shown in the previous section that not until we can provide the Scriptural background to some of Matthew’s statements can we enter into his understanding of what Jesus taught on any one subject. In other words, the non-Jew must take hold of the skirt of the Jew and be taught by him what is the key to understanding Jesus’ words.

It is the experience of many that there is an arrogance, typical of academia in the sciences and other disciplines, but especially in evolutionary biology, that assumes all others to be fools but themselves and their new insights are to placed above all others. This is especially so when it comes to an understanding of God’s Word, both Old and New Testaments. “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies,” is as true today as it was when Paul penned those words. It takes humility to sit at the feet of a Jew and be taught by him. The Western scholar is not comfortable in that position. But those who earnestly seek the truth will know the doctrine whether it be of God or whether it be of man (Jn 7:17).

If we start off by recognising that Matthew’s Gospel was not written for Romans and Greeks, of whom the Western world and civilisation is an extension, but was written solely for a people who were dominated by a comprehensive system of laws, rituals, ceremonies, and traditions, that were absolutely unique to it as a system, then we are on the verge of adopting the correct approach to understanding their world, and how much these unique people lived in a bubble that was incomprehensible to outsiders. What they ate, when they could sleep with their wives, what things were ‘holy’ and what things were ‘common,’ what things were ‘clean’ and what things were ‘unclean,’ controlled their whole lives from birth to death, covering hatch, match and dispatch.

It is obvious that the further a Westerner travels into this different world of another, very strange culture, and gains a foothold in understanding why they did things a certain way and not another way, and how they use terms, expressions, and phrases in a different way, with a different outlook on life, and with their own traditions surrounding major events in their lives such as birth, marriage and death/burial, the further he travels away from his own culture, and acquires wisdom and understanding in the process. But this wisdom is lost in transmission when he reports back to his own culture because they have not made the journey themselves to appreciate what they are hearing from the first traveller.

Given that the Western approach to life and especially its moral values are different from those to whom Matthew was writing, there will always be a distance between the Jew and the non-Jew, and this difference will manifest itself in reading the literature of the Jews. That is one problem that must be borne in mind.

The other difference is what others have commented on more eloquently, which is a superficial reading of Scripture without the background that a Jew in Matthew’s day would have
possessed, because he lived, moved, and has his being, in that closed environment. This approach treats Scripture as if it were an exhaustive encyclopedia of knowledge, and if something is not in the Bible then it doesn’t exist. This is especially the cop-out that the majority of Yount Earthers adopt when it comes to reading the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1-3. This simplistic approach to Scripture will always result in stunted growth spiritually, mentally, and academically, and will result in an inability to bring factual, scientific data to cast light on how God put His universe together, and an understanding of the various laws that hold the entire creation together, which the Bible has nothing to say. Failure to take in all knowledge from every direction will produce a teenage approach, not a mature and maturing approach to God’s creation. The same applies to reading Scripture.

If we ignore the wealth of extra-biblical information regarding the chronology of the ancient Near East kings adjacent to Israel, we would never be able to reconstruct the chronology of the Bible. A wrong attitude toward this extra-biblical data will take pride in boasting that its biblical chronology is based solely on the Bible, as if that factor alone gave it credence, or accuracy, or the infallibility that is sometimes claimed for some hair-brain, chronological schemes!

What applies to budding Bible chronologists applies to other topics, such as Infant Baptism, and a whole range of other debateable topics, where the criteria used to read God’s Word is: “Does it make sense to me?” And, “If I cannot find an actual text to support a view, I will not accept it.” On this criteria, there is no Trinity, and women cannot take Communion because there is no ‘actual text’ to say they can, and Eve was not expelled from the Garden of Eden, because there is no ‘actual text’ to say she was expelled. The list could go on and on. It is not possible to add maturity to a child’s life, by education alone, and neither is it possible to understand all of Scripture except by maturing in the faith and increasing one’s knowledge of spiritual matters. This may take years. But God has set mature teachers in the church to guide the immature into a full understanding of His word.

Nevertheless, Matthew’s Gospel will always present a challenge to the Western reader because it was not intended for him. The Holy Spirit guided Mark and Luke to write for the Western man, and to present Jesus’ teaching on divorce and marriage in terms that the Western man can understand. In both Gospels there is no so-called exception clause, and the Western man is left without an excuse. Now, if the Spirit guided Mark and Luke to make no exception for divorce, then it follows that He must have said the same thing to the Jews, otherwise there would be one doctrine and ethic for the Jew and another for the Gentile. This would create two bodies of Christ.

Now the Jew lived under God’s Torah, and in that Law it stated clearly that the punishment for adultery and for fornication was death, not divorce. Consequently God removed the possibility of any Jew getting a divorce for these two crimes. But that would not stop renegade Jews from getting a divorce for these crimes if they were determined to do so. The question the Pharisees asked Jesus was a legal one: ‘Is it lawful . . . to divorce for any cause?’ On a matter of law, it was unlawful to divorce for fornication.

What God did not do was to give a similar law banning divorce for any non-fornication cause. This looks like a deliberate loop-hole on God’s part not to shut off the possibility that hard-hearted husbands will hate their wives and seek to get rid of them. But God envisaged a day when He would send His Son who would shut the door on this loop-hole, and shut up all mankind to the abolition of divorce on any grounds, sexual or non-sexual, and that day arrived with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Pharisees came to Jesus with their question whether it was lawful to divorce for any cause, we are not to impose our Western point of view on these Pharisees, and assume that they were asking Jesus if it was lawful to get a divorce for adultery/fornication. They knew the answer to that question: it was not lawful to get a divorce for adultery/fornication. So we should rule out any suggestion that these Pharisees were asking Jesus if He was going to abolish the law relating to the death penalty for adultery/fornication. After all, they regarded Jesus as just another human being, with a large than life ego about His self-importance. They disdained Him. What they had in mind, with their question, was whether it was lawful to divorce for non-fornication issues. Why would they raise that question? Answer: they had no direct warrant for divorce in the Torah.

It is now widely recognised that in Deuernonomy 24:1-4 we have Yahweh describing (not prescribing) how His people went about divorcing their wives, and showing the arbitrariness of their action. Then after Yahweh described what He hated to see His people doing, He slapped a penalty on anyone who would take advantage of the pre-Moses custom of divorcing a wife, namely, they would be barred from being reconciled to their first wife. It has been recognised by commentators that Moses did not introduce divorce into Israel, but that it had been going on among the Israelites while they were in Egypt for 430 years.

The innovation that Moses contributed was an oral command that every divorce must be accompanied by a bill of divorce, which the divorced wife could use to remarry, and so avoid the
death penalty, which had just been introduced by Yahweh for all sexual offences that defiled a woman. God ensured that even Moses’ command did not get into His Torah, such was His detestation of the practice. The rabbis were in a quandry: they had no text to use as a pretext to smuggle divorce into the Torah.

The suggestion was could they use Yahweh’s description of what they were doing wrong to justify continuing to do wrong? Could they take the two grounds that Yahweh coined to describe what they were doing wrong and create a law of divorce which would include these two grounds, namely, ervat davar, and hate, and in this way smuggle divorce into the Torah?

This seems a bizarre way to make divorce lawful. It is on a par with a noted burglar who only broke into houses in the dead of night, and a guild of burglars meeting together made it a law that it is only lawful to burglar in the middle of the night; that all daylight robberies were unlawful! Or imagine a public boys school in England where all the boys started daubing the walls with excrement, and creating art-work out of it. Apart from the unsightliness of the daubing, one boy was seen to eat it. For health and safety reasons the headmaster instantly issued a command forbidding the eating of excrement with the threat of instant expulsion. He could not expel every boy who daubed the walls, for they all did it, because the school would have no pupils if he expelled them all, and he would be out of a job; but he could curb an evil within an evil. This is the situation that Yahweh met. Instead of daubing the walls, they were divorcing their wives. Neither the daubing nor the divorcing could be stopped. The best that Moses could do was command them that if they were going to do evil to their wives then at least give her a chance to have a life on the other side of the divorce. And Yahweh contented Himself to issue an order that if they obtained a divorce they could not undo their evil deed. They would die in their sins.

How the rabbis managed to smuggle divorce into the Torah is not relevant at this point. What is important to note here is that among the Jews, but not among the Greeks or the Romans, there was a sharp, twofold division into capital and non-capital punishments, and that all sexual offences came under capital punishment. This meant that the common people in Israel knew that sins of fornication (including adultery) were punished with death, but that non-fornication sins were not met with death.

Ben Bloggs could work out that if he was going to divorce his wife he would have to catch her committing a non-fornication sin. So when he heard Jesus say, “Whoever divorces his wife for a non-fornication sin, and marries another woman, he is an adulterer,” he recognised instantly that Jesus had just robbed him of the only grounds he could get a divorce on. His instant recognition of the significance of what Jesus had just said was because he was a Jew, and not an ignorant non-Jew.

What Jesus said was unambiguous. It could not be clearer. God the Father had ruled out divorce for fornication sins; and His Son had ruled out divorce for non-fornication sins. Together they had banned divorce from the earth. That left no grounds on which Ben Bloggs could safely get a divorce from his hated wife. Jesus had just shut him up to living with her for the rest of his life. He would have to conclude that this new religion was not for him, and turn his back on Jesus (and on eternal life), as many still do today over His total rejection of divorce on any grounds.

The chart below illustrates the difference between Roman and Greek law compared to Jewish law. Outside of Judea all cultures made provision for divorce for sexual and non-sexual misdemeanours, so that adultery and hate were treated as equal grounds for divorce. The Jewish distinction between ‘fornication’ issues and ‘non-fornication’ issues when it came to obtaining a divorce was rigid and permanent, compared to lax situation in Roman and Greek law-codes.

Jewish law was unique in that God made a sharp, and unambiguous distinction between ‘fornication’ and ‘non-fornication’ misdemeanours. In sharp contrast to Roman and Greek law, adultery had to be punished by stoning or strangulation under Jewish law. They had no choice in the matter, because their law descended from heaven and was written by God. There was no option to punish adultery with divorce under Jewish law, which Jesus and the Pharisees were fully aware of.

Prior to the birth of Jesus, there is no known case in Jewish history where this law was violated, and where Jews in Judea could obtain a divorce on the ground of adultery.

Given this background, we now have a solid, historical (cultural) reason why Matthew was written to the Jews, and Mark and Luke were written for the Romans and Greeks respectively.

This background must also be carried into any reading of Matthew’s so-called ‘exception clauses.’ When the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to divorce their wives ‘for all causes,’ they had in mind all causes outside the capital offence causes, and so they were not asking Jesus if it was lawful to get a divorce for adultery. They were asking Him if they could get a divorce for any non-capital offence, or in terms of the pie-chart, for any non-fornication misdemeanour.
Both Jesus and the Pharisees would have agreed that divorce could not be had lawfully for fornication or for adultery, so we can take that for granted. The issue the Pharisees put to Jesus was would He agree with their age-old tradition of obtaining a divorce for all the non-fornication issues that they were presently using, or would He limit the number of non-fornication issues that they could use. Jesus knew the boundaries they were currently using, which encompassed every cause imaginable except fornication (which would include adultery). So when Jesus replied to their question, He took up their current boundary which was ‘anything, but not including fornication,’ and declared that any Pharisee who got a divorce ‘not over fornication’ (i.e., they got it on non-fornication grounds) and married another woman, he was committing adultery against his first wife, and anyone who married his ‘divorced’ wife was likewise committing adultery, because he was sleeping with another man’s wife.

The implication of Jesus’ revelation was that Mosaic divorce did not dissolve any lawful marriage; after the ‘divorce’ the husband was still married to his wife. Consequently, when another man married his ‘divorced’ wife, that man was sleeping with his wife. It must have become obvious to the Pharisees that, according to Jesus, nothing happened when they got a Mosaic divorce. The bond could not be broken by handing a wife a piece of paper.

This was a monstrous, and completely unacceptable new teaching, because it implied that from the time of Moses no divorce was lawful in the eyes of Jesus. The Jews took great pride in their ancestry because all their mothers were virgins. But if Jesus was right that no Mosaic divorce ever dissolved a single lawful marriage during the entire Old Testament period, then He was casting aspersions on the legitimacy of their births.

If the fathers of any of the Pharisees who asked Jesus the question about divorce, had divorced their first wife, and they were born of a second wife, then they were the children of fornication, and hence bastards. They said to Jesus on one occasion, ‘We were not born out of fornication’ (Mt 5:36). This could be rendered: ‘We were not born out of prostitution’ (ἡ πόρνη).’ Jesus thought otherwise, because divorce could be had for the most trivial of excuses in Jesus’ day, so much so that Jesus termed the nation a generation of adulterers (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Mk 8:38).

The entire male population of Jesus’ day had deluded themselves into believing that they had the power to sever what God had joined together, and that this power extended back to the time of Moses. That they never had this power must have come as a bombshell, and must have sent many of them scurrying to the Temple to find out from the national genealogical records kept there, if any of their ancestors came through a second wife following a divorce, or through a many times divorced wife, who had three or more husbands. If so, then their line of descent was tainted with illegitimacy, and illegitimate children were excluded from being counted among the Sons of Israel for ten generations. “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord” (Deut 23:2). In this place the Septuagint reads ἡ πόρνη, ‘out of a prostitute’ to describe the illegitimate sons who are barred from citizenship of Israel.

This one teaching alone would have incensed the entire male population against Jesus, and should be viewed as a prime contributor factor that led to His rejection by the nation, and His death on the cross, accompanied by the roar of angry divorcers baying for His blood.
The pie-chart also brings out the historical background to Mark and Luke, because the Romans and the Greeks had no consistent equivalent for the death penalty for fornication/adultery. Generally, their only punishment consisted of divorce accompanied by exile. This explains why Mark, in particular, could not include the phrase Jesus used to refer to the category of causes that the Jews had been using to obtain their divorces. Mark omitted what Matthew said in 19:7-9 because it did not apply to his audience.

Significantly, when Jesus repeated His teaching privately to His disciples in the house immediately following this confrontation with the Pharisees, He gave them a version that was applicable to all three cultures. Indeed, His *vice versa* statement referring to wives divorcing husbands was unknown in Israel, but practised in all non-Jewish cultures. No wonder Mark chose to include the *vice versa* version in his Gospel to the Romans.

The Romans and the Greeks lumped the two distinct Jewish categories of punishment—capital and non-capital—into one category, namely, non-capital, so that divorce could be had from the most trivial to the most serious offences. It was a case of one size fits all. One divorce law applied to all cases, whereas the Jews retained divorce only for non-fornication (in Jesus’ words, ‘not over fornication’) offences.

In conclusion we have seen that each Gospel was carefully crafted to bring the ‘Good News’ to all the nations of the world. Each Gospel writer had to choose what to include and what to exclude, which was at all times influenced by his target audience. Even when they each include the same story, event, parable, or teaching, they are consciously editing the material to get the attention of their diverse audiences in order ‘that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life in His name.’

We have seen, in the case of Matthew’s Gospel, that because it was written for knowledgeable Jews, that Matthew could assume they had the necessary background knowledge in their memories, to understand everything he wrote to them. While exploring the implications of this ‘barrier’ that non-Jews encounter while reading Matthew’s Gospel, it turned out to be the key to understanding the enigmatic ‘exceptional clauses,’ which turned out not to be exception clauses after all, but of Jesus, in the case of Matthew 19:9, answering the Jews in terms that only Jews would understand, and which they did understand, namely, that divorce had been banned from the earth, and anyone who thought that they could divorce their wives would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And in the case of Matthew 5:32, Jesus took into account that if a husband did divorce his wife, then all her sins of adultery would be laid at his feet except for the situation obtained in Deuteronomy 22:20-21, where his wife came into his marriage having committed fornication already. Jesus was careful to exempt the husband from blame for her pre-nuptial sins of fornication. This is how the Jews would have understood the ‘exemption from blame’ to come from. Ignorant non-Jews, looking to justify Erasmus’s new doctrine, changed the ‘exemption from blame,’ into an ‘exception to divorce,’ with disastrous consequences, affecting millions of lives.

**CRITIQUE OF THE BETROTHAL SOLUTION**

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(THE FOLLOWING CRITIQUE IS PART OF A LARGER WORK)

**ABSTRACT**

The Betrothal solution was born out of the necessity to harmonise Jesus’ abolition of divorce on any grounds, on the one side, and the ‘exception clauses’ in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 on the other.215 It was assumed that both exception clauses were genuine exceptions and should be translated as “except for fornication.” From an examination of the extant writings of the Early Church Fathers up until the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 remarriage after a separation (indistinguishable from a divorce) was not permitted, confirming Jesus’ total ban on remarriages after a divorce. To explain the apparent exception clauses it was thought that these must be related to something peculiarly Jewish,

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215 See the Postscript at the end of this section for the first(?) published presentation of the Betrothal view by Daniel Whitby in 1703. For advocates of this view since that date, see David W. Jones, “The Betrothal View of Divorce and Remarriage,” *BibSac* 165 (2008) 68-85, esp. p. 70 nn 8-14. This work gives leads to biblical and rabbinic sources relating to betrothal (p. 74).
because they are found only in Matthew’s Gospel, which was written specifically for the Jews. The solution was simple. The clue came from two directions.

From Scripture came the revelation that when Mary was betrothed to Joseph ‘before they came together,’ that is, before they consummated their marriage, ‘she was found with child of the Holy Spirit’ (Mt 1:19).

From rabbinic literature came the revelation that during the espousal period an engaged couple were regarded as husband and wife. This is confirmed in Matthew 1:19 where Joseph is called the ‘husband’ of Mary (1:19), and she is called his ‘wife’ by the angel of the Lord (1:20, 24).

According to the Betrothal solution, both sources indicated that if the bride was not a virgin leading up to the marriage ceremony she could be divorced and the wedding aborted. This is what Joseph intended to do. Consequently the Betrothal interpretation was brought to bear on the exception clauses, not to weaken or delete them, but to take full advantage of the unique situation in the Jewish religion whereby it was possible to get a divorce before one was married.

By demonstrating that Jesus distinguished between two types of divorces, one before and the other after the marriage ceremony, this interpretation argued that the exception clauses related only to divorce before the marriage, and that there could be no divorce once the marriage was consummated, unless, of course, it was discovered that the bride was not a virgin on her wedding night, and that she ceased to be so prior to the marriage, during the espousal period (as in the case of Mary). According to this solution, a significant confirmation that this re-interpretation was correct came in the discovery that pre-marital sex was called ‘fornication,’ and post-marital sex was called ‘adultery,’ and that these terms were rarely (if ever) misapplied in the Greek Scriptures. The outcome of this re-interpretation of the so-called exception clauses in Matthew was that there was a good divorce, which Jesus approved of, and a bad divorce, which He disapproved of.

6.6. CRITIQUE OF THE BETROTHAL SOLUTION

6.6.1. The pros and cons of the betrothal interpretation

The beauty about the betrothal interpretation is that it defends the indissolubility of every lawful, consummated marriage. That cannot be said of very many other solutions. It also defends the infallible nature of God’s Word, and that it can be trusted to guide the righteous man and woman into the true knowledge of God, and give them heart to do the will of God through obedience to everything He has revealed in His Word. If we translate Matthew 19:9 to bring out the interpretation of the Betrothal solution it would read:

“Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—except for betrothal fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

The evil consequence of the betrothal interpretation is that it makes Jesus the administrator of divorce, even though it is given under exceptional circumstances (akin to the Incestuous solution), it is, nevertheless, argue its supporters, a lawful divorce that Jesus thoroughly approved of, because His earthly father contemplated using this exceptional provision when he planned to divorce his

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216 The exception is the view, propounded by Gordon Wenham, that the exception clause in Mt 19:9 simply states that Christ’s prohibition against divorce does not apply in the case of an illegal, incestuous marriage—one that should not even have been consummated in the first place. Jesus, then, is teaching ‘no divorce,’ save the exceptional situation where marriage has taken place within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18:6-18. The negre arguments for this view are summarised in J. Carl Laney’s contribution in H. Wayne House (ed.), Divorce & Remarriage: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, ENG.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), pp. 36-7. This view stumbles over the same situation occurring in Greek and Roman cultures, so that the same exception clauses would be required in the gospels of Mark and Luke to meet the same situation. Is it not obvious that in the unique case of unlawful, incestuous unions the prohibition against divorce did not apply? There never was the possibility of obtaining a bill of divorce to undo these unlawful marriages. There are no history cases where a bill of divorce was used to disband these abominable unions. Annulment, not divorce, was the appropriate legal action to take in these cases. It is a sign of desperation to apply Jesus’ so-called exeptive clauses to these unlawful unions.

217 This solution is better known under the title, Marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18, which is supported by J. Carl Laney, The Divorce Myth (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1981), pp. 72-77.
espoused wife Mary. This provision of divorce had to go through the Jewish law courts to be valid. So, under special circumstances, divorce is good. God loves this kind of divorce.

We are informed that one of the major reasons for the one-year wait between the betrothal [engagement] and the consummation was to confirm the bride’s chastity. Proof of her virginity, in the form of menstrual blood on a cloth, which was usually bright red, was kept by her parents right up to the day she was married. If the proofs were not available or kept, then the contract would be declared null and void; the groom would not go ahead with the marriage. He had to be 100% sure that his bride was a virgin. It was like buying a jar of jam and on opening it at home discover that the seal had been broken and a big spoonful of it had taken out. It was bought in good faith that it had been sealed and was intact. So it was in the case of marrying a virgin. Both goods would be taken back to the seller and the purchase price refunded to them. End of story. The buyer goes off and buys the same product from a more reputable seller.

Yet, when we examine the work of one of the most able exponents of the betrothal view, he came to the conclusion that the ending of a betrothal contract was not on a par with divorce, but on a par with the annulment of a contract of ‘marriage,’ even though it had not been consummated to qualify as a full marriage. His words were:

A husband’s divorcing such a wife [i.e., one who has been unfaithful during the betrothal period] can equally well be described as the annulment of an unfulfilled contract of sale as a divorce. . . . Although the term divorce was used in these cases, it is more accurate to say that it was a matter of cancelling an unfulfilled contract of sale, because one of the parties had tricked the other as to the nature of the goods. . . . The word divorce is used even when a man divorces his wife because of her premarital unchastity. Actually he does not divorce his wife but is himself relieved by a court order of the need to fulfill his obligations under the marriage contract, since it has been established that the other party has deceived him.

Wenham and Heth agreed that, “This is not actually a divorce, though a legal bill of divorce was required by the Jews in such cases.” Given the contractual and conditional nature of the betrothal stage it is surprising to find a defender of the betrothal solution argue that: “Advocates of the betrothal view assert that this practice of nullifying an unconsummated marriage during the betrothal period because of unfaithfulness is the event in view in the Matthean exception clause.”

One can understand that Christians who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture would seek out a solution that would allow Jesus to be consistent in His teaching on divorce as stated clearly in Mark 10 and Luke 16. This is highly commendable, but if the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 has been tampered with, and a Greek word added to Jesus’ words to make Him allow for divorce for fornication, then it is wrong to defend the tampered text as representing what Jesus taught. The added word must be removed in order to recover the original words that Jesus actually used in conveying His teaching. When the offending word is removed we find Jesus teaching the complete opposite to what the addition produced. For instead of Jesus saying “except for fornication,” He said, “not over fornication.” The full text of Matthew 19:9 then reads, “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

Since the days of Moses no Hebrew or Jew had been allowed by God to obtain a divorce for fornication or adultery. God chose the severest penalty available to Him to get rid of such defiled persons. The only grounds that Hebrews and Jews had been using to get a divorce since the time of Moses were for non-fornication issues, but Jesus referred directly to these grounds and declared that all such divorces were now null and void. Anything outside fornication was no longer a ground for divorce.

218 Abel Isaksson, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple. A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19.13 [sic]-12 and 1. Cor. 11.3-16. Trans. Neil Tomkinson with Jean Gray (ASNU 24. Lund: Gleerup; Copenhagen: Munsgraed, 1965), pp. 137, 140. It should be borne in mind that Isaksson assumed that Jesus permitted divorce in Mt 19:9 because he was under the false impression that Erasmus’s text represented Jesus’ teaching (ibid., p. 139). All advocates of the betrothal solution labour under the same misapprehension, and even by most of their opponents, cf. J. Carl Laney, The Divorce Myth (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1981), p. 65f., who advocated the solution Marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18 to account for Erasmus’s exception clauses (ibid., p. 72).


He was asked, “Is it lawful . . .” and He answered clearly, “It is not lawful to divorce for a non-fornication issue, and My Father made it unlawful to divorce for a fornication issue.” God, in the Person of the Lord Jesus, abolished the practice of divorce on planet Earth for all time to come, and restored the original standard by which all men and women will be judged in the Last Day.

According to the betrothal solution, one cannot say that Jesus banned all divorces under all circumstances. Jesus has room for this kind of divorce within His teaching. He has given permission to Jews who are in a marriage contract, and whom He regards as husbands and wives, even though the consummation of their marriage is still up to one year in the future, to divorce one another if one of them commits fornication. He does not allow them to divorce on any other grounds. Apart from this single sin, this means that their engagement vows are unbreakable, and they must go through with the marriage. That Jesus would put the full weight of His authority behind this special case—this exception to His ‘no divorce on any grounds’ has alarming implications.

First, it means that Jesus’ name is associated with divorce and it has His approval, albeit it is a special kind of divorce available only to Christians belonging to a certain race.

Second, it means that divorce per se is not a word to be associated with sin. It is no longer appropriate to infer that ‘divorce’ of any kind is evil. In the betrothal solution Jesus has created a valid divorce which is not a sin. Consequently, there were three stages at which a divorce could be had in Jewish society: divorce leading up to the consummation (Matthew 1), divorce at the moment of marriage, (Deuteronomy 22), and divorce well into a marriage (Deuteronomy 24).

Third, on the betrothal interpretation there are now good divorces and there are bad divorces. Jesus is on the side of good divorces. Jesus loves divorce—the good kind. The argument goes that the espoused virgin is truly married, as truly as any married wife is, except for the matter of consummation, so that it is necessary to have a full, and proper divorce, complete with a bill of divorce, exactly the same as would be given to a married woman, to dissolve her espoused union. The betrothal view requires, nay, demands, that the term ‘wife’ should apply to a woman before and after consummation for the exception clauses to function. The betrothal vows have got to be as binding as the marriage vows. This is absolutely crucial if the exception is to work. But the more one argues for equality between the betrothal state and the married state, the wider becomes the logical gap in allowing the betrothal ‘wife’ to lose her wifely status for infidelity, but not allowing it in the case of the married wife. If betrothal were the same as marriage then why would the couple still need to be married?

Here the procedure of divorce does do what it claims to do, namely, it dissolves a lawful union of ‘husband’ and ‘wife.’ And Jesus, it is claimed, agreed that the divorce procedure truly dissolves unconsummated marriages because of unfaithfulness. Consequently, it is argued, that what God had joined together in holy matrimony in an espousal ‘marriage,’ He can dissolve through the law courts of this world. The question naturally arises, if God does this for unfaithfulness in the pre-consummation period, why would He not do the same in the post-consummation period? This disparity would place faithfulness prior to the marriage on a far higher level than on faithfulness after the marriage. God will not punish a married wife for adultery, or allow her husband to divorce her; he must put up with her all the days of his life. But God does punish the betrothed wife who commits exactly the same sin as the married wife, by allowing her ‘husband’ to divorce her, so that he is not glued to his ‘wife’ all the days of his life. This is an illogical, not to mention, immoral, situation to be in.

We noted above that the betrothal vows have got to be as binding as the marriage vows. This is absolutely crucial if the exception is to work. The reason for this insistence by the supporters of the Betrothal solution is this, when Jesus commences His statement He uses the term ‘his wife’ and this must include espousal and married wives. He is addressing both types of wives. The term ‘wife’ (γυναῖκα) is an inclusive term in this context, we are told. Now if we omit the exception clause, the text would apply to both types of wives, and would read, “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife [espousal or married], and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

Now, if Jesus had made no distinction between these wives (in different stages of becoming potential mothers), then it logically follows that if, say, Joseph obtained a bill of divorce to dissolve his union with Mary, because of her fornication [loss of virgin status], then no man could marry her without being condemned by Jesus as an adulterer. We are told that it was to allow the innocent espoused husband (in this case, Joseph) to find another wife that Jesus inserted the exception clause.

If so, then we must return to the commencement of Jesus’ words and understand the ‘who’ in 19:9 to be inclusive of betrothed husbands and married husbands.

There is an illogical sequence here. Jesus, we are informed, taught that the exception allows only the espoused husband to divorce his espoused ‘wife.’ Now, if Mary was truly divorced from
Joseph, so that whatever bond there had between them as ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ has been truly dissolved, then how can Mary’s next husband be regarded as an adulterer? The charge of being an adulterer can only apply if Mary’s second husband marries a married woman, which Mary was not, if the divorce did what it claimed to do.

The only way out of this situation is to speculate that in the second half of the v. 9 Jesus has mentally put the betrothed couple behind Him, and addresses only the situation that pertained to fully married husbands and wives, as in v. 9a. If so, the text should now read:

“Now I say to you that who [= a married man], for instance, may have divorced his [wedded] wife—except for the espoused husband who divorced his espoused wife for betrothal fornication which is punished by death—and he [= a married man] may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

The odd thing in this whole set-up is that an espoused wife can be lawfully divorced on Jesus’ express authority, for the sin of fornication, but when a married wife commits the exact same sin of fornication, she cannot be divorced, yet the theory places great emphasis on the belief that at the betrothal ceremony the two are married in the eyes of the law. And so binding is this union, we are informed, that it takes a divorce certificate to get out of it. Playing up the permanency of the betrothal contract only heightens the nonsensical nature of not allowing married couples to be divorced on the same grounds of a broken contract.

Fourth, Jesus hates fornication so much so that when it occurs between two persons who are engaged to be married, the innocent party can sue for a divorce with His full approval and blessing. But if fornication occurs after they have consummated their marriage vows, then the innocent party cannot sue for a divorce, and if he does get a divorce it does not have His approval or blessing. The former is a just divorce, the latter is an unjust divorce. The flaw in this argument is that if the espoused wife is found to have committed fornication (note the term) before she consummated the marriage, she is not divorced, but stoned to death (Deut 22:21). There is, therefore no parallel with Joseph’s action to ‘put away’ his wife privately. This was an unlawful act on Joseph’s part in the eyes of the rabbis.221

Fifth, in order to administer Jesus’ ‘special case’ divorce, Jesus would need to set up the equivalent of the Jewish Sanhedrin in His Church to appoint judges to investigate each case. These judges would need a salary or stipend, secretaries, financial boards, and the whole paraphernalia that goes with human law courts. Or, are these privileged Jewish Christians to go to Satan’s Gentile law courts to obtain Jesus’ special divorce certificates?

Sixth, this ‘special case’ divorce would not be available to Jesus’ non-Jewish converts. It is a special privilege which He has granted only to those who are still participating in the traditional Mosaic way of life, and who are living under the same conditions that obtained when the Torah became the established way of life for all Jews. Jesus discriminates between His Jewish followers and His Gentile followers. He cares more for one than the other. One is more highly favoured than the other. There is a class division between His followers. They are unequally yoked together in a single Body.

Seventh, in effect the vows that the Christian Jews make at the traditional pre-nuptial stage are the same vows that the Christian Gentiles make on the day of their traditional way of becoming husband and wife, the only difference is that the Christian Jew has a longer period of time between making the vows and consummating the marriage.

In the case of Gentile Christians, bringing forward the pre-nuptial vows to within a few hours of the point at which those vows are consummated, does not allow any time for the bride or groom to commit fornication, but even if, God forbid, one of the parties commits fornication between making the vows in the morning and consummating the marriage in the evening, and it can be proved that fornication has taken place, Jesus does not allow this Gentile couple to sue for divorce on the grounds of fornication, because He discriminates between His Jewish and His non-Jewish followers. It follows from this, that if one of the Gentile parties is guilty of fornication before the marriage is consummated Jesus’ attitude toward the innocent Gentile party is to say, ‘Hard luck, but you now have to live with your guilty partner for the rest of your life, because I have not given you the option that I have given to my Jewish followers to sue for a divorce, and extricate themselves from a defiled relationship.’

Let us be clear, in the case of Jewish Christian weddings, because there is a longer period of time between making the vows and consummating the marriage, if one of the parties commits fornication in that time, then the innocent party can sue for a divorce, but only if they are Jewish, because the exception is found only in the Gospel that was specifically written for the Jews.

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221 I have elsewhere dealt with the lawfulness of Joseph’s action in putting away Mary, which is not the same as legally divorcing her.
In effect, Jesus discriminates between His Jewish converts and His Gentile converts; the latter are second-class converts. If Jesus did make a ‘special case’ for His Jewish converts then a new batch of legal questions come to the table. What if only one of the parties is Jewish, can they sue for this ‘special case’ divorce? What is the shortest time that can exist between the pre-nuptial vows and the consummation of the marriage? Can it be a week, or one day? What is Jewish? Is it biological or cultural? If biological, what percentage of the DNA must be ‘Jewish’ (however defined) to qualify for this ‘special case’ divorce, approved of by Jesus and having His full imprimatur stamped on the divorce certificate?

Eighth, one would have to question the wisdom of Jesus who had the foresight to realise that God’s will for marriage pre-dated Moses’ approval of severing marriages. He displayed His supernatural wisdom when He took His disciples back to Genesis 2:24, not to Deuteronomy 24:1-3. This insight is highly commendable, but in the case of His ‘special case’ divorce, He took up a tradition that Moses did not institute, which has no legal foundation in God’s Torah, and which was imposed on God’s people by the rabbis, and He goes along with it. Not only does He go along with it, but He actually incorporates it into His set of doctrines. So the rabbis created their own law, with no authority from God, and Jesus meekly fell in behind these rabbis and gave His approval to their new, man-made law.

We are entitled to ask: What was the point of rescuing this man-made, post-Mosaic, Johnny-cum-lately custom to divorce an unmarried couple, when His doctrine of forgiveness stated that all adultery and all fornication committed after a marriage had been consummated had to be forgiven, and that He would not make any ‘special provision’ for divorce for sexual sins committed by married persons? The position that the supporters of the betrothal solution have put Jesus in is ludicrous. It makes Him look like a fool, taking His lead from blind leaders of the blind. Elsewhere Jesus had nothing but contempt for the ‘tradition of the Elders,’ but in this case He was blind-sided and didn’t see it coming, if we are to believe that the betrothal solution is the only solution to the so-called exception clauses in Matthew’s Gospel.

Ninth, if the only difference between a Jewish Christian wedding and a Gentile Christian wedding is that in the former there is a nine-month gap, and in the latter a nine-hour gap between full committal to becoming one flesh and the moment of consummation, then why did Jesus not see that this did not constitute a logical ground to deny the Gentile Christian the same right to divorce the guilty party that He gave to the Jewish Christian? How can this discrimination be justified? It is immoral.

Tenth, the concession to institute law courts to administer divorce certificates but only to His Jewish converts, and only in the case of fornication occurring in the nine-month gap (or x-months) between making a full, verbal commitment to becoming one flesh and the consummation of that intent, but deny administering divorce certificates to His Gentile followers, especially those who placed a similar nine-month engagement gap between promise and fulfilment, is odd. Written above the door of these Christian law courts would be the notice: “Admittance to Jews only.”

Eleventh, every one can see that an engagement is an engagement and not a one flesh union. Every one can see that if a Gentile Christian puts an engagement ring on the finger of the love of his life that he is set on marrying her, and if she accepts the ring she, too, is fully committed to marrying him. The ring constitutes a promise. They are no longer looking for their life’s mate. The promise is embodied in a tangible object. Accompanying that ring is the question, “Will you marry me?” But it is obvious to all her family, and his family, that the engagement does not make them ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ though they experience in their hearts that something has happened to their singleness, and this is recognised by God in Scripture, because He treats the engaged virgin differently to the one who is not engaged (Deut 21:13-29).

If one culture wants to capture the earnestness of their intense love for one another by prematurely calling them ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ then so be it; calling them does not make them ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ in the sense that these terms have in ordinary day usage. One would expect that Jesus would see that the engaged couple were not yet husband and wife. Why, then, does it require a divorce certificate to break off an engagement promise when the two are not yet one flesh? Gentile Christians do not need to go to a law court to get a divorce certificate to end their engagement, and to retrieve the engagement ring. They do what Joseph did to Mary, they put her away privately. End of engagement. End of story. Move on. Get another girlfriend.

It was a colossal blunder on the part of Jesus, if the betrothal interpretation is the infallible way to interpret the exception clauses in Matthew, in that He fell for the unbiblical tradition of granting a divorce certificate to break off an engagement. Jesus did not need to do this. It exposes a weakness in His claim to be God’s supreme teacher that He would fall for such a noose of a tradition as to regard the engagement to be so binding that it could only be severed or dissolved by using the same divorce certificate, with the same wording, as if the engaged couple were a one-flesh union.
How did Jesus allow Himself to be duped by this unnecessary tradition? It constitutes a damaging weakness to Jesus’ claim to be God, and to deliver infallibly God’s teaching to His people if the supporters of the betrothal solution are right, but are they?

Twelfth, Moses never instituted divorce for engaged couples. God never instituted divorce for engaged couples. But Jesus, we are told, instituted divorce for engaged couples. Or, rather, it was done for Him by the rabbis, before He was born, and He, unthinkingly, took up their tradition and incorporated it permanently into His body of teaching. Why did Jesus not question the lawfulness of this new divorce certificate for engaged persons? Why did He not reject it in the same way, and using the same reasoning process, that He rejected Moses’ divorce certificate, saying, “From the beginning it was not so.”?

When confronted with the post-Mosaic, new fangled, divorce certificates for engaged couples, why didn’t Jesus see through it, and declare, “The rabbis, because they wanted to protect the husband, permitted you to divorce your (engaged) wives, but from the time of Moses it was not so.”?

The supporters of the betrothal solution are agreed that Jesus took His lead from the rabbis because the rabbis called the engaged couple ‘husband’ and ‘wife,’ before they were married, and Matthew, the Jew, similarly called Joseph and Mary, ‘husband’ and ‘wife.’ Jesus also, we are assured, called the engaged girl a ‘wife,’ because in the very words that He condemned married wives from being divorced, He slipped in an exception for engaged ‘wives,’ realising that they were not in the same class as married wives. But the fact that He refers to them as ‘wives’ is said to be proof that He was not including them with the other, married wives.

Jesus said, “whoever divorces his wife . . .” Which ‘wife’ are you referring to? the Pharisees could have asked: ‘engaged wives or married wives?’ but Jesus continued, “whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, . . .” The word ‘except,’ we are told, creates two classes of wives, and the word ‘fornication,’ we are told, is a sin that only engaged wives (or singles) could commit,223 so it is obvious, we are informed, that Jesus is talking about two different kinds of wives, and that what He says about married wives committing adultery if they remarry, does not apply to the engaged wives. They can get a divorce, and they can become the (engaged) wife of another man, while the first ‘husband’ is still alive, without committing adultery. We are told that Jesus was siding with the rabbis in order to protect these engaged ‘husbands’ from the charge of committing adultery after they divorced their ‘wives,’ which the tradition obliged them to do, using the exact same divorce certificate that was used to divorce a married couple.

In effect, the betrothal interpreters hold that what Jesus is doing is robbing the married man of his Mosaic right to divorce his married wife for fornication,224 but allowing the engaged man his new rabbinic right to divorce his engaged wife for fornication, which new right was unlawful, because death, not divorce, was the lawful punishment for her fornication (Deut 22:21).

Thirteenth, there is a logical and a moral inconsistency in Jesus giving permission to divorce an (engaged) wife for sexual infidelity before she is married, but not after she is married. If fornication is wrong before marriage, then it is wrong after marriage. What’s the difference? The act of fornication, and its heinousness, is exactly the same whether it is carried out before or after the marriage has become a reality.

Fourteenth, there is a logical and a moral inconsistency in Jesus punishing an unfaithful (engaged) wife with divorce, and punishing an unfaithful (married) wife with death. Jesus allied Himself fully with the rabbis when He, too, called the engaged woman a ‘wife.’ However, the rabbis were more consistent than Jesus, because if an engaged wife committed a sexual offence, they did not call it ‘fornication,’ as Jesus did, but they rightly called it ‘adultery,’ because she was a ‘wife.’ Because the sin was adultery, the rabbis rightly demanded the death penalty. Jesus, we are told, reduced their punishment to divorce, when He used the term ‘except’ in the so-called exception clause in Matthew

222 A virgin wife was the expectation of every husband. If he engaged her in good faith, and having seen the evidence for her virgin status before he married her. She became his property. He did not want to marry ‘damaged goods.’ WYSIWYG did not apply when it came to Jewish weddings.

223 This point is the foundation for the betrothal interpretation, namely, that by using the term ‘fornication,’ which is dogmatically declared to be a sin that is never committed by a married woman, Jesus must be addressing two kinds of wives in His condemnation of divorce.

224 Of course, betrothal supporters would never accept that a married woman can commit fornication; she can only commit adultery. If there is one thing that they will never give up, it is that fornication always and only refers to pre-marital sex, committed by unmarried persons. Only by maintaining this distinction can they get their Trojan horse wheeled into Mt 5:32 and 19:9. For inside this Trojan are two different kinds of wives, one married and the other unmarried).
19:9. “Whoever divorces his wife . . . except for fornication . . . “ This, we are told, gave the engaged husband the right to divorce his engaged wife for fornication. He should have stoned her, but Jesus gives him permission to reduce it to divorce.

Jesus left Himself open to the charge that “this was not so from the beginning,” because God demanded that both the engaged wife and the married wife, if found guilty of infidelity to their husbands, were to be stoned to death. On what authority, then, did Jesus overrule God and change the death penalty into a divorce penalty in the case of engaged wives? The betrothal solution puts Jesus and God on a collision course over the punishment that is to be meted out to the engaged wife. Jesus preferred to side with the rabbis and oppose God. This is an unforeseen, evil consequence of adopting the betrothal solution. It has not been thought through in a rigorous manner.

Fifteenth, supporters of the betrothal solution to the Matthean exceptive clauses sleep safely in their beds knowing that Jesus instituted divorce only for engaged Jewish couples. They feel secure knowing that Christians in the West cannot get their hands on this ‘special case’ divorce certificate. But what they have not realised is that once Jesus made an exception for divorce for engaged Jewish converts that this provision automatically became a permanent fixture in His teaching on divorce and remarriage. This means that as more and more Jews turn to Christ and congregate in Messianic churches, and who are determined to carry into those congregations all the trappings of their rich Hebrew/Jewish religion, they will return to their marriage traditions.

Now, if they discover that Jesus, their Messiah, has granted them permission to divorce their engaged wives and engaged husbands for sexual immorality during the espousal period, they will be emboldened by the betrothal solution to re-introduce these ‘special case’ divorces into their congregations, because they are the ‘special’ people of God, set apart from their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ. With a sense of pride in their Jewishness, they can point out that there is an exception clause to be added to Paul’s statement, “that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ; we are all one.” ‘No,’ says the modern Christian Jew, ‘Jesus has given us divorce, which He has not given to you Gentiles.’ And the supporters of the betrothal solution will have to agree with them: we are not all one; Jesus has erected a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile over the issue of divorce during the espousal period. They can get a divorce, but the Gentiles cannot. This is one of the unforeseen consequences of the betrothal solution.

Mark and Luke were written for Gentile Christians, and these Gospels make no provision for the ‘special case’ divorce to be on offer to them; it is only on offer to Jewish Christians, and this is why it appears only in Matthew’s Gospel. If this is so, would it not be tempting for Gentile Christians to become converts to Jewish Christianity, so that their offspring can be considered ‘Jewish’ and so inherit Jesus’ provision for divorce during the engagement period? By becoming ‘Jewish,’ the infants of Gentiles can be circumcised and be deemed to be within the Body of Christ, and the infant girls could receive baptism as their sign of being ‘in’ the family of God, and not left on the ‘outside,’ in limbo, as obtains in the case of Baptist churches.

Sixteenth, the supporters of the betrothal view made themselves hostages to fortune when they declared that the word ‘fornication’ could only mean pre-marital sex, and that no married person could commit fornication. This is based on ignorance of the facts. Married persons can fornicate and be fornicators, as well as be adulterers and adulterers and adulteresses.

Seventeenth, the betrothal interpretation is based on the wrong Greek text. It is based on Erasmus’s faulty Greek text. The truth is, that once you remove the Greek word that Erasmus added to God’s Word in Matthew 19:9, the exception clause “except for fornication” disappears, and the raison d’être—the reason for the existence of the betrothal interpretation disappears.

Eighteenth, the betrothal interpretation gives the same translation to the so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, namely, “except for fornication,” despite the fact that the Greek is different in both places. It is different because Jesus was teaching two different points in these two places. Being caught in the headlines of their own theory, has blinded their minds to see the difference. This difference is crucial, because on it hangs the solution to the enigma of these so-called exception clauses.

Nineteenth, if, as some scholars hold, the Romans and the Greeks, as well as the Jews, had a similar betrothal period prior to the actual wedding, then this weakens the foundation of the betrothal view. 225 Whether there was a legal commitment to marry at a future date in these non-Jewish cultures, so that there was a true parallel to the Jewish situation is unclear.

Twentieth, the supporters of the Betrothal solution would prefer to translate Matthew 19:9 as follows: “Now I say to you that who, for instance, may have divorced his wife—except for betrothal fornication which is punished by death—and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous.

by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.” But why would Jesus single out betrothal fornication, when the same death penalty applies to it and to adultery? To justify God’s death penalty the solution requires that the pre-marital fornication be committed after the couple have entered the espousal period, but before the marriage is consummated, because only if she can be viewed as a ‘wife’ could she receive the punishment that belongs to adulteresses.

If a young woman was raped before she was espoused to be married, so that she was not considered to be the ‘wife’ of any man, then the rapist was not subject to the death penalty (Deut 22:29), but then neither could he ever divorce her all the days of his (or her) life if he married her.226

Twenty-first, under point three above we noted that the Betrothal solution required the following translation: “Now I say to you that who [= a married man], for instance, may have divorced his [wedded] wife—except for the espoused husband who divorced his espoused wife for betrothal fornication which is punished by death—and he [= a married man] may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.”

The switch from focussing on married couples in 19:9a, to addressing betrothed couples in the exception clause, and then switching back to married couples in v. 9b is not good grammar.

The implication of the exception clause is that Jesus taught that if a betrothed husband divorced his betrothed wife it could only be for fornication, and nothing else. This means that his betrothal, when once established in law and custom, is a permanent union (‘all the days of his life’), and he cannot get out of it on any other grounds, not even using the ‘eret dava’ or the ‘hate’ option of Deuteronomy 24:1-3. It becomes an indissoluble betrothal bond.

Presumably, if Joseph had divorced Mary for fornication, then she would have been a divorced woman, and no one could marry her, and yet she is not married to anyone! This is unlike the case with married couples, who, after they got the same bill of divorce as the espoused couple got, Jesus did not regard their bill of divorce as dissolving their marriage bond.

Surely, if Jesus agreed that Joseph’s bill of divorce did dissolve their union, then Mary was a free woman. She was free to remarry. But if she is a divorced woman, how can any man marry a divorced woman and not be an adulterer? The answer must be, according to the Betrothal solution, that Jesus made a further exception to His statement in v. 9b, to allow espoused divorced wives to remarry. So the colorary of allowing espoused husbands to divorce their wives is that their divorced wives are free to remarry. So the assumption that all remarriages are adulterous relationships is false; there are some remarriages which are not adulterous affairs. This is what results when you do some joined up thinking.

6.6.2. The way forward to a new solution

What we need is a new solution that:

(1) divorces Jesus from divorce. The betrothal solution does not do that. It presents Jesus holding ‘special case’ divorce certificates in His hands, and dispensing these through the hands of His bishops and elders but only to His Jewish converts. The New Testament Church was predominantly Jewish to begin with, but in the course of time they dwindled to almost nothing. The teaching of Jesus has come round full circle again, or come into vogue once again, in that as more and more modern Jews return to be His disciples, they, but not their Gentile brothers and sisters, can avail themselves of His permanent provision of divorce to ensure that their men folk marry only virgins. Gentiles are not given the same protection, and they have to take their chance that they are marrying a virgin. If she is not a virgin, then that is hard luck on them. They have to live with her in a WYSIWYG world (what-you-see-is-what-you-get), with no prospect of ever being released from her (or him).

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226 There are only two occasions when God stepped in to ban divorce. (1) When a man raped a virgin who was not betrothed, and she agreed to marry him (Dt 22:29; Exod 22:16-17), and (2) when a husband wrongly accused his newly married wife of not being a virgin on her wedding night (Dt 22:13-19). Both wives had an ugly beginning to their married lives. The seeds of disaster and the potential for divorce were there from day one. God saw it, and by removing any escape from the union, He forced the husband to come to terms with his ‘bound’ state. The abolition of divorce in these two cases was a foreshadowing of what was to come when He would send His Son into the world to make it a universal law that once a lawful union had been formed each couple must come to terms with their ‘bound’ state, because it was one from which there was no escape. Hence the consternation of Jesus’ disciples when they learned this, “In that case, it is better not to marry” (Mt 19:10).
(2) The new solution must associate every occurrence of the word ‘divorce’ with sin. In the betrothal view there is a ‘good’ divorce, which Jesus endorses as a good thing, and there is a ‘bad’ divorce which He hates. This distinction must be abolished in the new solution.

(3) The new solution must take into account the linguistic evidence that the term ‘fornication’ cannot be restricted to pre-marital sex. This is the lynch pin that holds the betrothal theory together. The evidence is clear that married persons can be fornicators and fornicate, just as they can be prostitutes and prostitute themselves. The term ‘fornicate’ and ‘prostitute’ go back to the same root.

(4) The new solution must be based on the Majority (Byzantine) Greek New Testament published by Robinson & Pierpont, which has removed Erasmus’s addition of ἐτί before μὴ in Matthew 19:9. The removal of this word will remove the exception clause altogether in Matthew 19:9.

(5) The new solution must come to terms with the different Greek words used in the so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. It is a common failing of works supporting the betrothal solution that they ignore these differences, because behind them Jesus is making two separate points.

(6) The new solution must take into account that Jesus is referring to one and the same wife in Matthew 5:32, and one and the same wife in Matthew 19:9, in accordance with the grammar of their respective sentences. It is a cornerstone of the betrothal solution that Jesus is addressing two kinds of wives in both places. This is eisegesis, not exegesis.

(7) The new solution must not manipulate or distort the use of rabbinical material. For example, the rabbis regarded the engaged ‘wife’ as in the same category as a married wife, whose infidelity is called ‘adultery’ and the punishment was death. But in the betrothal solution this information is disregarded, and in its place they regard the engaged ‘wife’ as really a single person, and so her infidelity is called ‘fornication’ (which it is in Deut 22:21), and her punishment is reduced to divorce (which it is not in Deut 22:21).

Now the Jews never permitted divorce for adultery.227 This slighte of hand is a dishonest use of the rabbinical sources upon which they claim to find their master key to unlocking the meaning of the exceptive clauses in Matthew 5:32 & 19:9. In any new solution there must be transparent honesty in the use of rabbinical sources. It must be made absolutely clear to the readers where rabbinical sources have been altered, modified, or manipulated to make them support a predetermined goal that is not found in the source documents. The betrothal solution gives the impression that it is based on trustworthy Jewish documents setting out the details and laws pertaining to marriage customs among the Jews in Jesus’ day.

(8) We must not present Jesus as taking His theology and ethics from the rabbis, as the betrothal solution does. Jesus despised them and used the harshest terms possible to condemn them and their ‘traditions of the Elders,’ which Jesus found nauseating and a burden on the people of God. The introduction of a divorce certificate to get out of an engagement was the creation of the rabbis. It has no legal basis in God’s Torah, and certainly Moses did not sanction it. We should not present Jesus as a poodle dog jumping through this rabbinic hoop. That is an undignified role to put Jesus in.

(9) The new solution must not create divorce law courts in the Church, as the betrothal solution would require for Jewish Christians to come to, to dissolve their binding engagement commitments.

(10) The new solution must not divide Christ’s Church into two distinct groups on the grounds of race between Christian brothers and sisters. Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage must be applicable to Jew and Gentile Christians alike.

All the points outlined above are present in the new solution being put forward in this book.

6.6.3. The importance of virginity in a bride

Having presented the best and the evil aspects of the betrothal solution, and an outline of a new solution to the so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew’s Gospel, it is time to delve more deeply into the betrothal solution, which appears to be the only one on offer to conservative-evangelicals to rally around.

It is wise to have grave reservations about cultures that demand virginity in the bride but not in the bridegroom, and if the bride is not a virgin on her wedding night, then she can be divorced, but not vice versa. This is a case of double standards.228

227 The case of Joseph privately putting away Mary cannot be an example of the Jewish tradition relating to espoused brides, because these had to be public occasions, where possible. There is no legal term in Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew, that is equivalent to the English word ‘divorce.’ These languages use common verbs to refer to the act of divorce.

228 See also section 5.8. How far can Old Testament laws be imposed on the Church?
Where once in Ancient Near Eastern societies a bride was bought for money and was a possession, much like cattle and goods, one can see that a non-virgin bride would be deemed to be ‘spoil goods,’ and returned to her father (the seller). That is a given fact of life in those kinds of cultures, and we can place Hebrew culture within its Near Eastern context in this respect. But with the coming of Christ and the re-introduction of marriage as it was ‘in the beginning,’ all of these cultures must undergo a complete transformation. ‘All things become new,’ applies to marriage customs as much as to all other aspects of societal living.

The reason why a man had to marry a virgin in Israel was to ensure that every man’s offspring could be traced back to those to whom great promises and covenants were made concerning possession of land in Palestine and future inheritances. Only physical, legitimate descendants could inherit these promises. Illegitimacy disqualified. Illegitimate sons could not be members of the people of God—‘the Church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38) for ten generations of descendants. The need for such purity of descent has long since passed with the coming of Jesus. In Him all genealogies have terminated. Illegitimate children can now inherit the Kingdom of God, as can repentant adulterers and murderers, and all those who formerly committed capital punishment sins while living under the Mosaic law.

So while one would expect every bride and groom to be virgin on their wedding night, anywhere in the world, no exception must be made for Christian Jews. Not to find her a virgin is not a cause for divorce, or to invalidate the union. Young men (Jew and Gentile), as much as young women, are not virgin in their thought-world while they are in an unregenerate state (before conversion).

Consequently Jesus made a great contribution to abolishing the evil of divorce in every culture when He made the statement: “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart’” (Mt 5:28). On this standard no young groom would ever reach the altar. Of course, in using the term ‘adultery’ Jesus was specifically referring to married men. If He had been thinking of single men, He would have said, “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed fornication with her in his heart.”

The one thing that can be said of the Hebrew religion is that every male member of the Old Testament Church was born of a virgin mother. God was absolutely strict on this necessity. So strict was He that He required the death penalty for every bride who was not a virgin on her wedding night, and whose parents could not provide proof of her virgin status when they gave her away in marriage (Deut 22:13-29). That is a very high standard of morality to maintain, and a very high price to pay if it was not maintained. But the standard and the penalty were introduced with the sole object of ensuring that the promise made to Adam that from his seed would come his redeemer, would be fulfilled. The same promise is narrowed down to Abraham, then to Isaac, then to Jacob, then to Judah, then to David’s line, and so to Christ. It was Satan’s purpose to contaminate the line running from Adam to Christ, so that no one would know if God had kept His promise to Abraham and David or not.

It is the fact that the Messiah-Jesus emerged out of Joseph’s house, who was ‘of the house and lineage of David’ (Lk 2:4) that God was able to demonstrate that He had kept His word. But if Satan had managed to contaminate the lineage of the Messiah as it passed down the male line from Adam through Seth, through Shem, through Abraham, through David, through Joseph, he could only do so when the seed passed out of the loins of each carrier of the seed into the womb of a virgin mother. Because each male link had to pass through the womb of a woman, because the male carriers died, the seed was at its most vulnerable to being lost when it made the transition from husband to wife. If she was not one hundred percent faithful, then her firstborn son may not be her husband’s firstborn and heir, and that would cause great confusion.

Now that the Messiah has come, the death penalty has been removed for fornication and adultery. It is highly desirable that a Christian man marry a virgin wife, but if she is not a virgin he cannot kill her or divorce her. Jesus laid His axe to the tree of marriage as an indispensable hoop through which every man had to jump to please his Creator.228 The era of physical begetting to

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228 Some supporters of the betrothal solution use 1 Cor 7:2, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband,” as proof that the use of the term ‘fornication,’ which is a sin that only unmarieds can commit, implies that Paul is addressing unmarrieds. If so, then Paul is commanding every unmarried man and every unmarried woman to get out of the unmarried state as soon as they possibly can, to avoid the sin of fornication. This goes against his principle that each person is to remain in the married state in which God called him/her (7:20, 24). “Are you bound to a wife? seek not to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife” (7:27). The solution is that he is addressing married couples, who already have proved that they
expands the membership of the Old Testament Church was now a thing of the past. The era of spiritual begetting had arrived in the person and example of Jesus Himself. There is something better to live for than sex, He revealed. The custom of marrying and giving in marrying had to take a back seat in His Kingdom.

6.6.4. Physical begetting has given way to spiritual begetting

We can start off with an analogy. The Holy Spirit did not instruct the Church of God to abolish social realities, such as the master and slave relationship. He transformed the outlook of both classes. The master is the master of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 7:22), and Christ is his master (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1); and the slave is the Lord’s freedman, and a freedman (1 Cor 7:22). Slaves and masters have the same Holy Spirit abiding in them (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). The Christian slave and the Christian master are brothers in Christ (Phlm 16), and this is all the more reason that the slaves should submit to their masters in the same manner that they submit to Christ (1 Tim 2:9-10).

At the spiritual level ‘there is no longer slave or free’ in Christ (Gal 3:28), because Christ is the master of both; they are all His slaves. They are all one class in Christ (Gal 3:28). Those who are born free must not become slaves, because they are already Christ’s slaves (1 Cor 7:23). Christian slaves are to obey their masters (Christian and non-Christian) as if they were obeying Christ Himself (Eph 6:5-7), and to do so ‘as slaves of Christ’ (Eph 6:6).

If slaves can buy their way out of slavery, or become free through legitimate and lawful means, then they should do so, but only with the motive that they can serve Christ directly (1 Cor 7:21). The slave serves Christ through serving his immediate, physical master. Likewise the wife serves Christ through serving her husband (Christian and non-Christian), who is her immediate head. The slave uses his will to do the will of his master. The wife uses her will to do the will of her husband. The master and the husband use their will to do the will of Christ, who uses His will to do the will of God, so that God will be seen to be all in all (1 Cor 14:28).

The husband and the master serve Christ directly, not through some human intermediary. The male slave can move from serving Christ indirectly to serving Him directly, if he can become free. The wife can never do this. All her married days she serves Christ indirectly, through her ordained head.

If it is good for a man not to ‘touch’ a woman, that is, not to become one flesh with her through marriage, so that he can be more devoted to serving Christ, then the same applies to the girl. It is good for a woman not to ‘touch’ a man, that is, become one flesh with him, so that she can be more devoted to serving Christ in body and in spirit (1 Cor 7:34).

Marriage has a detrimental effect on the level of devotion that can be given to serving Christ. It never adds, it can only subtract, and distract from serving Christ. Where possible, Paul advises, do not marry, not as a command (which some heretical groups made it), but to avoid the inevitable (cf. Mt 19:10). Paul’s advice would have been, only marry when the physical urge to do so is so great that it, itself, becomes a distraction from serving Christ as a single person (1 Cor 7:9).

The object of every convert to Christ should be to serve Christ as fully and as undistracted as possible. If the convert is single when called to serve Christ then they (male and female) should stay single for the rest of their lives. This is the best option. This maximises what they can give back to Christ for buying them with His blood.

Those who marry because they have to marry, have no choice. They must make the best of their privileged calling to be married, for it is a charisma from God (1 Cor 7:7), and within that context to devote as much of their time to serving Christ as is possible, and raising up children (the gift of God) to serve Him. Too often today, the children of Christian parents are lost to the family of Christ, and are attracted by the lures of the world to end up in perdition. It might seem to the Christian parents that they devoted a lot of time and money to no profit for Christ.

God did not create woman in His image and likeness, as He did the man. They are not the same in God’s eyes. He created the woman for the man, but He created the man for Himself. The man has been placed over the woman. He has been put in full control over all that God created, and that includes woman. God has created ‘sons of God’ and these are central to His creation; woman is his helpmeet, not his head, and never to exercise authority over him.

This top-down approach to the relationship between men and women, and husbands and wives, is reflected in Jesus’ statement that a man may even give up his wife for the sake of the

do not have Paul’s gift of continence, so they are more vulnerable to slip into fornication, a sin which marrieds can commit, according to Paul’s use of the term here.
kingdom of God (Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29; Lk 18:29\textsuperscript{280}). But there can be no \textit{vice versa} here, because the woman is subject to the man's headship. Paul has the same outlook as Jesus in that he addresses the men-folk with the advice, “Brothers, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, . . . for the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:29-31). Both Jesus and Paul are very conscious that man is central to God achieving His will on this earth, consequently, the unmarried state is preferable because God and Christ benefit most from it. The single man is to think hard before he marries. If he ‘binds’ himself to a wife, he must live with the consequences of that decision. Likewise the single woman must weigh up the cost to her of losing her glorious opportunity to devote her body and spirit to serving God, and forego marriage, if possible.

Because the ‘sons of God’ are the focus of God’s attention, every man, married or unmarried, must be ever vigilant not to allow any custom or tradition to rob him of his privileged status before God. He was created to be leader of his family, and leader of women in general, such that he must never submit to any woman in any position of authority in the Church. If she cannot rule over her own husband, then she cannot rule over the husbands of other women.

Given today’s multi-media influence on young people and the temptations to indulge in pornography and drugs at a younger and younger age, it is a wonder that any child of Christian parents can shield them from the polluting influences of the world, which appeal strongly to the desires of the flesh. Peer-group pressures outside the family home have more influence on the child than those of the family itself, where the battle rages to establish right from wrong, and true from false values. If there is no ‘born again’ experience the war is lost, and the child is lost forever. They grow up, and are servants of Satan, to do his will. Is marriage really worth it if this is the majority experience of Christian parents in the modern, electronic era?

The Holy Spirit’s teaching through Paul had a profound impact on Christians throughout the first few centuries, where it was recognised that to be free from marriage was the best option \textit{from Christ’s perspective}. Christ, Himself, set the standard, by refusing to follow the norm of His day, which was to enter into marriage. Today, marriage is still seen as the norm, and to be unmarried is seen, especially by the non-Christian world, as missing out on the pleasures of the flesh.

Where the motive of the convert is—in refusing to be married—to be totally dedicated to serving Christ, this is of great value in the sight of God and His Christ. Where refusing to be married becomes an end in itself, or a means to earn salvation, it is of no value in the sight of God and His Christ. \textit{The value lies in the motive.}

Under the old dispensation, to have sons was essential to God’s plan, who constantly promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a multitude of physical sons so that they could become a multitude without number, as the stars in the sky, or grains of sand on the sea-shore. But with the coming of the Messiah-Jesus all of this came to an end. The goal changed from having physical offspring to having spiritual offspring. Marriage was no longer essential, because that which is born of the flesh is flesh. Conversion to Christ became the essential thing. Spiritual begetting has taken priority over physical begetting with the advent of Christ’s coming. Christ shifted the focus and life-goal of each of His converts away from physical begetting to spiritual begetting. Paul delighted to have spiritual offspring, not physical offspring. His converts were his children, and how he loved and cared for them.

The Lord Jesus reset the compass with the needle always pointing to Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and away from Moses, who represented the physical world of marrying and giving in marriage, of divorce and remarriage, of endless sacrifices for sin, of hard-heartedness, and the inability to please God in the flesh.

What was said about physical versus spiritual begetting applies equally to physical versus spiritual land. Physical land and physical begetting were left behind with the new era that commenced with the coming of the Messiah-Jesus. What applies to one, applies to the other.

Today, the physical land of Israel is as inessential to God’s plan, as is the physical begetting of offspring. The spiritual has superseded the physical in all areas. Truly born-again Christian Jews no longer place any value on the physical land of Israel, or the physical city of Jerusalem, but have set their eyes on inheriting a different country and a different city, a new, spiritual Jerusalem, whose builder and maker is God. Everything has been moved from the physical to its spiritual counterpart in the heavens.

\textsuperscript{280} Some early transcribers (Codex Vaticanus in Mt & Mk/Codex Sinaiticus in Mk; but Vat. and Sin. retain ‘wife’ in Lk) saw a contradiction in Jesus’ teaching here, that a man is not to desert his wife (1 Cor 7:12), and these scribes deleted the mention of ‘wife’ from their copies. Men who do such things are not to be trusted, nor their copies.
We all, like Abraham, look for a new country and a new city, wherein dwells righteousness and peace. Like spiritual begetting, so with spiritual land, both are experienced in the here and now, and not just in more depth in the distant future. We already tentatively walk the streets of the New Jerusalem, as we walk in the same light that lightens the New Jerusalem that is above. For God is its light, and God is present in the lives of each of His spiritual offspring here on earth, shedding His light on their path. We have passed from darkness into light. We have passed from the physical Jerusalem to the spiritual Jerusalem. We have passed from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. All things have become new. All things have been changed.

Jesus opened the eyes of the world to see a completely new dimension to life that was kept hidden from the foundation of the world. But once opened and ignored, or glimpsed and turned away, or tasted and rejected, it will be more tolerable for those of Sodom and Gomorrah than for those who had the privilege to encounter Jesus through His new teaching and not become His disciples.

6.6.5. The ‘exception of Jonah’ in Matthew 16:4 and the parallel in Mark 8:12

Those who hold that the Jewish espousal custom holds the key to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 are to be commended in that they have arrived at the right conclusion (no divorce for consummated marriages) but from the wrong direction.

One of the strongest arguments used to support the betrothal interpretation is that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is not repeated in the parallel account in Mark 10:9 nor in Luke 16:18. Therefore the exception clause must have something to do with something that is unique to the Jews.

Are there any parallels in the Gospels where an exception is made in one Gospel, which is not repeated in another Gospel, but, which must be assumed to carry over into the Gospel that does not record the exception? There is one such example. The pericope Matthew 16:1-4 = Mark 8:11-13 takes place at Magdala, where the Pharisees press Jesus to display His miraculous powers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 16:4</th>
<th>Mark 8:12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and no sign shall be given to it, except (τῷ μή) the sign of the prophet Jonah.</td>
<td>Why does this generation seek after a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the occasion is the same, and the place is the same, and the time is the same, is it not reasonable to conclude that Mark left out the exception clause when he came to edit the material he used to compose his Gospel? If, as some believe (and wrongly), Mark wrote his Gospel first, and Matthew and Luke used it as the basis for their Gospels, where did Matthew get his exception clause from? Could it have been that the ‘sign of Jonah’ was still fresh in his memory from 12:39-40? Luke does not have a parallel to this particular pericope, but he records the exception clause in Jesus’ discourse in Luke 11:29-36. Verse 29 reads, ‘This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign shall be given to it, except (τῷ μή) the sign of the prophet Jonah.’

What would Mark’s readers make of his omission to mention the exception in Jesus’ apparently absolute statement that the Jews would not be given a single sign. i.e., a demonstration of His miraculous powers? What looks like an absolute statement in Mark turns out not to be absolute after all, because Matthew retained the exception clause, ‘except for Jonah the prophet.’

Is this not a parallel to the missing exception clause in Mark 10:9? Matthew retained the exception clause, ‘except for fornication,’ which Mark omitted. Many pro-divorce writers feel strongly that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 should be in the mind of the reader who reads Mark 10, Luke 16, Romans 7, and 1 Corinthians 7. On the face of it they have a strong case. Erasmus and the Protestant Reformers argued cogently that all Scripture passages about divorce must be interpreted in the light of the unambiguous exceptions contained in Matthew’s exception clauses, and it was very difficult for anyone to escape the logic that enclosed the mind of Europe at that time.

What is damaging to this parallel is that while there is an τῷ μή in the Jonah passage, there is no τῷ μή in the case of Matthew’s so-called exception clause. Here is where the breakdown occurs. However, supporters of the betrothal interpretation arrived at their solution in the distant past, when Erasmus had changed the Greek of Matthew 19:9 to read τῷ μή, thus creating a direct parallel with the
exception clause in the Jonah passage. The betrothal solution worked on the assumption that Jesus did make an exception for fornication, and they were puzzled to find something in Israel’s laws that would allow Jesus to make an exception for ‘fornication’ and yet allow Him to maintain that no consummated marriage could ever be dissolved. The solution lay in the situation that Mary and Joseph found themselves in. This scenario requires a separate section to unravel, see Should Mary have been executed? below.

The point of this section is to show that the betrothal interpretation arose out of a Greek text that was deliberately tampered with by Erasmus in order to get his interpretation of Jesus’ teaching on divorce into the New Testament. He was a humanist, and he was determined to get Jesus to allow divorce for fornication. The Reformers did not spot the trickery and were duped into accepting that Jesus permitted divorce for fornication.

Those who support the betrothal solution have been similarly duped by Erasmus into accepting that Jesus did introduce an exception clause into His teaching on divorce. This work has exposed Erasmus’s deception, so that those who formerly supported the betrothal solution will quickly see through Erasmus’s deception and go back to Matthew and remove Erasmus’s exception clause, and take a fresh stand on what Jesus did say about divorce and remarriage.

6.6.6. Did Jesus make an exception for fornication?

Almost all supporters of the betrothal interpretation follow the wording of the King James Version (AV) when it comes to the so-called exception clauses. This version followed the Greek text of Erasmus, who added the Greek word τιμία before μὴ at Matthew 19:9, and by this small addition he altered Jesus’ exclusion of divorce on all grounds, to one in which Jesus made an exception for fornication. These supporters never doubted that Matthew included an exception for fornication, but they were wrong. They were not in a position to even question the Authorized Version translation itself, such has been the low level of scholarship among them. Unfortunately, the New King James Version is no better than the old KJV, because it translates the Majority (Byzantine) Text as if it were translating Erasmus’s Greek text of 1516. But the Majority Text has rightly discarded Erasmus’s addition of τιμία before μὴ, yet the NKJV retains the old exception clause, for it reads: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Given that a shift is occurring toward the acceptance of the Majority Greek text of the New Testament, as the nearest thing we are likely to get to the original autograph text itself, it is disturbing that the New King James Version perpetuates the Erasmian exeptive clause, which is not in the Majority Greek text, nor is it in the Nestle-Aland Greek text (28th ed.), which goes back to Westcott & Hort’s 1881 Greek text, which was based on two, isolated, Egyptian manuscripts, both of which were in a state of degenerating into oblivion when they were rescued, but not before they lost a considerable portion of their text, which had to be supplied from later manuscripts. Evangelicals urgently need a revision of the NKJV which will be faithful to the underlying Greek text. Even Wilbur Pickering’s English translation of his Family 35 Greek text (really von Sonden’s Kr text), which does not have Erasmus’s addition, has not altered the AV text, because his text reads: ‘except for fornication.’ This shows how embedded the KJV is in the minds of textual scholars.

However, given that the betrothal interpretation came into being on the assumption that the Erasmian exception clause faithfully represented the mind of Jesus, godly men instinctively sensed that Jesus would never allow divorce for a lawful marriage. They had to find some way that would allow them to retain no divorce on any grounds, and yet allow the exception to stand. The solution was found in the custom of the Jews whereby it was possible to get a divorce before one was married!

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231 Unfortunately, almost every evangelical writer on the topic of divorce follows Erasmus’s Greek text, and they translate Mt 19:9 as “except for fornication/sexual immorality.” This concession to Erasmus wrong foots the lot of them. See, for example, J. Carl Laney’s contribution in H. Wayne House (gen. ed.), Divorce & Remarriage: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, ENG.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), p. 33.

232 Codex Sinaiticus was in the process of being burnt when Tischendorf arrived in time to rescue it. Codex Vaticanus was eaten through at both ends, so that bookworms ate almost all of Genesis and from Hebrew 10 to the end of Revelation. After Vaticanus had the missing text restored, and rebound, it was again discarded and bookworms began to eat through both ends again, until it was dismantled in the 1890s and has never been put back together again. Yet these two discarded manuscripts became the basis of the Nestle-Aland editions.

233 Wilbur Pickering, The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken (published in USA; Lexington, KY, 04 December 2013).
This custom was unique to the Jews, for the Greeks and Romans had nothing exactly like it. The fact that only Matthew carried the exception, which was written to and for the Jews, lent further credence to their belief that they had stumbled on the key to the exception clauses in Matthew. The fact that Joseph availed himself of this custom to divorce Mary, his espoused wife, clinched the argument in favour of their interpretation, they held.

The question was asked, Did Jesus make an exception for fornication? According to the NKJV the answer is Yes, but according to the Greek text behind the NKJV, the answer is No. We need to bring out the meaning in the Greek text if we are to get back to what Jesus really taught on the issue of divorce and remarriage. In what follows, I shall propose a revision of the NKJV at Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

6.6.7. Does ‘fornication’ in the New Testament refer only to pre-marital sex?

A search of dozens of web sites supporting the Betrothal solution to the so-called exception clauses in Matthew’s Gospel frequently contain the following sentence: “Fornication and adultery are not interchangeable words, otherwise they would not both be listed when sins are categorized as in Matthew 15:19 and Galatians 5:19.” This is a false deduction. It betrays ignorance of how language works. This is usually followed by a summary of the Betrothal interpretation such as:

In the Bible, ‘fornication’ always refers to sexual sin committed by single (engaged, or betrothed included) person and ‘adultery’ refers to sexual sin committed by those married. Hence, Jesus was not granting permission for the divorce and remarriage of a husband or wife on the grounds of sexual unfaithfulness in contradiction to the other passages cited in Mark, Luke, Romans or 1 Corinthians, but instructing the Jews that an engagement or betrothal could be broken for fornication.234

Defenders of the betrothal interpretation believe that if they can show that the term ‘fornication’ is not interchangeable with, nor is it a synonym for, ‘adultery,’ but refers only and exclusively to pre-marital sex, then this means that no married person can commit fornication. As a consequence, all extra-marital affairs by married persons are adultery, not fornication. They consider it a major linguistic blunder to say (1) that fornication can include adultery, and (2) that a married person cannot commit fornication. On these two presumptions hang all their other arguments.

Of these two, the Lynch pin is (2). The espousal view can be summed up in one writer’s words, “Remember,” he warns, “it was ‘except for fornication [pre-marital sex]’ during the espousal period, prior to the marriage being consummated, that Matthew said one was free to divorce—remarry.” Another writer wrote, “Could the ‘saving for fornication’ be pre-marital sex during the Jewish espousal period, making them free to divorce and remarry because they had not yet consummated the marriage?” What this writer failed to notice was that if Jesus permitted an engaged ‘wife’ to lose her virginity in the espousal period, and was divorced by her prospective husband for her infidelity, how could she be married to another man if she was not a virgin, for every man had to marry a virgin. If she was found not to be a virgin on her wedding night then she was stoned to death (Deut 22:20-21), not divorced, as Jesus is made to support.

This view makes a fool of Jesus, who is presented as being incapable of working through the logic of His position.

In the above case, could the ‘husband,’ after divorcing his ‘wife,’ have a change of heart and take back his ‘wife’ again, contrary to the law in Deuteronomy 24:4? The rabbis would say No, because her divorce is no different from that used to divorce a married wife. Jesus could be saved

234 The earliest reference I could find to this misleading linguistic argument comes from John Ignatius Döllinger, The First Age of Christianity and the Church, translated from the German by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (1st ed; London: Allen, 1866, pp. 222-36; 3rd ed. 1877; 4th ed; London: Gibbings, 1906, pp. 373, 434). In 1866 (vol. 2. pp. 223, 227) he claims that πορνία “is always applied to the sin of an unmarried person, not to unfaithfulness in a wife, which is constantly described by another word (μοιχία) both in the Old and New Testament.” He accepts that the excessive clauses only refer to betrothal fornication (p. 227), “… Christ carefully distinguishes … between the two words, one (πορνία) referring to unchastity in the single, the other (μοιχία) to unfaithfulness in the married.” In Appendix III. “On Christ’s Teaching about Marriage” (pp. 310-316), he repeats his claim “that πορνία always means incontinence in the unmarried, never, either in the New Testament or in the Septuagint or in the profane authors adultery.”
from looking like a fool only if we change the Erasmian exception clause to read, “except he divorced her for a non-fornication cause,” because then she would still be a virgin, and be married as such.

It is interesting that in Matthew 5:27 Jesus’ teaching must have been addressed only to married men because He used the term ‘adultery’ which is only applicable to married persons. Consequently this verse can be made more specific in translation: “... but I—I say to you, that every **married man** who views a woman with the motive to desire her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” If Jesus wanted to include all males, married and unmarried, He would have had to use the term ‘fornication.’ Now, while the use of ‘adultery’ restricts Jesus application to married men, His use of ‘fornication,’ so goes the Betrothal view, restricts His application to unmarried men. It is crucial for this theory that the word ‘fornication’ must never be applied to married men.

Another writer, having mistranslated Matthew 5:32 as ‘except it be for fornication,’ asked, “What is fornication in this context? It is having pre-marital sexual relations during the Jewish espousal or engagement period.” According to the betrothal view, the primary definition of the word fornication (porneia) is unlawful sexual intercourse by unmarried persons, and the primary definition of the word adultery (moicheia) is unlawful sexual intercourse by married persons. That, they claim, is the core distinction between the two terms, and since their solution rests on just two pillars, if this linguistic theory collapses, then the whole edifice also collapses.

However, this rigid distinction between pre- and post-marital fornication, and between married and unmarried persons is not sustainable on linguistic grounds. It is artificial. It is contrived in order to twist the argument in favour of the betrothal interpretation. For the evidence that married persons can commit the sin of fornication, see 5.10. **Vocabulary relating to divorce.**

It takes but one example from the LXX of Jeremiah 3:1 to disprove this assertion. The LXX reads (my ET):

1 If, say, a man sent out his wife, and say she departed from him, and became wife to a different man, surely she shall not (μὴ) be returning to him again? [answer, No (Dt 24:4)] Shall not (οὐ) that women be defiling defilement? [answer, Yes] And you—you have fornicated (ἐξεπορνεύσας) with many shepherds, and are you returning to Me, says the Lord? 2 Lift up now your eyes and see, where have you not been defiled? Upon the roads you sat for them, just like a desolate raven, and you defiled the land with your fornications (πορνειαίς), and with your badness. 3 And you are possessing stumbling-stones for yourself with many shepherds. You acquired [became] the face of a prostitute (πόρνης). You acted shamefully toward everybody.

Here Yahweh sees Himself in a marriage metaphor, married to Judah. He divorced her because of her unfaithfulness. She went off and fornicated with many other men, which means that she is not permitted to return to her first husband, but, surprisingly, and brazenly, Judah thinks she can come back to Yahweh, her first husband. The implication of the divorce metaphor is that she has made it impossible for Him to be reconciled to her, because she is a defiled person (cf. Deut 24:4). The metaphor continues in LXX Jeremiah 3:6-8 (my ET):

6 And the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the king, You saw what she did to me, the dwelling of Israel. They went up upon every high mountain and under every leafy tree and they fornicated (ἐπορνεύσαν) there. And I said after these things—the time of her fornication (πορνεύσαι)—“Turn back to me again.” And she did not turn round again. And faithless Judah saw [observed] this faithless one. 8 I saw therefore concerning all things which she was overtaken by, in which she—the dwelling of Israel—was committing adultery (ἐμοιχάτο), and I divorced her, and I gave to her a bill of divorcement into her hands, and faithless Judah did not fear, and she was fornicated (ἐπορευθή), and she fornicated (ἐπορνεύσεσθε), she also. And her fornication (πορνεία) became for nothing, and she committed adultery (ἐμοιχεύσει) with stone and with wood.

Now, in Jeremiah 3:1 the scenario that Yahweh describes is of a married woman, who, after her divorce, was fornicating with numerous other males. This is a clear-cut case where a married woman can commit fornication. We see the same picture in 3:6 with regard to Yahweh’s other wife, the Ten Tribes of Israel, who were sent into exile. In 3:8 the married wife of Yahweh committed adultery (which is the correct word to use of a married person indulging in extra-marital affairs), so

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He divorced her (the Ten Tribes). Judah, Yahweh’s other wife, saw what He did to his wife Israel, but she paid no heed to it, and committed adultery and fornication against Him.

In the case of Tamar, she was the wife of Judah’s two sons, Er and Onan, but after she was married to them she remained a virgin and it was as a virgin that Judah, her father-in-law had sex with her, thinking she was a prostitute, but she was, in fact a widow, as he calls her (Gen 38:11). When Tamar was three months pregnant it was reported to Judah. He assumed that she had acted the prostitute. The report said, ‘Tamar your daughter-in-law has committed fornication [prostitution], and also see, she conceived through fornications.’ It would appear that any unlawful sex is fornication, whether it was committed by unmarried, married, widows, or virgin widows.

Only by limiting one’s search to a small corpus of Greek literature, namely, the New Testament, is it possible to impose the pre- and post-marital distinction, but it has to be imposed.

New Testament Greek was not a special, ‘holy’ dialect of Greek, confined only to Jews living in Palestine in the time of Jesus. It was Koine Greek which was spoken throughout the Roman Empire as seen in the dispersion of the New Testament writings to all parts of the Empire. Consequently, to be sure one has got a clear definition of what porneia meant, one would have to examine its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint), and then in the writings of those closest to the time of the New Testament writers, such as the Early Church Fathers who wrote in Greek, and then expand the search to include its occurrence in any classical writers. Only by casting the linguistic net as widely as possible is it possible to define the contexts in which the word porneia and moicheia are used. The smaller a net a researcher uses the less likely he is to come to a definitive decision.

However, even if we confine ourselves to examining the thirty-two cases of the use of porneia in the New Testament it is clear that the pre- versus the post-marital sex position does not hold up. It is not possible to impose on these texts this distinction in every case; there are always texts where the imposition does not fit. For instance in John 8:41; “You do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.” If this is a snide reference to Jesus’ virgin birth, then the supporters have overlooked the fact that Mary was the ‘wife’ of Joseph before she became pregnant. Her infidelity, according to the betrothal view, you would think, was one of adultery, not fornication, because she was considered to be the wife of Joseph, and, according to the betrothal view, wives cannot commit fornication. But the supporters of the betrothal view will not say that Mary has committed adultery (but the rabbinic work Sanhedrin would), because their theory states that a married woman cannot commit adultery. The theory is determining the meaning of words, not linguistics or grammar. The theory is the driving force, not the lexicons, not the dictionaries, and not the grammars.

The supporters of the betrothal solution thought they were on to a good thing when they discovered that a Jewish wife could be divorced before she was married, as well as after she was married! Great pride was taken in unravelling this mysterious tradition before the eyes of ignorant Western Christians, and being assured that Christians did not have to rely on non-canonical writings to prove that this unusual Jewish tradition existed in Jesus’ day, because, providentially, there was a record of Joseph actually using this rabbinic divorce to sever his connection with Mary. But the discovery was a two-edged sword. It was not all good news.

The moment a supporter of the betrothal view says that Mary committed adultery “before they came together,” in that admission, the solution disintegrates into thin air. Supporters are not allowed to say that. They must keep to the party line that she committed fornication, not adultery. Only if Joseph got a divorce for fornication can the exception clauses be made to apply to his case. If he got a divorce for adultery then the exception clauses cannot be restricted to engaged wives. The clauses must then apply to all wives, engaged and married. This is not the outcome that the supporters of the Betrothal solution want to see come about. This would be a disaster for their position. It had to be suppressed at all costs, and the best way to do this was to say nothing, and hope that nobody would notice the inconsistency in their position.

The supporters of the betrothal solution should come clean about the way they are picking and choosing to make their case stand up. First of all, they should acknowledge that rabbinical literature, and Matthew, call an espoused, engaged woman a ‘wife.’ Second, they should acknowledge that rabbinical literature regarded infidelity in an espoused wife as ‘adultery,’ and not ‘fornication.’ They can then place their cards on the table and say, If we accept that her sin should be called adultery, then our whole theory crashes to the ground. We cannot allow this to happen, so we are going to claim that Jesus decided to re-write rabbinical literature and re-classify Mary’s sin as ‘fornication.’ If we had honesty to this degree, then the claim that Jesus, off His own bat, decided to re-classify His mother’s infidelity as ‘fornication’ could be examined to see what it was worth, and whether the grammar or syntax or anything, could deflect the charge that the supporters of the betrothal interpretation have brought their theory to the text, and imposed it on Jesus, in order to
extricate Him, and shield Him, from being a supporter of divorce for all cases (married and unmarried) involving fornication.

Supporters of the betrothal solution are against any supporter who claims that ‘fornication may sometimes include adultery by extension, and adultery may include cases where there is fornication.’ They point out that this may be so in English usage, but it is definitely not so in Greek. They point out that if the blurring of the semantic fields that obtain in English were to be repeated in Greek then it would no longer be possible to be sure which wife Jesus was referring to in the exception clause itself. They argue that for Jesus to refer to engaged wives there then must be a black and white distinction between fornication (unmarried) and adultery (married), which means that the distinctions are locked in pairs. Fornication and unmarried go together; and adultery and married go together. We are informed that it is because this distinction is frozen solid linguistically in Greek that we are able to discern who Jesus is referring to, just through the vocabulary that He employs.256

Supporters are clear over the consequences, if adultery is the exception. This opens the flood gates to legitimise the vast majority of all cases of adultery going through the law courts. Indeed, there would be no law against divorcing your wife every year. A husband will not need to get his wife to be unfaithful to him in order to get rid of her. All he need do is commit adultery with the woman he wants to marry next, and get his divorce that way. Adultery will dissolve every marriage, so that the two become single again. The innocent party can remarry without waiting for the guilty spouse to die. The guilty party will also be able to remarry, but they will have a black mark against them for the adultery that dissolved the marriage, but apart from that black mark they can enjoy marrying a new partner.

If John 8:41, however, is a snide reference to Jesus’ virgin birth, which it could be,257 then Mary, a married woman, committed fornication (the term used by the Jews in v. 41) as the ‘wife’ of Joseph. If Mary was not the intended target of the remark, then the Jews have overlooked the fact that the tribe of Judah had its origin in Judah having sex with a woman he took to be a prostitute, but it turned out to be Tamar, his daughter-in-law.258 Judah in this case was a widower. He had no intentions of ever marrying her, but he was prepared to sow his wild oats with a proven prostitute (or so he thought), so this can hardly be considered to be pre-marriage sex. It deserves the description of being indiscriminate, wild sex. It is frequently asserted that if a married man has unlawful intercourse with an unmarried woman this is fornication, not adultery.259 The rule of thumb among Betrothal supporters appears to be, if any man (married or unmarried) has sex with an unmarried woman it is fornication, and if any man (married or unmarried) has sex with a married woman it is adultery.260 This does not hold up in Luke 16:18, or Mark 10:11-12. However, it is frequently argued in betrothal circles that the only time a ‘wife’ could possibly commit ‘fornication’ would be during the betrothal period, because before the betrothal period she would not be a ‘wife’ yet, but she would be a single woman. And after the betrothal period she would be ‘married,’ and therefore she would be committing adultery if she cheated on her husband during the betrothal period.

A study of the Greek translation of the two key terms πορνεία ‘fornication’ (and its derivatives (Heb. zenu) and μοιχεία ‘adultery’ (and its derivatives)(Heb. na‘af) in the Hebrew Bible, shows a very consistent equivalent translation of the two terms. They never confuse the translation terms.

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256 A variant on the Betrothal solution hinges on a similar, rigid distinction in Greek. Here the pairs are ‘prostitution’ (porneia) and ‘adultery’ (moicheia). Mt 5:32 reads, “except for a report of prostitution.” Presumably this is to make the exception a difficult category to qualify for a divorce.
258 Could it be that within the tribe of Judah there was a split into those born of Perez and Zerah (children of fornication), and those born of Shelah (child of a legal wife)? Jesus’ branch came from the children of fornication, in that Perez begat Hezron, and down his line came Boaz, who begat Obed, who begat Jesse, who began David, and so his line leads to Joseph and Jesus. If so, then there was no knowledge of Jesus’ virgin birth until after He ascended into heaven. The Toledoth Jesu was a scurrilous book, written by Jews, and mimicking the opening words of Matthew’s Gospel. In this work Jesus is said to have had a Roman soldier as his earthly father, but this work came too late to influence John 8:41.
the doubt, "did she or did she not commit adultery (About unless she has lost her reason"

"She committed adultery (zintah) [= fornication] within one of these (the priestly) novitiates” (Sot. 6b).

R. Jose b. Kipper (ca. 180) does not hold the view that a negative precept is applicable to a sotah “even in the case where she had actually committed adultery (zana'i) [= fornication)” (Yeb. 11b).

(For connection with Num. 5:12 A wife “does not commit adultery (mezanah) [= fornicating] unless she has lost her reason” (Num. Rab. 9:6, 25a).

(About the wife who is suspected but does not drink the bitter water. There is a matter of doubt, “did she or did she not commit adultery (zana'i) [= fornicating]?” (Yeb. 38b).

E. Lövestam made a study of the Hebrew equivalent to porneia and found it was invariably the word zenut. He concluded that zenut covers all the sexual scenes that porneia covers. and both can be used about matters which come under the category of adultery. He wrote:

This is the case in the Old Testament, where in many places zanah/porneuein [fornication] (with derivatives) is used side by side with na’af/moicheuein [adultery] (with derivatives) to express the same thing (Hos. 1:2; 2:4; Jer. 3:1ff. Ezek. 16:38-41; 23:37, 43ff; etc.) . . . If we turn to the Rabbinic literature the use of zanah (porneuein) (with its derivatives) about a wife’s unfaithfulness to her husband is well in evidence. In the following passage, zanah [fornication] and na’af [adultery] are directly related to each other: When a wife “commits fornication (mezanah) she is in the first instance false to her husband . . . and in the second place she is false to the Holy One, blessed be He, who has commanded her, “Thou shalt not commit adultery (tin’af)” (Ex. 20:14) and who says, “Both the adulterer (hano’ef) and adulteress (vehano’afar) shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10)” (Num. Rab. 9:2, 25a). This statement relates to the instructions about the wife suspected of adultery in Num. 5:11ff. In the Rabbinic discussions about the possible unfaithfulness of a wife zanah (derivatives) is often used. Here are just a few examples (note that Lövestam has retained the wrong English translation of the Mishnaic Hebrew terms. I have placed the correct ET in square brackets):

“R. Johanan said, Whoever is faithless, his wife is faithless (mezanenet) [= fornicating] to him.” (Sot. 10a).

“What if his wife (is charged with having) committed adultery (zintah) [= fornication] on the testimony of one witness, and he (i.e. the husband) is silent?” (Kid. 66a).

“If we say that they (scil. the witnesses) come before she drank the water, she is an adulteress (zana’h) [= fornicator]” (Sot. 6a).

“Suppose that she committed adultery (zintah) [= fornication] within the Temple precincts” (Sot. 6b).

“She committed adultery (zintah) [= fornication] with one of these (the priestly) novitiates” (Sot. 6b).

R. Jose b. Kipper (ca. 180) does not hold the view that a negative precept is applicable to a sotah “even in the case where she had actually committed adultery (zana’i) [= fornication]” (Yeb. 11b).

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(About the wife who is suspected but does not drink the bitter water. There is a matter of doubt, “did she or did she not commit adultery (zana’i) [= fornicating]?” (Yeb. 38b).

The wife who had committed adultery (zintah) [= fornication] instantly died when she smelled the bitter water (Num. Rab. 9:9, 26a).²⁴²

Lövestam claims that the verb zanah ['fornication'] is used about married wives in similar contexts in the writings of the Rabbis, for example, Yeb. 56b; Ket. 44b, 46a, 81a, 101a; Shab. 88b; Sanh. 50b; Siphra 21:9 (94c); Siphre Deut. 22:21 (118a).

Lövestam concluded: "Against this background the most plausible interpretation is without doubt that porneia in the exeptional phrases in Mt. 5:32 and 19:9 means sexual unfaithfulness. If the intended meaning was any other the term used would have been highly open to misunderstanding."²⁴³

I have omitted Lövestam's use of the Testament of Joseph as evidence, because it is not valid. When the terms are viewed from Potiphar's wife's point of view it is adultery, but from Joseph's point of view it was 'fornication,' and this helps the reader to recognise the point of view each time these terms are switched around.

It is clear from the above evidence that it can no longer be claimed that the term 'fornication' is the prerogative sin of unmarried persons. In what follows let us change 'fornication' into 'pre-marital sex' (for the sake of the argument) in the following texts and see what happens.

First, at the very first Church Council, held in Jerusalem, the apostle James suggested that the Church should send out a decree to all the churches not to come under the yoke of the Mosaic Law, and suggested— "that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from pre-marital sex [fornication], and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). Are we to believe that the Council, in choosing to use the word 'fornication' in vv. 20, 29, were addressing only unmarried, young men and women, and asking them to control their sexual urges before they got married? Were they not also addressing married men and women in all the churches? The wording of the decree is repeated in Acts 21:25. The context in Acts 15:20 would suggest that 'fornication' was a general word to cover all unlawful sexual activity by all members of Christ's Church—married and unmarried.

Second, Paul does not seem to abide by the rule that fornication only refers to pre-marital sex by unmarried singles, for as a close observer of human nature he noted, of the wicked men of his day, that "God gave them over to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another. . . . God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness, pre-marital sex [fornication], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; . . ." (Rom 1:26-29). Paul notes that these wicked men 'leave the natural use of the women,' which suggests that they were married. Or if Paul means that they turned their backs on marriage and sought an outlet for their sexual drive in homosexual relations instead, then are we to assume from this narrow definition of 'fornication' that all these wicked men were unmarried? The betrothal definition would exclude married men being in view here. Greek does not have a word for 'wife,' so when Paul says, 'even their women,' this could be a reference to their wives, who indulged in perverted sexual behaviour. Were all these men and women unmarried?

Third, Paul urges the brothers he is writing to in Corinth, "Flee pre-marital sex [fornication]. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he that commits pre-marital sex [fornication] sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18). If the definition holds up, then Paul is addressing only unmarried men, because they alone can indulge in pre-marital sex. Is this how the text is to be exegeted? Or is Paul addressing all the brothers in the church, married and unmarried? The only obstacle to saying that Paul is addressing all the men in the church is the narrow definition that the supporters of the betrothal interpretation have imposed on the word 'fornication,' but is that sustainable?

Fourth, Paul knew his Bible well, and knew that 23,000 men had been killed by a plague that God sent on them for committing fornication (see Num 25:1-9). Paul refers to this event as follows; "Neither let us commit pre-marital sex [fornication], as some of them committed, and fell in one day


three and twenty thousand” (1 Cor 10:8). Is it credible to say that the 23,000 who died were all unmarried men? It is more likely that the majority of these 23,000 were married men.

If fornication refers to indiscriminate sex, then the LXX and Paul wisely chose to throw a blanket over the entire 23,000 men, irrespective of their marital status, and refer to what they were doing as ‘fornication.’ Age does not come into the picture, neither does marital status, what does come into the picture are men (single or married) having sex with Moabite women (single or married), and morality also comes into the picture: it is unlawful sex. When Paul addressed the men in the church at Corinth, and said, ‘Neither let us . . . ’ did he exclude all the married men from his use of ‘us’ in this injunction, and direct his words only to the unmarried brothers? If so, then everywhere where the word ‘fornication’ occurs in Scripture it can only refer to unmarried persons. This is not a credible position to hold. There are too many holes appearing in the dyke to plug all of them, and is a futile attempt to try to hold back the flood of evidence that points in another direction.

Fifth, Paul shows his concern for the breakdown of Christian witness in some members of the church in Corinth, and writes, “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many who have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and pre-marital sex [fornication] and lasciviousness which they have committed” (2 Cor 12:21). Is it credible to believe that those who sinned in Corinth were only unmarried men? If the narrow definition of the betrothal supporters is correct then they can dogmatically assert, as part of their principles of exegesis, that Paul can only have been referring to single men in this context, on the grounds that they have empirically analysed the use of the word ‘fornication’ throughout all biblical Greek literature, and they have been unable to find a single example where fornication was committed by a married man or a married woman.

Sixth, in his letter to the Ephesian church Paul wrote, “But pre-marital sex [fornication], and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints” (Eph 5:3). In 5:5 Paul reminds them, “that no fornicator [one who committed pre-marital sex], an unclean person, nor a covetous man, . . . has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Does ‘fornicator’ in this context not include ‘adulterers’? With this compare 1 Corinthians 5:11 “and now, I wrote to you not to keep company with [him], if any one, being named a brother, may be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — with such a one not even to eat together.” If a brother is not to keep company with someone who has had pre-marital sex, can he keep company with a brother who is an adulterer? The answer would appear to be No, but the supporter of the betrothal interpretation is adamant that the adulterer and the fornicator are two distinct persons, and must not be confused.

Seventh, when writing to the church at Colosse Paul advised the brothers, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;” then he mentions some of these sins, “pre-marital sex [fornication], uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). The first item is ‘pre-marital sex’ but this, according to the supporters of the betrothal interpretation, applies only to unmarried persons; it does not apply to married persons. Paul, we are informed, in this instance has only unmarried persons in mind, because he used the word ‘fornication’ which never applies to married persons. In reply it could be asked, Why would Paul want to single out unmarried persons, and say nothing to the married couples to mortify the infidelity in their lives? Is it not obvious that the term ‘fornication’ has nothing to do with marital status, but has everything to do with unlawful sex, irrespective of the marital status of the person committing the unlawful sex?

Linguistically, all apples are fruits, but not all fruits are apples. Once again the truth is that all adulterers are fornicators, but not all fornicators are adulterers. The relationship between ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ can be likened to two concentric circles, the smaller, inner circle sitting in the middle will represent the sin of adultery. The much larger circle on which the smaller circle rests, will represent the sin of fornication. So in using the term ‘fornicators’ Paul includes anyone who had indulged in unlawful sex, and this would include all adulterers, and all fornicators.244 The fact that in John 8 a woman is said to have been ‘taken in adultery,’ does not rule out the possibility that she was, like Mary, an espoused wife, because in Jewish tradition, such wives could be guilty of adultery. But

244 It is argued that when Paul told the members of the Corinthian church that to avoid fornication “let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2) that he was addressing unmarried men and women, and that this proves that fornication was the sin of unmarried persons. But it could easily be argued that Paul is addressing married persons and due to the external pressure to take advantage of free sex, for which Corinth was infamous, he was ensuring that they used the natural outlet of their spouses to ‘burn’ toward one another and not with any other available fornicator.
in the betrothal interpretation such wives could only be charged with fornication during the espousal period.

If we return to his advice again, it reads, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” The sin of fornication is not confined to the unmarried, because when the fornicator gets married, the sin of fornication is not left at the altar or at the door of the bridal suite, but lies latent in his nature, and when it is indulged in again we call it adultery, but it is still fornication by another name. It is this evil propensity to misuse sex that Paul identifies as fornication; and this propensity runs from youth to old age. It is not found only in the promiscuous youth but lies dormant in any human who is capable of sex.

Theologically, let us not play around with words, but get down to substance. The evil impulse to have unlawful sex outside and inside marriage is a result of the fall of Adam, and the degeneration of the spiritual life that he once knew. His fallen, human nature has been transmitted to all men. It is this misuse of the sexual drive (good in itself) that is called fornication in Scripture when it is misused. When this misuse is exercised by married spouses inside marriage we call it ‘adultery,’ but it is no different from its misuse outside marriage. Behind both is the driving, evil impulse that Paul calls ‘fornication.’ Getting married does not kill off this evil propensity. Paul says, ‘Kill . . . fornication,’ and this applies to marriages as much as to unmarried. Fornication (= the impulse to have unlawful sex) belongs to our old natures, and he commands all Christians to kill the old man with the lusts and passions that inhere in that nature.

Eighth, when writing to the church at Thessalonica Paul is very clear. “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from pre-marital sex [fornication]” (1 Thess 4:3). According to the supporters of the betrothal interpretation, and they make no apology for saying so, Paul’s advice here is addressed only to half of the congregation, the unmarried half, because it is irrelevant to tell married couples to ‘abstain from pre-marital sex,’ seeing they are already married!

Ninth. Jude, when meditating on the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, wrote, “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to pre-marital sex [fornication], and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). Are we to conclude from the solution’s narrow definition of fornication—sin committed before marriage—that none of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah who committed this sin of fornication were married?

Tenth, in the book of Revelation there are two significant references (2:14, 20) where the members of the seven churches of Asia are under constant pressure to commit pre-marital sex [fornication], but there are no references to pressure them to commit adultery. Why? Did Satan only target the unmarried in these churches?

There are a number of references to the prostitute [Whore] of Babylon with whom the kings of the earth committed pre-marital sex [fornication], according to the betrothal interpretation (17:2, 18:3, 9). Are we to assume that all these kings of the earth were unmarried men when they committed fornication with her?

In the vision of the Seventh Trumpet, accompanying Revelation 9:20–21, we discover that one-third of mankind were killed, then we learn that “the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands . . . and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries, or of their pre-marital sex [fornication], or their thefts.” Does this mean that two-thirds of the entire population of the world had unlawful sex before they were married? Or does the sin of fornication know no barriers of age, or marital status, or gender, or class? Surely it is the latter.

Jesus analysed the implications of a husband divorcing his wife for any reason, which would be that she would remarry, according to Matthew 5:32. He pointed out that if she did remarry she would be committing adultery, because as far as He was concerned she was still married to her first husband. The bombshell that Jesus dropped at the feet of the first husband was that he would be held responsible for causing his wife to commit adultery. Then Jesus qualified His statement that the first husband would be held responsible for all of his wife’s infidelity by inserting an exemption clause, and the exemption was that if his wife committed fornication before he divorced her, then obviously her husband did not cause her to commit this initial act of infidelity, she did it herself, hence the exemption clause read, ‘apart from [her own] fornication.’ Here Jesus attributed the sin of ‘fornication’ to a married woman. So married persons can commit fornication as well as adultery, as Jesus’ scenario shows. In His scenario Jesus maps out the consequences of divorce for any husband who divorces his wife. The exemption clause applies to the husband, not to his divorced wife. The entire scenario is limited to the same couple—one wife and one husband.

Jesus’ scenario in Matthew 5:32 is a real headache for those who support the betrothal interpretation because of Jesus’ use of the term ‘fornication,’ which is always defined as pre-marital sex by unmarried persons, by those who advocate the betrothal solution. To extricate themselves they
have to assume that Jesus is referring to two wives, not one wife. One wife is a married wife (consummated), and the other wife is an engaged wife (unconsummated). The betrothal solution is that the exception clause applies only to the engaged wife, while the rest of the verse applies to the fully married wife. What this solution overlooked was that an engaged wife who loses her virginity faces the death penalty, and she is considered to have committed adultery, not fornication, according to Sanhedrin 52, 66.

In this short section, having examined the thirty-two occurrences of the word fornication in the New Testament, and picked out ten of them where the distinction that the betrothal interpretation has given to the term fornication breaks down, it is clear that one cannot restrict the sin of fornication to unmarried persons indulging in pre-marital sex. This is a real hammer-blow to the betrothal interpretation.

The question was asked, Does ‘fornication’ in the New Testament refer only to pre-marital sex? The linguistic answer is a definite No. The literary answer is also a definite No. An orange is a fruit, but not all fruits are oranges; so likewise, adultery is fornication, but not all fornication is adultery. Both ‘orange’ and ‘adultery’ are sub-categories of the general class. It is for this reason that ‘adultery’ and ‘fornication’ can exist side by side, in the same way that ‘orange’ and ‘fruit’ can exist side by side in any language. Now, just as ‘fruit’ embraces ‘orange’ within its broad classification, so likewise, ‘fornication’ embraces ‘adultery’ within its broad classification. In both cases ‘orange’ and ‘adultery’ are specifics within their broader, umbrella terms of ‘fruit’ and ‘fornication.’ The ‘orange’ is a specific kind of ‘fruit,’ and ‘adultery’ is a specific kind of fornication. For the purpose of this section it is worth repeating that all adultery is fornication, but not all fornication is adultery. Linguistically, they cannot be put into two separate, watertight compartments, with no overlap between them, as those who hold to the betrothal interpretation attempt to do, with their restriction of ‘fornication’ to the specific sin of unlawful, pre-marital sex, and ‘adultery’ as unlawful, post-marital sex. But once the lid of these artificial boxes have been blown off, the grounds for their specialised use of these terms evaporates. The attempt to impose on words the meaning that best suits one’s argument will eventually be found wanting.

It is as nonsensical to restrict fornication to unmarried persons as it would be to do the same with prostitution. There are married and unmarried fornicators and prostitutes (both words come from the same root). Israel was married to Yahweh, but she was a prostitute, who indulged in fornication (Jud 19:2; Jer 3:1, 8; 13:27; Ezek 16:8+15, 16, 28, 31, 33, 35, 41; 23:5-7, 19; Hos 2:5; 3:3; Amos 7:17) and adultery. Unmarried daughters committed fornication, not adultery, and married wives committed adultery in Hoshea 4:14. 285 Now, while unmarried daughters may not commit adultery, married wives could commit adultery and fornication. It is clear from this that if a married woman can commit fornication and adultery, but an unmarried daughter can only commit fornication, yet the sex act is exactly the same in both cases, only the status of the females differ, that consequently, fornication is the umbrella term that covers unmarried daughters and married mothers indulging in unlawful sex. When married women are accused of fornication, as opposed to adultery, there is a strong element of wildness and abandonment, of prostitution, associated with the sexual act.

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<th>UNMARRIED DAUGHTERS</th>
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Consequently when Jesus used the term ‘fornication’ He used it in its normal, non-specialised, general, signification of unlawful sex whether committed by married or unmarried persons. This undermines the betrothal interpretation, which requires that the term ‘fornication’ can only refer to pre-marital sex. Their solution has demanded that the term ‘fornication’ lose its general signification and become a sin peculiar to unmarried persons. Their interpretation has determined the meaning that ‘fornication’ is to bear. This should be left up to the dictionaries to determine. And the dictionaries should be subordinate to the literary uses that occur in real life situations as recorded in historical documents. The bottom line is that the dictionary definition should come up from below, from usage, and not imposed on the term from above. The betrothal interpretation is guilty of imposing from above a narrower definition of the term ‘fornication’ with the specific intention to make it conform to their predetermined interpretation. This is not a healthy linguistic corner to box oneself into.

285 In Isa 57:3 the sons of Israel are the seed of adultery and the seed of fornication, suggesting that their mother had sex with married and unmarried men, or else through gay abandonment (“with many lovers” Jer 3:1).
It has been shown above (§5.10) that the term ‘fornication’ is used in Greek literature to refer to deviant sexual behaviour by married and unmarried persons. The NKJV translation of Matthew 19:9 reads, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” Armed with the solid, linguistic evidence that ‘fornication’ is unlawful sex, and can be attributed to married and unmarried persons, then, logically, the Erasmian exception clause means that Jesus taught that divorce was permissible for this sin. In other words, Jesus taught that divorce was permissible for adultery, which is fornication.

This Erasmian conclusion was totally unacceptable to some Christians, and out of their consternation was born the betrothal interpretation which depended on rewriting the dictionary definition to suit their argument. It is truly a sign of desperation when one has to rewrite the dictionary to make ‘fornication’ refer only to pre-marital sex, and only performed by unmarried men and women.

For a while the naïve and the gullible will be taken in with this rewriting of Greek dictionaries, this, plus the doctrine that it seeks to defend, will appeal to the Christian who instinctively knows that divorce is incompatible with the Jesus they have come to know and love, and so they feel bound to defend the betrothal view, because if they abandon this ‘rock’ what other ‘rock’ can they stand on? But eventually this redefining of the dictionary definition of ‘fornication’ will be exposed, to the embarrassment of all those who were taken in by it.

It is the purpose of this section to show that there is another ‘rock’ that concerned supporters of the betrothal interpretation can flee to, that will give them the reassurance that they crave, namely, that Jesus had no doctrine of divorce, not even one for engaged couples. The interpretation put forward in this work is that Jesus ruled out divorce for all non-fornication causes, and His Father ruled out divorce for all fornication causes, so that together, they ruled out divorce for any cause.

6.6.8. Should Mary have been executed?

The short answer is Yes. The betrothal interpretation takes Matthew 19:9 ‘except for porneia’ to refer to pre-marital sex during the Jewish espousal period. This presupposes that Jesus is exempting engaged, Jewish couples from His charge of adultery if they ‘divorce’ on the grounds that one of the engaged parties has had illicit sex before the marriage was consummated.

Apart from the major problem that “except for fornication” is a translation of Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, there is a problem with this limitation on Jesus’ teaching. If the engaged couples are regarded as married (even though the consummation is still in the future), and they break off their official, and very public engagement (much feasting by both families and friends), as Joseph planned to do with Mary, if this was done privately (or secretly), does this mean that Mary is still technically a ‘wife,’ and if so, the second half of Jesus’ statement in 19:9b, warns that anyone marrying ‘a woman having been put away’ (i.e., marrying Mary after Joseph has rejected her) is committing adultery by marrying her? The answer would be No; and that the espousal period has been unilaterally terminated. Or, if someone marries Mary after Joseph has rejected her, are they committing fornication, or adultery? If Mary had been guilty of sex with another man while engaged to Joseph, would Jesus have approved of stoning her as an adulteress or as a fornicator? Indeed, was Joseph ‘putting her away’ as an adulteress or as a fornicator? Most likely as the latter.

God makes a distinction between a virgin who was betrothed to marry a man, and a virgin who was not betrothed to a man. But nowhere does He call the engaged couple ‘husband’ and ‘wife.’ That was invented later on by the rabbis, and out of which they created the need for a divorce certificate to get out of it. In the case of a betrothed wife, if the virgin was raped in an uninhabited place, and her cry for help was not heard, then only the rapist died (on the strength of her report; Deut 22:25); but if she was raped in an inhabited place and did not cry for help, then she and he had to die. In the case of an unbetrothed virgin, the rapist did not die, but was forced to marry her (Deut 22:29), but only if the father agreed to it (Exod 22:16-17), and to pay her father the bride price, but he was not allowed to divorce her, if they did marry.286 The different treatment meted out by God would suggest that He

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286 The prohibition against divorcing her is not to be taken as evidence that Yahweh approved of divorce among the common people. Rather, it was His opportunity to teach the man a lesson, and so prevent others from following his example, for the right to get rid of a wife was highly prized by hard-hearted husbands, and there was very little that God wanted to do to curb this evil. This explains why He did not put a blanket ban on divorce. Better to let the evil come out of them and punish them hard later on, than prevent the evil coming out and unable to punish them as they deserved to be.

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regarded the betrothed virgin as something special, because He deals with her as He would with a married wife (compare Deut 22:22 with 22:23-24).

An interesting detail is omitted from the case where a betrothed virgin was raped away from human help, and was declared innocent by God, did the espoused husband need a bill of divorce to end the relationship? Each man was entitled to marry a virgin to ensure the purity of his genealogy. It is likely that the espoused husband did what Joseph did, and put her away privately, seeing it was not her fault that she lost her virginity during the espousal period. The Western idea of love and romance was absent in arranged marriages.

So the issue in the rape cases boils down to timing. If she had sex between the betrothal event and the marriage event, according to the Law of God she comes under the same category as a married woman, and so Mary should have been stoned to death. The issue of divorce would not have arisen.

It would appear that Joseph only intended to ‘put away’ Mary, when God prevented him from doing so. He was duty bound, as a righteous man, to follow the public judicial procedure to stone her to death (or burn her if she was of the tribe of Levi, which she probably was\(^\text{247}\)), but it is more likely that this duty would have fallen on her father to carry through the courts.

The notice that Joseph decided to put Mary aside privately may have been a correct record of his initial reaction to what he had heard, which was a righteous reaction, with a view to investigating the matter further, face to face with Mary. The initial reaction of Joseph to ‘put her away privately’ is ambiguous. Some, with a knowledge of rabbinic conventions surrounding wedding traditions, would jump to the conclusion that Joseph intended to divorce her. But the word ‘privately’ rules this out, unless another theory is invented that it was possible to get private divorces! But this smells of a cooked up ploy to remove the objection.

The verb ‘to put away’ (ἀπολώ) is a very common verb with no technical or legal meaning to it. There is no equivalent to the English word ‘divorce’ in Greek or Hebrew. The verb literally means what it says in every instance of its use in the New Testament. The exact same form of the verb is used (1) when Jesus did not wish to ‘send away’ the starving crowds (Mt 15:32; (2) when Pilate wished ‘to release’ Jesus at His trial (Lk 23:20); and (3) when the Roman judges wanted ‘to release’ Paul from prison. In the others cases of this word they all refer to release from the marriage bond (to divorce). What links all these cases is that someone is in a ‘bound condition’ from which they are released. In the case of Joseph and Mary it means that Joseph would have literally and physically sent Mary away from his presence, if he was allowed to carry out his intention.

The least that we can infer from the use of this common verb, in this context, is that Joseph made the decision to release Mary from her solemn commitment to marry him, by physically putting a distance between him and her. He shows great concern for her welfare in thinking how he might shield her from public humiliation and disgrace. He does not regard her as a slut or a prostitute. He seems to know her well enough to make a sound assessment of her character.

The Greek uses the adverb ‘secretly’ in conjunction with the infinitive ‘to release,’ so that he intended to release her, but in a covert manner. Maybe the use of postponement was the cover he needed to extricate himself from his legal commitment to marry her. After all, there was a baby on the way. If he delayed long enough (six months), and the baby was born out of wedlock, then a decision would have to be taken by her parents at that stage. Because Joseph was in direct descent from David, he would not register this child as his own, in the normal course of events.

It is probably best to explain Joseph’s action in terms of a looming marriage ceremony, when suddenly on the ‘eve’ of his wedding day he gets the shocking news that his bride-to-be is pregnant. His immediate reaction is to find an excuse to postpone the wedding day, but before he can call off the well-advanced arrangements for the week-long wedding feast, he is told by God in a dream to go ahead with the wedding, much to his relief, I’m sure, and this provides Mary with the cover she needs to hide her three-month pregnancy from the public (and her parents?).

It is a weak argument of those who support the betrothal solution to say Mary could not be stoned because there were no witnesses, so the only option open to Joseph was to divorce her. The evidence for her ‘adultery’ (rabbinic interpretation of her state) was growing fast in her womb! This is what would lead to her death, not the technicality of there being no witnesses. The only way she

\(^{247}\) The scientific mind of the Western Christian tries to see an organic, DNA, blood connection between Mary and David (Luther’s solution), otherwise they cannot see how Jesus could be of the seed of David. Unfortunately, the transmission of the Y-chromosome is only through the male contribution to the conception (cf. Heb 7:10). But in many cases a son-less Israelite could adopt a household slave as his son-in-law and heir (cf. 1 Chr 2:34-41), and it was Joseph’s reception of Jesus as his secretly adopted son and heir that Jesus was connected to the Davidic line. In the Temple records Jesus would have been registered as, and assumed to be, the natural son of Joseph, because illegitimate children did not count. Only males can constitute links in a genealogical chain.
could escape the death penalty was to charge her with a non-fornication charge (an ervat davar cause). In which case she fell into the category that all fully married wives fell into of being divorced for a non-fornication cause. But it would require Joseph to be dishonest in hiding the true cause behind his action to divorce her. Rather than do that he opted not to divorce her at all, but simply to drop her. There is a large consensus assumption that the action Joseph took was a legal one. This is not necessarily so. According to the law in Deuteronomy 24, divorce was a private matter, and belonged to domestic law/tradition. If Joseph decided to go back to the law as stated in Deuteronomy 24 and follow that law, instead of following the rabbinic law of public divorce, then it might be possible to interpret Joseph’s action as seeking an actual divorce. The only snag with this is that Deuteronomy 24:1-3 does not allow divorce for fornication or adultery.

According to Deuteronomy 24:1-3, no man was compelled to get legal authority before he divorced his wife. He was king of his own castle. He could do as he liked. Moses never set up any courts to enforce his new divorce command, nor did any husband have to get a special certificate. Any scrap of papyrus would do to scrawl a few hurried words telling her she was no longer his wife and to clear off for good. That is how easy it was for a husband to divorce his wife in Moses’ day. The hard-hearted divorcer was answerable to no one for his actions.

That Joseph did not use the public system to ‘divorce’ Mary, but sought to put her away privately, shows that he was not using the normal, rabbinic procedure, current in his day. In any case, he could argue, according to Deuteronomy 24:1-3, the termination of a consummated marriage was a private matter, so how much more so would have been the termination of a marriage that had not yet taken place?

If Joseph had been lawfully ‘one flesh’ with Mary, as a married couple, then indeed, as a righteous man, he would have had her stoned (or burned), and rightly so. As it was, he knew her character sufficiently well to have doubts about her unfaithfulness toward him, and in this state of shock and disappointment—since he was not married to her—he did the right thing, and had nothing to do with her. It was up to Mary’s father, not to Joseph, to demand the death penalty if his daughter was found to be with child once Joseph had nothing to do with her.

While the Jews may have demanded the same divorce document (get) and procedure to end a betrothal as well as a consummated marriage, Christian theologians recognise only the latter as constituting the ‘one flesh’ union. Joseph did not sever a one-flesh union, but only a contemplated one. So we should not have a problem with the break-up of engagements, Jewish or Gentile. They do not constitute a ‘divorce’ because there is no ‘one-flesh’ union to ‘put asunder.’ There is no need to go through the charade of a ‘divorce’ proceedings, except in those cultures (such as the Jewish) where contracts are in use and are an everyday part of the culture. But Jews and Christians should avoid the term ‘divorce’ to cover these situations because of its Mosaic associations with the evil and sinful practice of legalising dissolution. (Christians can use the State’s divorce laws to dissolve all invalid remarriages, but more on this below.)

Some modern, pro-divorce writers regard a lawfully conducted Gentile marriage to be invalid in God’s sight, “after the disclosure or discovery of pre-marital promiscuity at or before the time of the marriage.” While we might sympathise with the groom, or the bride, being disappointed on their wedding night to find that their partner is not what they had expected, I am at a loss to know where to find this pro-divorce, time-limited criterion in Scripture. Does it apply to Jewish and non-Jewish marriages? Where is this standard of purity stated in Scripture?

No provision is made in Scripture for a ‘divorce’ in the situation Joseph found himself in. The fact that he planned to put her away privately defeats the whole purpose of issuing a ‘roll of severance.’ These rolls had to be public knowledge, not private knowledge, to function in society. This was the point that Moses made when he commanded that a bill of severance be handed to every divorced wife. So Joseph was not even following the normal, public procedure for divorcing Mary. Joseph, obviously, did not regard himself as bound to obey human extensions to Moses’s unrecorded command, so he spurned the biblical, rabbinic addition to the unrecorded command of Moses, and set about to put away Mary privately. Good for him. We should applaud this disdain for man-made ordinances. His son, Jesus, showed the same disdain for rabbinic hoops.

God may not approve of the promiscuous life that precedes marriages in the West, but are we really to go so far as to declare that all marriages which were preceded by promiscuous behaviour and lifestyle are ‘invalid in the eyes of God’? What about African tribal marriages before David Livingstone opened up Africa to Christian influence? Were all or some of these ‘one-flesh’ unions invalid? Are not all civil marriages by godless persons, communists, atheists, etc., if lawfully entered into, by first-timers, as valid as Christian marriages? The logic of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is that the unbelieving husband who departed from his Christian wife was still validly married to her.

Somewhere, lodged deeply in the mind of untaught Christians is the humanist instinct that divorce does what it says it does, namely, it dissolves marriages. They know of divorced couples
among their relations and friends, and divorce is a real fact of life. The one case that confirms this instinct in the untaught Christian is the case of Joseph divorcing Mary. Under Jewish law you can get a divorce before you are married as well as after you are married. This is an odd state of affairs, but that is Jewish culture, whether it pre-dates the coming of Jesus is another matter.

The Torah was given to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. It is inappropriate for Gentiles to reach into the Law and extract bits and pieces that suit them, and incorporate them into Christ’s teaching. Those who support the betrothal interpretation are guilty of doing just that if they believe that if a bride is not a virgin on her wedding night then she can be legitimately divorced the next morning.

To avail oneself of this provision, a Gentile would have to become a Jew, and be circumcised, and live as a Jew, and live under the Law, and obey every precept, and protect the virginity of his daughters up until they are married, and be able to produce the evidence required by Jewish law that his daughters are what they claim to be, then, and only then, would he be in a position to make use of the Law to divorce a non-virgin bride the next morning.

The Western Church cannot pretend to have anything like the protection of its female members in place that obtained under the Law, and parents have no certain knowledge of the virgin status of their teenage daughters or sons. Paul likened the difference between Jew and Gentile Christians to one of a cultivated olive tree, and an uncultivated, or wild olive tree (Rom 11:17, 24), and Gentile Christians are ‘wild by nature’ (Rom 11:24). When it comes to finding a suitable Christian partner to marry in the Western world it is a case of what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG).

Indeed, the spiritual advice of Paul is worth pondering very deeply, ‘It is better not to touch a woman.’ But if you must, then choose only a Christian partner, who truly bears fruit of being born-again, because once you marry her you are stuck with her for life, and vice versa.

It is worth bearing in mind that the custom of regarding an engaged couple as virtually husband and wife was never part of the Torah that God gave to Moses.248 It is one of those man-made traditions that grew up probably some time before the birth of Jesus. Other traditions also were introduced, such as washing the hands before sitting down to a meal. The Pharisees treated Jesus like a poodle dog when He sat down without washing His hands. They put the hoop of their tradition in front of Him and expected Him to jump through it. Jesus refused to recognise their hoops as having any authority from God, and so He deliberately disdained to play along with their silly rules.

Obtaining a bill of divorce to break off an engagement was another such hoop, which Joseph ignored. When Mary, his espoused wife, was found to be with child, he simply dropped her, as any self-respecting righteous man would do. The verb used is simply he decided to put her away privately, something which the holders of the hoops would have been incensed to find he had done, and ignored them, and thereby offended them.

The Jewish Encyclopaedia records that after the betrothal ceremony the parties were regarded as man and wife. Their betrothal ceremony bound them on a set course to the marriage ceremony itself. The bond could only be dissolved by death or a formal bill of divorce. If the woman proved to be unfaithful between the time she was betrothed and the wedding night, she was regarded as an adulteress, not as a fornicator, and her punishment was to be stoned to death (Deut 22:22; Sanhedrin 66b). She was punished more severely than the unfaithful married wife, who was strangled (Deut 22:22; Sanhedrin 52b) 249

Jerome (AD 396), when replying to an indirect enquiry by a woman whether it was right for a wife to divorce her husband on the ground that he was an adulterer and a sodomite, replied, “Let her read the books of Moses and she will find that if violence is offered to a betrothed virgin in a city and she does not cry out, she is punished as an adulteress.”250 Note that Jerome is aware of the rabbinic class that the betrothed virgin is in: she is considered to be a wife, so if she consents to having sex during the espousal period, she is not guilty of fornication, but of adultery. (Jerome, Letters 55, 58)

And if she is guilty of adultery then death, not divorce, awaits her.

If the supporters of the betrothal interpretation want to make use of the above rabbinic tradition on marriage etiquette, and see it as the key to their solution to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, then they cannot manipulate, modify, or twist the custom to suit their requirements. It

\[ 248 \] The earliest references to betrothal occur in Deut 22:24 (‘the wife of his neighbour’) and 2 Sam 3:14 (‘my wife whom I have betrothed’). That marriages were arranged between parents is clear from Gen 24; Song of Songs 8:8; and Jud 14:2-7. If the bride was a widow, the betrothal period was reduced to thirty days (Ket. v. 2; Shulhan ‘Aruk, Eben ha-‘Ezer, 56; cf. also Kid. 13a; Yeb. 52a).


\[ 250 \] See 6.7.5. Jerome on divorce and remarriage.
is clear from the custom that the sin that Mary committed was not fornication, but adultery, for which she would have been stoned to death, like the woman taken in adultery in John 8.

If it had been Jesus’ intention to cover the case of His mother, then He would have had to re-word His exception clause to read, ‘except for adultery,’ because that was her crime, not fornication.

Whichever route we take, whether the biblical one, or the rabbinic one, Mary, by becoming pregnant before she was married, was to be stoned to death, not divorced. The only thing that could save her from discovery was a gunshot wedding as soon as Joseph took her back again. Only in this way could she escape the death penalty. Hers was a unique situation which called forth unique action on the part of the Holy Spirit to avert public shame coming upon Mary. In every other case in Hebrew and Jewish history a young woman found in her pregnant condition would have been stoned to death. It did not require witnesses. Moses was powerless to command that such pregnant women could be given a bill of divorce and allowed to live on and try for another husband.

That the case of Joseph and Mary could not have been in Jesus’ mind when He identified all the causes that the Jews had been in the habit of using to obtain their divorces in the phrase ‘not over fornication,’ i.e., for non-fornication causes, is plain from Deuteronomy 22:23-27, where we find that if an espoused wife was not a virgin on her wedding day she was to be stoned to death, and the husband was free to marry another virgin. The rabbinic work, Sanhedrin, regarded the espoused wife as having committed adultery, not fornication, so if the supporters of the betrothal interpretation use the rabbinic law to make out a case that Jesus was referring to an espousal divorce, as distinct from a marriage that had been consummated, then they have a real obstacle to overcome in that the biblical and the rabbinic law coincide in demanding the death penalty for her. She falls into the category of having committed a capital punishment crime, so that Mary would have been in the same category as if she had become pregnant with Jesus after she had been through the marriage ceremony proper. In her case it made no difference whether she became pregnant before or after the marriage ceremony, provided Joseph did not lie with her at any time before she became pregnant with Jesus. There are some things we need to draw attention to.

First, if the law of God placed Mary in the same category as a woman who committed adultery with another man, after she consummated her marriage with her own husband, and this is confirmed by rabbinic practice, then there is no escape for her: she cannot be divorced. This means that the ‘exception clause’ has nothing to do with Mary and Joseph, and Jesus was not shielding her from the death penalty that His Father had laid down for an espoused wife in her pregnant condition.

Secondly, the rabbinic law requiring the same bill of divorce to break an espousal agreement as was needed to break a consummated marriage did not come from God, nor did it come from Moses, it was a hoop that the rabbis created. It had no legitimacy. It was a Mickey Mouse certificate, and, like their roll of divorce to end a consummated marriage, its value was no higher than that of a piece of toilet roll. Neither God nor Jesus had anything to do with Moses’s command to issue these bills of divorce.

Thirdly, we have shown that the attempt to restrict the term ‘fornication’ to sexual sins committed by unmarried persons has not been proved linguistically. Even within the narrow compass of the New Testament writings, it has been shown above that the betrothal definition of fornication cannot be restricted to unmarried persons. Elsewhere in this work it has been shown that the term cannot be restricted in this way in the literature surrounding the New Testament period. And the wider one extends the search into the huge volume of surviving Greek literature going back to the time of Homer, no one has brought up a single example where the Greeks restricted the meaning of ‘fornication’ to a crime peculiar to unmarried persons.

It would appear that the betrothal solution has been imposed on Matthew 19:9 to prevent the exception clause being used to dissolve a consummated marriage. The solution came first and then the evidence was ‘found’ to give it legitimacy. The search for ‘evidence’ began with the clumsy conclusion that ‘nowhere in the New Testament is the term ‘fornication’ used of a married person.’ This was a case of not looking hard enough at the New Testament use of that term, which has been shown above, to apply to every class of society, to married and unmarried persons, to both genders, and to all classes of society. The further out one extends one’s research for evidence, especially into the non-canonical writings of the Early Church Fathers and the Septuagint, the clearer it becomes that to restrict ‘fornication’ to pre-marital sex is an artificial distinction, imposed on the literature.

In the early days of the betrothal solution, maybe somewhere in the nineteenth century or earlier, this solution gave its supporters the ‘evidence’ they desperately needed to sustain Jesus’ total ban on divorce ‘for any cause.’ In ignorance they believed that the New Testament use of the term was the bedrock they had been looking for, and on which they could build their case. Unfortunately for this solution, with time has come greater access to the whole of Greek literature on computers, which was denied to the ones who first proposed this solution, and with this extended access to the
whole of Greek literature the restriction that this solution required has been undermined and is no longer sustainable.

If one examines the writings of modern supporters of the betrothal solution their case is based on outdated research.\textsuperscript{251} They have simply recycled the solution as it was dreamed up a few centuries ago by Daniel Whitby (1638 - 1726).\textsuperscript{252} when Erasmus’s exceptive clause was accepted as part of the Word of God. In place of fresh research we find dogmatism, and a refusal to budge. In place of interaction with new discoveries, especially linguistic ones, we find withdrawal or ignorance. In place of a willingness to be exposed to a different, but equally biblical, interpretation of the data, we find a defensive posture. In place of opening up to the possibility that they could be wrong, we find a brick wall behind which they sincerely believe that they, and they alone, hold the infallible key to unlock the meaning of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, because only they hold to the full inspiration of Scripture, whereas all their rivals do not. In the end, it is this latter point that proves to be the dividing line that separates them and their solution from all their rivals and their rival theories. They sincerely believe that they alone are standing on the bedrock of Scripture, and everybody who opposes them and their solution, are not standing on it.

Behind one’s beliefs lies pride, and pride can blind the eyes to facts that would undermine one or more of those beliefs. The shame of being shown to be wrong humbles the proud man. If he is prepared to acknowledge that he was wrong, he is a true seeker after the truth, and he takes the indignity of shame on the chin. But if his pride kicks in and he cannot bear to suffer shame and humiliation, he will suppress the truth at the expense of his dignity and pride. There are many supporters of the betrothal interpretation who have taught this solution all their lifetime. The shame of having to abandon it would be too much, because of the knock-on effect that this would have on their ministry as a whole. For, it would be argued, if this minister, after forty years of defending it, now tells his congregation that he was wrong, could the same not apply to some of the other doctrines that he preached on for the same number of years? Rather than face the humiliation of a confession to having been duped by Erasmus, such ministers would prefer to end their days leaving their congregations and friends in ignorance of their final position.

While the stand of the supporters of the betrothal interpretation on the question of the full inspiration and infallibility of Scripture is highly commendable, they must not allow themselves to be duped, as were the Reformers, into accepting Erasmus’s Greek text as the infallible, inspired Word of God that they want to follow. It is not. It is an interfered with text. It is a text edited by a humanist. It does not convey Jesus’ infallible teaching on divorce and remarriage. It must be thrown away, and replaced with the Majority (Byzantine) Text, which has been the only universal text in constant use in Christ’s churches. The minority Egyptian text is no better than Erasmus’s edited text. Indeed, it has been more heavily edited than Erasmus’s Greek text. It has only antiquarian interest. It belongs in a museum, not in the hands of the leaders of Christ’s Church.

If the supporters of the betrothal solution can bring themselves to throw away Erasmus’s faulty Greek New Testament and move over to the Majority Text, then they also throw away the exception clause that Erasmus imposed on the Lord Jesus’ teaching. And if they lose the exception clause then they do not need the betrothal solution to explain it away. This would disturb them, because in giving up their pet theory, they would feel that this would be opening the door to divorce, because, they are convinced, it is only their interpretation that constitutes the only barrier to the introduction of divorce into the Church.

Now given the fact that the betrothal interpretation was based on the wrong Greek text, where does this leave the betrothal solution?

6.6.9. What is the alternative to the Betrothal solution?

We have challenged the betrothal solution on a number of points. First, we have shown that they used the wrong Greek text, when they based their interpretation on Erasmus’s Greek text. If a new version of the betrothal solution is to be found it must be based on the Majority (Byzantine) Greek text, which does not differ from the Nestle-Aland text with regard to the wording of the so-

\textsuperscript{251} A very common fault in the betrothal solution is the failure to note that Jesus is teaching two different things in His use of the so-called exception clauses in Matt 5:32 and 19:9. These two passages are treated as if Jesus is making the same exception in both places. Very few supporters of this solution are aware that this failure goes back a long time, especially in nineteenth century and right up to the present day (see §6.4.).

\textsuperscript{252} See the Postscript to this section, which gives extracts from his Paraphrase on Mt 19:1-9.
called exception clauses. At Matthew 19:9 both Greek texts read: ‘not over fornication’ (meaning, ‘for non-fornication causes’).

Second, those who first propounded the betrothal solution were duped by Erasmus into believing that Jesus made an exception for divorce in the case of fornication. To be tricked into accepting a Greek text which does not have a single Greek manuscript in support of its reading is a serious blow against any solution. To be duped is a serious and devastating situation to find oneself in. It is embarrassing. It exposes the solution to ridicule and ignominy. It exposes the lack of serious scholarship that should have gone into it.

The first thing any scholar worthy of the name should do is make sure the foundation they are about to erect their house on, is built on rock and not sand. The betrothal solution was built on sand. The Greek word ἑτέρῳ was added to Matthew 19:9 by Erasmus in 1516, and no one realised what he had done until textual criticism got under way. Apart from the Roman Catholic Complutensian Polyglot in 1522,283 the first printed text to remove Erasmus’s addition was that by Albert Bengel in 1734, who was followed by J. J. Griesbach in 1777, and from that day onwards to the present day no critical text has ever allowed Erasmus’s personal addition of ἑτέρῳ to gain any credence. Indeed, no modern critical apparatus even mentions Erasmus’s addition, such is the utter contempt that it is held in today, and rightly so. But it was on Erasmus’s text that the edifice of the betrothal solution was built. Any modern writer who supports the Betrothal solution is living in ignorance of what Erasmus did, and how cleverly he duped the Protestant Reformers to accept his Greek text as an accurate copy of the original autographs. If the Betrothal solution is to be resurrected in some form, then its supporters must reject Erasmus’s text and build their case on a more solid textual foundation, such as the one nominated under the first point.

Third, in order to maintain that Jesus never gave permission to dissolve a lawful marriage, through a bill of divorce, the supporters of the betrothal interpretation were forced to restrict the meaning of ‘fornication’ to unlawful sex performed by unmarried persons. This decision became the lynch pin on which the whole theory would rest. The linguistic argument is seriously flawed.

Fourth, they overlooked the fact that Mary’s pregnant state before she married Joseph carried the death penalty in Deuteronomy 22:23-27; and this was confirmed in the rabbinic writing called Sanhedrin. She should have been executed by her parents, and not put away privately as Joseph intended to do.

Fifth, it is constantly said that when Jesus said, ‘except for fornication,’ He was referring to ‘pre-marital sex during the Jewish espousal period “before they came together”’. But if so, this means that Jesus overruled His Father’s law that such fornicating women were to be stoned, but on the betrothal view Jesus reduced the penalty to divorce in the espousal period. Jesus is made to contradict His Father. The inability of those who support the betrothal view to think through the implications of what they are talking about is astonishing. The ignorance is shocking and only matched by the shallowness of the research that lies behind it.

Sixth, and arising out of the above five points, if fornication can be committed by married persons, and the proponents for the betrothal view agree with Jesus that divorce can be had for fornication, then Jesus has permitted married persons to be legitimately divorced. There is no escaping from this conclusion: Jesus supports good divorces.

It is to no avail that many defenders of the betrothal interpretation defend their position that the words, ‘except it be for fornication,’ refers to ‘pre-marital sex during the Jewish espousal period “before they [Joseph and Mary] came together.”’ In other words, they do not regard Mary’s sin as a death penalty crime, even though her case would come under Deuteronomy 22:23-27 by the populace, who would be ignorant of the part the Holy Spirit played in making Mary pregnant, and in Deuteronomy 22:22 her crime is punished with death, not divorce.

The defenders of this solution have confused two different scenarios. The first scenario is this. If an engaged couple decided not to go ahead with their marriage, and neither were guilty of pre-marital sex, rabbinic custom demanded that they had to get a bill of divorce to end their engagement. It is obvious that in this case both persons were free to marry (not remarry), without being accused of adultery.

The second scenario is this. If an engaged couple decided not to go ahead with their marriage, because one of them was guilty of pre-marital sex (as in Mary’s case), rabbinic custom demanded that the wife who committed the sin had to be stoned, because her sin was not fornication,

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283 This text was re-issued by Arias Montanus (1583) and by Joseph Scaliger (1620), with slight modifications.
but adultery. This left the innocent partner free to marry another person. It is obvious that in this case only one person was free to marry without being accused of adultery.

The rabbinic procedure was the same whether the couple were getting a divorce as an engaged couple or as a married couple, because both sets of couples were regarded as being married.

What has happened is that the first scenario has been applied to Mary and Joseph, on the grounds that Joseph intended to get a legal bill of divorce. But what they have ignored is that he did not divorce her publicly, or before witnesses, because private divorces were unknown in Israel. The reason why Moses commanded the Israelites to write out a bill of divorce before sending his hated wife out on to the street, was so that everyone knew her new status, that she was no longer the wife of so-and-so. It had to be a public affair, otherwise a man could commit adultery with her out of ignorance.

Now there was no technical term equivalent to the English word ‘divorce’ in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Various verbs were used, all of which conveyed the sense of sending someone away from their presence. Consequently when we read that Joseph, “being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example” (which would have happened had the knowledge of her pregnancy come to the knowledge of the custodians of public decency), “he was minded to put her away privately” (Mt 1:19). He made no fuss. He did not get a public divorce, because that would involve telling the truth about why he wanted to divorce her, which would have meant divulging the fact that she had committed ‘adultery’ against him (‘adultery’ because he was deemed to be already married to her).

Joseph had a choice. He could go public, or he could go private. If he took the public option then he had to tell lies about the real reason for divorcing her, otherwise she would have been stoned, but Scripture honours him with the reputation of being a righteous man, and righteous men do not tell lies. So he took the private option, and intended to break off his engagement to her in a low key manner, which would allow her to become a single mother, and for her family to ‘deal’ with her in whatever way they chose. We know from the sequel that he was not permitted to drop her quietly, but was told to take her as his wife, and presumably they got married within a few days so as to cover up the fact that a baby was well on the way.

Other defenders have argued that divorce is not permitted to non-Jews for pre-marital sex per se, but is only available to Jews, because only Jews have an espousal period in which the engaged couple are treated in law as if they were already married. It is claimed that Jesus knew of the custom of divorcing an engaged couple and He approved of it, and defended it in an aside to His condemnation of divorce for married couples. We have pointed out that this would be inconsistent on His part, because His Father ruled that any Jewish bride who was not a virgin on her wedding day had to be executed, so why is Jesus giving His approval for her engagement to be terminated with a divorce and not with stones?

Now, if Joseph and Mary were considered to be husband and wife ‘before they came together,’ then if either of them was sexually unfaithful to the other, it would be adultery. Now the Erasmian translation of Matthew 19:9 reads: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery.” So what is this sin of fornication, which if a married woman commits, her husband is allowed to divorce her? If fornication, in this context, means, ‘pre-marital sex during the espousal period by an unmarried person,’ then we have confusion, because in the context Jesus is talking about a wife who commits fornication, but this contradicts the betrothal definition of ‘fornication,’ because Mary and Joseph could not commit fornication because they were regarded as husband and wife. The lack of joined-up thinking behind this solution has contributed to its confused presentation.

The only reading of Matthew 19:9 that would make an exception possible (and allow Jesus to retain His teaching of no divorce for any consummated marriage) would be the first scenario given above. Now if it was Jesus’ intention to take into account that an engaged couple, who are classed as husband and wife, could get a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility, with no sexual impropriety present, then it would be possible to allow an engaged ‘wife’ to get a divorce and be lawfully married to another man (because she was still a virgin). If this was the scenario in the mind of Jesus when He issued His exception, then the text should have read, “And I say to you, that whoever divorces his wife, except for a non-fornication cause, and marries another, he commits adultery.” But this is the exact opposite to what Jesus did say in Matthew 19:9.

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284 It would not make any difference to the punishment whether Mary’s pregnancy was due to fornication or adultery, but in terms of how the rabbis viewed her sin it is important to note the terms they used.
Since many Christians, who hold that Jesus ruled out divorce for any reason, have latched on to the betrothal interpretation as the one that comes closest to Jesus’ teaching condemning divorce and remarriage, it is worthwhile to repeat here (from §5.10) how the so-called exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 should be translated.

Matthew 5:32, “But I – I say to you, that who, say, may put away his wife makes her to commit adultery—apart from the matter of her own fornication—and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

The fornication mentioned here must have been committed after the marriage was consummated otherwise the wife would have been stoned to death if she was not a virgin on her wedding night. If her fornication preceded her divorce, the husband cannot be charged with causing her to commit it, which is the focus of the exemption clause. We have seen that all adultery is fornication, but not all fornication is adultery, so Jesus’ choice of terms meant that there were no loopholes.

The text is not spelling out an exemption to the verb ‘put away’ (divorce), as if Jesus said: “But I – I say to you, that who, say, may put away his wife—apart from the matter of fornication—makes her to commit adultery, and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

The text is spelling out an exemption to the verb ‘makes’ as follows: “But I – I say to you, that who, say, may put away his wife makes her to commit adultery—apart from the matter of her own fornication—and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.” The use of παρεκτός makes it clear that the exemption goes with the verb ‘makes her commit adultery,’ and not with the verb ‘puts away.’

The content-identity clause (if not that, then it must be this)

Matthew 19:9, “And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may marry another commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away commits adultery.”

The phrase, ‘not over fornication’ was intended to identify all the non-fornication sins that had been used to obtain a divorce. It would make it even clearer if we translated the text as: “And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife for a non-fornication cause, and may marry another commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away commits adultery.”

The difference between Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is that in the former Jesus warns every man divorcing his wife, that if another man sleeps with his wife, he, her husband, is guilty of making her commit adultery, unless, and this is where the exemption comes in, unless she commits fornication of
her own accord while still married to him, then he is not guilty for her sin of fornication under those circumstances. But he is guilty, if she remarries, of causing her to commit adultery. The assumption is that she was a virgin when she married him (otherwise she would not still be his wife, but dead), and she committed fornication before he divorced her, which may have been hidden from him, but God sees all sins. What the supporters of the betrothal solution have ignored is that the main verb is ‘makes’ or pressurises her to commit adultery against him. The issue is not one of creating an exception to allow divorce. This is to miss the point entirely of what Jesus was teaching His disciples and the people. Jesus is totally focussed on the unintended consequences that will follow anyone who divorces his wife, no matter what excuse he gives.

This criticism applies to every other solution that uses Jesus’ exemption-from-blame clause to turn it into an exception-to-no-divorce clause. This is to seriously distort Jesus’ teaching and to make Him say something that was absolutely abhorrent to Him. Often errors occur when one comes to the text looking for an exception, because that has been the traditional way of interpreting Erasmus’ s Greek text, and of course, if one comes looking for an exception, an exception will be found. “Seek and you shall find,” applies to interpreting the text as much as to any other discipline. It is true that,

Wonderful things in the Bible I see,
some put there by you,
and some by me.

The exception that allows one to divorce their partner is one of those ‘wonderful things’ that hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, have been grateful to the Lord Jesus for providing for them (so their religious teachers tell them) to be rid of a troublesome partner. But who put it there? The answer is, it was not the Lord Jesus, but Erasmus.

In the case of Matthew 19:9, Jesus warns all Jewish men that divorce on the grounds of a non-sexual offence is against God’s will. There is no exception under Jesus’ content-identity clause, because the death penalty covered the sin of fornication and adultery.

It follows that if Jesus banned divorce for all non-capital offences, and God banned divorce for all capital offences, then this left the Pharisees with no grounds for divorce.

Jesus answered their question in full, because in essence He said; ‘It is not lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause.’

In Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees He used a phrase that captured every excuse that a Jew could use to get a divorce from his wife, namely, ‘not over fornication.’ He could not have made Himself clearer where He stood in the absolute minimum of words, for it was only three words in Greek (as it is in English).

The way Jesus approached the problem set by the Pharisees was to set the unlimited number of ‘causes’ that the Jews had been using, from the trivial to the serious (but not including anything sexual), on the one side, and to set the sexual causes on the other side. Then He cleverly used simple, arithmetical logic. The case Jesus put to the Pharisees was this: ‘If you cannot get a divorce for fornication, can you get it for a non-fornication cause?’ And the Pharisees’ answer would have been, ‘Yes, according to our pre-Exodus tradition, and approved by Moses, we can only get a divorce for a non-fornication cause.’ ‘Well, then,’ Jesus would have replied, ‘simply subtract the sins that you cannot get a divorce for, from the sins that you cannot get a divorce for, and that will leave you the remainder of causes that you can get a divorce for. When you have done that, I am telling you that if you get a divorce for any of the remainder sins, and you remarry, you are committing adultery.’

The use of ‘remainder’ was a very astute way of referring to all the non-fornication causes that the Jews could think of, and had been using for centuries to obtain their divorces. Jesus referred to this remainder by using the negative to point to these remainder sins when He said, “And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife—not over fornication which is punished by death—and may marry another commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away commits adultery.” The negative phrase ‘not over fornication’ was Jesus’ positive way of referring to the remainder of causes that they had been using traditionally to obtain a divorce. If not this (fornication), then it must be that (non-fornication).

It is a trivial objection to complain that Jesus should not have used a negative to identify a positive category of sins that were unlawful causes to obtain a divorce. But given the countless sins that wives can commit, any one of which could become a cause for divorce, Jesus, with the Pharisees’ category of ‘every cause’ in mind, chose to subtract her sexual sins from her non-sexual sins, and in this way He identified what ‘every cause’ meant for Him. It meant ‘every non-sexual cause,’ which is how the Pharisees understood their own words, for they knew it was unlawful to divorce for every
sexual cause. So instead of Jesus identifying all the long list of categories of causes, and there were scores of them, that He would rule out as causes for divorce, He did a very simple sum in front of the Pharisees, which was breathtaking in its simplicity, and shows that He had given a lot of thought to this issue.

Despite Western reservations over the manner in which Jesus defined 'every cause' in the Pharisees' question, the mathematical precision and logic of Jesus' position on divorce was instantly recognised and understood by the Pharisees to mean that there were no causes left to get a divorce if (1) they could not get one for fornication or adultery, because God demanded the death penalty for these causes, and (2), if Jesus had just removed getting a divorce for any non-fornication causes.

However, the Pharisees would not be outdone by this 'man from nowhere' telling them what was right and what was wrong. They instantly realised that there was a flaw in Jesus’ position because it was different from Moses’s position. Moses clearly permitted divorce for ‘any cause (except for fornication),’ provided they followed his command that they must write out a bill of divorce and hand it to the hated wife, and then send her out of his house, never to return again.

Now Moses was the supreme teacher and leader of Israel, and it was obvious to all the Jews that he would not do anything that was unlawful in the eyes of Yahweh, their God. By pitting Jesus against Moses they thought that they were on to a winning argument. Jesus was a nobody, whereas Moses was at the nation’s top hero. Jesus was a country bumpkin, Moses was the acknowledged friend of God, who spoke face to face with God. God personally handed to Moses His Ten Commandments. God honoured Moses in the sight of all the people, whereas Jesus was an obscure, self-appointed rabbi from Galilee, of all places, for no great leader ever emerged from that backwater place. It looked like a no-win situation for Jesus when He went against Moses, because as the Pharisees quickly pointed out to Jesus, divorce had the backing of none other than Moses’s own authority and standing in God’s eyes. Now, if no less a person than Moses authorised them to write out a bill of divorce, who was Jesus to say he was wrong? To condemn Moses was to condemn Himself to the contempt of the people, to be ridiculed, to be ostracised as an extremist, and, worst of all, to show disrespect to God’s supreme teacher of Israel.

At that moment in history, Jesus stood utterly alone against the massed ranks of the religious establishment in Israel. There were always odd-balls in any community who stepped out of line with the consensus, and Jesus was just another example of such an odd-ball, rabid ranter, calling the establishment figures ‘hypocrites,’ and ‘fools,’ and ‘blind teachers of the blind.’ In the eyes of all who witnessed this confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus, Jesus had put Himself outside the consensus that dominated Jewish life for the past 1,500 years by challenging the establishment’s defence of Moses’s position on divorce and remarriage.

On the day the confrontation took place Jesus was the only Jew in Israel who said that Moses was wrong to sanction divorce for any cause. Even His own disciples standing by were not on His side. They had to wait until they got Jesus alone, and out of sight of the Pharisees, before they could question Him over His brand new teaching on divorce and remarriage. Jesus’ position of ‘not over fornication’ clearly ruled out divorce for any non-capital offence, which adultery and fornication clearly were. So if it was not possible to get a lawful divorce on the grounds of adultery or fornication, then what grounds were left to get a divorce, and Jesus’ answer was ‘None.’ The answer He gave behind closed doors was the same that He gave in the public square.

Moses had never given the Jews the right to divorce an espoused wife. This was a ‘tradition of the Patriarchs’ that pre-dated the Exodus. Moses merely conceded that divorce, like the poor, would always be with Israel. When the Pharisees asked their question, they and Jesus were focussed on the issue whether a consummated marriage could be dissolved. Jesus’ answer had to come to terms with that issue, and not stray off into the legitimacy of broken betrothal contracts.

If the Pharisees had come asking if it was lawful to divorce a woman in the betrothal period, Jesus would have thrown the question back at them, ‘What does the law say?’ They, and Jesus knew that the law said absolutely nothing at all about getting a divorce for such a pre-nuptial, betrothal contract. They all knew that it was a ‘tradition of the Elders’ that had grown up apart from the law. It had no legitimacy from God or from Moses. Such contracts fell into the civil realm of the nation’s life, alongside other human contracts, or agreements, or promises, or covenants, even marriage covenants, about whose contents the Bible has nothing to say.

We must be clear in our minds that Moses did not approve of divorce. His sole contribution was to force the husband to write out a bill of divorce when he divorced his wife. Moses was a realist and he knew what he was up against, and to bar divorce altogether was impossible. The best he could do was to sharpen the husband’s oral decision to throw out his wife, by forcing him to give her a written form of his oral decision, so that his action would be set in a permanent form for all time to come. Unknown to the divorcer it would become his own spiritual death certificate that he was writing out.
When the Pharisees put their question to Jesus their minds were not on whether it was lawful to divorce a betrothed wife, about which Moses said nothing. Their question was directed at whether it was lawful to divorce a consummated marriage. This is how Jesus understood their question, for He asked, ‘What did Moses command you?’ Now the command that Moses gave them is not recorded in Scripture. It was an oral command, but written down at the time, but not allowed to be included in the Torah. The effect of Moses’s oral command is recorded by Yahweh Himself, who describes the grounds on which tradition had permitted them to divorce their wives, which grounds were, logically, for non-capital offences. They could not get a divorce for fornication as this was a death penalty issue. So tradition restricted the husbands to non-fornication issues to get their divorces, what Yahweh refers to as ‘the exposure of a matter’ (erwat davar), or anything that displeased the husband. That was how easy tradition made it possible to get a divorce. Yahweh also refers to tradition legitimising divorce for hatred in Deuteronomy 24:1-3.

Now Yahweh described the effect that Moses’s oral command had on His community in Deuteronomy 24, but later Judaism, used the description to justify divorcing their wives on these same recorded grounds! But the point of Yahweh’s description was just a lead up to His condemnation of divorce in Moses’s day, which came in the form of a ban on any wife returning to her divorced husband.

Later Judaism did not see this as a condemnation of divorce—they missed the point completely—but, rather, they turned it around and used it as proof that God approved of their divorces provided they did not try to be reconciled to their divorced wives! That was the state of thinking that occupied the minds of the Pharisees who asked Jesus a lawyer’s question, ‘Is it lawful to divorce for every cause?’ They had in mind that it was probably lawful from the way they read Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Jesus does not get into an argument with them over the legitimacy of their exegesis of Deuteronomy, whether it was descriptive or prescriptive. He goes straight to the engine that is the driving force behind all divorces—an unwillingness to forgive others their sins. He calls it hard-heartedness. The logic of His position is, that if hard-heartedness did not exist, then divorce would not exist. They need each other. They feed off each other.

It is a shame to find hard-heartedness in any Christian. It is a denial that Christ lives in them. Hard-heartedness belongs to the old man, to the old nature, which every Christian is called upon to crucify daily. Many evangelicals pass this off as an ideal and unrealistic aspiration, and fall back to their pre-born again days, and divorce their spouses in the law courts of Satan, having convinced themselves to their own satisfaction that they were left with no other option. By opting to get a divorce they seal themselves in their own sin, which will ultimately eat its way into every fibre of their physical and spiritual bodies, like a cancer. They will walk in darkness for the rest of their lives and be rejected in the Day of Judgment as one of a vast hoard of human beings who did not forgive others their sins, and consequently their sins could not be forgiven them by a righteous God, who is no respecter of persons, be they archbishops or successful missionaries, or professors of theology.

In conclusion, this critique has found the betrothal solution wanting in the following areas. First, the claim that ‘fornication’ is always committed by unmarried persons is not the defining characteristic of this sin, which is sex for the sake of sex; sex as an end in itself; sex without any thought about the biological consequences; unrestrained and irresponsible sex. While this will most often be found among prostitutes and among those who are unprepared for marriage; the mature and the married are not immune from taking advantage of free sex, as Paul was well aware of when he wrote, “let each [married] man have his own wife, and each [married] woman have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2).

Second, divorce during the espousal period has no foundation in Scripture. It is a tradition that sought to safeguard the husband’s right to expect to marry a virgin. That a divorce certificate was required to end such an espousal makes no sense, because there was no one-flesh union to divorce. In any case, Scripture requires that the bride who is not a virgin on her wedding night could not be divorced, but had to be stoned to death. Consequently, this notional divorce cannot be compared to the divorce of a one-flesh union, which Jesus is focussed on in the so-called exception clauses.

The above issues were the two pillars on which this solution was built, and unfortunately, the foundation of these two pillars rested squarely on the wrong Greek text of Erasmus.

The instinct of those who put forward this interpretation was correct in that Jesus never permitted divorce on any grounds to dissolve a lawful, consummated marriage. The manner in which they went about it was deeply flawed. It is an embarrassment, and should be consigned to the bin of
false leads. Also to be consigned to the bin of history is Erasmus’s addition of ἵνα before μὴ in Matthew 19:9, and the exceptive clauses that they created.

In their place the following translations of the so-called exceptive clauses should be adopted.

The exemption-from-blame clause (exemption from culpability)

Matthew 5:32, “But I — I say to you, that who, say, may put away his wife makes her to commit adultery — apart from the matter of her own fornication — and who, say, may marry her who has been put away commits adultery.”

The content-identity clause (or the remind/remainder clause)

Matthew 19:9, “And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife — not over fornication which is punished by death — and may marry another commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away commits adultery.”

These translations bring the teaching of Jesus in Mark and Luke into line with Matthew. All three Gospels are sending out the same message to Jew and Gentile alike, that divorce has been abolished from the face of the Earth for all time to come. To divorce anyone, for any reason, if not repented of, will exclude that person from entering the Kingdom of God.

This critique of the betrothal interpretation shows that it is possible to hold to a high view of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, and at the same time to show that Jesus made no exception for divorce on any grounds.

This work sets out a biblical alternative to the betrothal interpretation. It is a biblical alternative to the many competing interpretations that would introduce divorce into Christ’s Church on the back of Erasmus’s tampering with Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:9. It is a biblical alternative to the move to turn back the Church to following the teaching of the rabbis on divorce and remarriage, which some evangelical teachers and writers are pressing for.

ADDENDUM

The exception of Jonah in Matthew 16:4 and the parallel in Mark 8:12

One could account for the omission of the exception clause in Mark by contextualising the event that Jesus was referring to, namely, His own resurrection, which only believing Jews were privileged to witness, as Jesus never appeared before the general public as He had done before His death. But the report of His miraculous resurrection would constitute the ‘exception clause’ to Mark’s absolute statement that no sign would be given to ‘this generation.’

Mark’s answer would have been to say that what the Jews were looking for was, that Jesus would perform a miracle before their very eyes, which would have them speechless with awe and wonder. This is how Jesus understood the expectation of the Jews at that time. Jesus was not prepared to act like a poodle dog and to jump through the hoops that they set in front of Him to jump through. In this sense His statement is absolute: they would not be given one of those signs.

However, knowing that His own resurrection was a miracle in its own right, and one that was not what they were looking for, for they killed Him and wanted Him to stay in that condition, He would offer a ‘sign’ that they did not want to see, which would condemn them. So the exception He offers them is not a concession to show them one of the kind of ‘signs’ that they were hoping to see Him perform. The exception would be of a different order of miracle altogether. In this sense, Mark read the mind of Christ correctly: Jesus would not be jumping through anybody’s hoop.

POSTCRIPT

The earliest supporter of the betrothal solution appears to have been Daniel Whitby (1638 – 1726), who says that he did not find his interpretation in any other author. In his work, A Paraphrase

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255 This addendum was deliberately displaced to here to allow the force of the argument to sink in to the mind of the reader, that it looked like there could be an exception that is omitted in a parallel account, which ought to be carried over. This addendum is my explanation why it is not necessary to assume that the exception given in Mt 16:4 must be carried over into Mk 8:12.

256 The spelling in the following abstract is as printed.
and Commentary on the New Testament (2 vols.; London: W. Bowyer, 1703), on Matthew 19:1-12 he wrote:

And the Pharisees came unto him, tempting him, and saying, εἰ ἔξεστιν αὐθέντως απολύσας τὸν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ κατὰ πασαν αἰτίαν, Is it lawful for a Man to put away his Wife for every Cause? The School of Hillel taught, That a Man might put away his Wife for any cause, because this Divorce was permitted, if she found not Grace in his Eyes, Deut. 24. 1. and this was suitable to the current Practice and Exposition of these Words. For that which we render, The Lord saith, he hateth putting away, Mal. 2. 16. is by the Chaldee and the Septuagint, rendred thus, The Lord saith, εἰ συνήκην ἐξάπτωσιν, If thou hastest, thou shouldst put her away. And the Son of Syrach [Ben Sira] saith, chap. 25. 26. If she go not as thou wouldst have her [if she does not do your will], cut her off from thy Flesh, give her a Bill of Divorce, and let her go. And (a) Josephus saith, the Law runs thus, He that would be disjoined from his Wife, καθαρ极大地 αἰτίας πολλαί δ' αν τοις ανθρώποις τοις αὐτοίς γυναικεῖς, for any cause whatsoever, as many are, (b) let him give her a Bill of Divorce: And he confesseth, that he himself (b) put away his Wife after she had borne him three Children, μὴ ἀρεσκομένους αὐτῆς τοῖς θέσιν, because he was not pleased with her Behaviour.

The School of Shamai determined on the contrary, that the Wife was only to be put away for Adultery, because it is said, Because he hath found some Unleanness in her. The Pharisees seek the resolution of this Question from Christ, tempting him, i.e. to induce him to decide this Question, either against the Law of Moses, or else, as he must do, against the Determination of one of these two famous Schools, and so to render him offensive to them. . . . [v. 4-5] . . . and when they have, after a mutual consent to enter into that Relation, done so, they are no more two, but one Flesh; and therefore are not to be separated, unless by cleaving so unto another, they have made themselves one Flesh with that other . . . 1 Cor 6: 16 . . . and of whom he [God] hath thus spoken, let no Man put asunder: God himself who binds, may see cause to permit in some cases, the Solution of this Obligation, to prevent Cruelty, and other Mischief, as he did to the Jews, by reason of the hardness of their Hearts, allowing a Divorce; but, without such Permission, no Man ought to do it . . . [vv. 7-8] . . . but then he [Moses] acting in this as God’s Minister, it must be a Divine Permission. . . . That this Permission excused those Jews, who made these Divorces according to the Law, not only from Punishment by Man, but also from Fault before God, and more especially from being guilty of Adultery, is evident (1.) From the Permission given to the Woman thus divorced, to marry with another, Deut. 24. 2. which plainly shews, The Bond of Matrimony must by it be dissolved, since otherwise this must be a Permission to be an Adulteress. (2.) From the Prohibition of the Person thus divorcing her, to receive her again as his wife; which yet he was bound to do, if the Bond of Matrimony still continued, and she was still in truth his Wife. And, (3.) Because otherwise, the whole Commonwealth of Judea, by a Divine Permission, must be filled with Adulteries, and with a spurious Offspring, . . . [v. 9] And I say unto you, Οὐκ ἐπὶ τὸν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ εἰ μὴ ἔτη πορνεία . . . Whosoever shall put away his Wife, except it be for Fornication, and shall marry another, committeth Adultery. Here it seems evident, That Christ prescribes a new Law, which had not before obtained among the Jews; Divorce being permitted to them for other Causes: For, tho’ it be said, Deut. 24. 1. he must find some Matter of Unleanness in her; yet that cannot signify Fornication or Adultery, seeing for these things, she was by the Law to die by stoning, if she committed Fornication before her Marriage was completed, Deut. 22. 24. by Strangling, say the Jews, in case of Adultery, ver. 22. (2dly,) Because this Divorce was permitted to all, except the Person who falsly pretended, he found her not a Maid; for that Law so peculiar to him, he may not put her away all his Days, Deut. 22:19. shews, that others were permitted to do so: Now Adultery being a Sin against the Law of Nature, could be permitted upon no account. And (3dly,) Any other, excepting only the High Priest, Lev. 21. 7. might marry her who was thus put away, Deut. 24. 2. whereas it could be lawful for no Man to commit Adultery with her. . . . Moreover, whereas all Commentators I have met with, by Fornication here, do understand Adultery, or the defiling of the Marriage Bed: I incline rather to take the word in its proper sense, for Fornication committed before Matrimony, and found after Cohabitation. (1.) Because Christ speaking of this Divorce here and elsewhere, doth never use the word μοιχεία.

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257 This is Whitby’s way of referring to his footnotes. I have placed these footnotes below this extract from his Paraphrase.

258 1760 edition reads: as many Causes there are, . . . (vol. 1. pp. 200-203)

259 The 1760 edition adds quotations from Greek authors (Hierocles and Plato) that two should become one flesh.
which signifies Adultery, but always πορνεία, Matth. 5. 32. which word, both among Jews and Gentiles, doth properly import the Sin of unmarried Persons lying one with another, and so being made one Body, 1 Cor. 6. 16. It is not therefore likely, that Christ receded from the known and common acceptation of the Word. (2.) The punishment of Adultery after Marriage, was Strangling; after Sponsalia, Stoning; Divorce not being mentioned in either case; but simple Fornication was not thus punished by the Jews. And, (3.) By this Interpretation, the Law of Marriage is by Christ reduced to its Primitive Institution; that Conjunction with another, makes them both one Flesh: and so the Woman who had thus transgressed, was to be dismissed, because she before was one Flesh with another, and therefore could not be so with the Man to whom she afterwards did marry. Note also hence, that according to either Interpretation, where it is lawful to put away the Wife, it is so to marry again. For (1st.) Such were the Divorces of the Jews, of which Christ speaks. And, (2dly,) Christ by pronouncing such Divorces, as were not for this cause, adulterous in him that married another, doth plainly insinuate, there was no such Crime committed in this case; and then the Marriage must be dissolved by that Act. (Vol. I. pp. 156-8)

(a) Antiq. l.4. c.8.p. 125. G.  
(b) In vita sua, p. 1031. F.

In the 1760 edition, the following paragraph was added:

Εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ πορνεία, Except for Fornication.] St. Jerome here saith, that if the Woman hath committed adultery, Non debet teneri, she ought not to be kept by her Husband, lest he fall under Condemnation; he being pronounced a Fool, and a wicked Person, qui Adulteram tenet, who retains an Adulteress, as the Septuagint reads, Prov. xviii. 27. The Greek Fathers say almost generally it is καλὸν εκβολῆν, an honourable thing to cast her out: And (*) St. Austin having said it was permitted, but not commanded so to do, retracts that Saying, as being contrary to the Words of Solomon. He that retains her, say the Apostolical Constitutions is Φυσιός θείου παρανόμος, a Transgresser of the Law of Nature. L. 6. c. 14.

Footnote (*) Retract. l.1.c.19.

Matthew Henry picked up on Whitby’s betrothal solution and popularised it in Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible (London: Marshall, 1706-29; reprint 6 vols in 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961, see vol 5:270).

Stooke-Vaughn suggested that the Syriac translation may be the earliest support for the betrothal interpretation because it translates Matthew 19:9 as ‘a writing of breaking a contract,’ and this occurs in the Sinaitic Palimpsest in 19:9 and 5:32.260

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DR LESLIE MCFALL
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