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 times seven. 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 paper 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, “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 that each of these five categories qualified for a divorce. He spoke the language of commonsense. Along came Jesus and taught the people to forgive these five wrongs, and be reconciled to the wrong-doer. This was not commonsense. But that is the difference between rabbi Hillel and rabbi Jesus. The Pharisee’s advice was this-worldly (intuitive); Jesus’ advice was other-worldly (counter-intuitive). 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.

The third reason why Jesus could not accept the break-up of any marriage is that marriage is the supreme analogy of 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. Separation may be forced upon the Christian, but the marriage bond can only be broken by death (Rom 7:1-2; 1 Cor 7:39).

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, 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. 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. He uses death, not divorce, to end all marriages.

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 exceptive clauses in your policy of forgiveness. 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. Finally, it reveals ignorance of what your Saviour has revealed about the sanctity of marriage. 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, 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 heaven, and no one in a second marriage, whose spouse is still alive, will be in heaven. Be rid of your second marriage, terminate it, if you would see Jesus again.

Possibly the most frequently asked question is: Is the act itself of getting a divorce a sinful act? I have, therefore, devoted Letter 5 (section 1.8.5) to a detailed answer to this question. What the reader should bear in mind at this early stage is that a Hebrew wife became an abomination (a hated person) in God’s eyes the moment she slept with two living men. Her second husband turns her into a defiled person the moment he sleeps with her (Deut 24:4). The reason for God’s judgment is that He designed ‘one wife for life’. Divorce is a rejection of this idea. Remarriage can only occur after a death, not after a divorce. Divorce does not exist in God’s world.

A divorced wife became a 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 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.

It is the prayer of the author, that this article 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 that God intended for all marriages. That, for most Bible-believing Christians, determines the issue. This article 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 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 450 years by any authoritative Christian teacher/leader. As a result, a definite pattern of behaviour (called ‘traditions’ by Paul) characterised the whole Christian Church whereby divorce was not permitted for any reason, not even for adultery. The break with Judaism was complete and final.

The so-called ‘Pauline Privilege’ (1 Cor 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 institution of a new priesthood of which He is its undying, great High Priest, offering a better Covenant between God and Man, and replacing the external Mosaic Law (Heb 6:12; 10:16) 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, 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 for the first time as a teaching of the Lord Jesus (which is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith [1648]).

This paper is in two parts with five appendices. Part I sets out the way in which the Reformed Churches were misled into branching off from the unambiguous teaching and universal practice of the Church up until the Reformation. Part I ends with replies to five correspondence questions. Part 2 sets out guidelines for Christian counsellors on how to handle divorce situations given that divorce cannot dissolve any one-flesh union.

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 David Instone-Brewer’s book advocating the use of OT laws to obtain a divorce between Christians, and between Christians and non-Christian spouses. Appendix D presents what little patristic, versional and textual manuscript evidence there is in favour of Erasmus’s addition of ἐν (Greek εν) to the text of Matthew 19:9. Appendix E sets out the case for the superiority of the Majority Greek Text.

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).
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.
PART I. TEXTUAL MATTERS & 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 and attribute to it the inspiration and infallibility that only belongs to the original text and its faithful copies.

It is a fact of history that the only Greek New Testament available to the Reformers up until 1522 was Erasmus’s Greek New Testament. He flooded the European market with his five cheap 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 over fornication”, which amounts to: “not even over fornication”. Here Jesus excluded the teaching of two influential rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, who both agreed that divorce could be obtained for sexual misdemeanours, such as fornication and adultery. Erasmus turned Jesus’ teaching on its head, because his new text reads: “except for fornication”. This alteration has Jesus agreeing with Hillel and Shammai that divorce is legitimate in His Church, and among His followers, in cases of fornication.

It was harder to obtain a divorce through rabbi Shammai, who insisted that Deuteronomy 24:1-3 referred only to sin of a sexual nature. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, handed out divorces for all sexual misdemeanours but also for ‘any other cause’ (cf. Mt 19:3) that a husband might nominate, even something as trivial as his wife burning his dinner. (See section 1.8.3. below for a fuller treatment of the difference between these two rabbis and Jesus.)

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. These rabbis were usurpers. If Jesus agreed with these rabbis to alter God’s law, then He is as guilty as they are in departing from God’s law. Jesus becomes a law-breaker. Divorce for adultery was never God’s law 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. His condemnation, “not even for fornication” (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. There is no exceptive 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?

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 exceptive clause in Matthew 5:32 being imported into Matthew 19:9 where it replaced the so-called exceptive clause in that verse. However, in trying to restore the original exceptive clause in Matthew 19:9 in the margin, the scribe added the small Greek word ei (‘if’) before the negative mh (‘not’) to change the text to read ‘except’ (because in Greek ei placed before mh becomes ‘except’). It would appear that Erasmus consulted this codex during his stay in Cambridge, England, between 1511 and 1514.

Who was the first to add ei (‘if’) to the inspired Word of God? We do not know who was the first, but the earliest Greek manuscript that Erasmus could have had access to, which contained the addition, was Codex Leicestrensis. It has always been assumed by textual scholars that Erasmus saw the marginal reading in Codex Leicestrensis when he stayed in Cambridge. We have no evidence either way, but if it can be shown that the addition of ei in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis was inserted later than Erasmus’s visit, then he could not have got it from this Codex. It is even possible that the marginal correction in the Codex was copied from Erasmus’s printed text, and not the other
way round, but to prove this either way, it would be necessary to analyse every marginal correction and see how many are found only in Erasmus’s printed text and in the margin of the Codex. What Erasmus did find were manuscripts (including Vaticanus) which imported Matthew 5:32 into 19:9. Now 5:32 is a genuine exception clause. The mischief was caused by importing it into 19:9, where it did not belong.3 This is what led Erasmus astray.

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 humanist4. He was not a Reformed Christian, by any means. He was a priest in the Roman Catholic Church 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. Erasmus was extremely angry at the dogmatic stance of the church over this teaching. He believed that divorce was justified in the case of adultery, so when he came to produce the first published edition of the Greek New Testament, he deliberately added ei before mh in Matthew 19:9 to allow divorce for adultery despite the fact that the three Gospel manuscripts which he used did not contain it.

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 offshoot of the Byzantine (Majority) Text, and the Western is an offshoot 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 E 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.

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE TWO MAIN GREEK TEXTS OF MATTHEW 19:9

There is a strong debate going on between supporters of the Nestle-Aland Greek text of the New Testament, which represents a minority text, and the Majority Greek Text which lies behind the Textus Receptus. When Westcott & Hort drew up their minority text they relied mainly on one manuscript, codex Vaticanus. Later, this was given some support when codex Sinaiticus was discovered. Nevertheless, the Nestle-Aland text is based on just two manuscripts and papyri which survived only in Egypt. These manuscripts differ from each other in thousands of places. The Majority (Byzantine) Text, on the other hand, has been the text in use in the Church universal. There are over 5,500 manuscripts supporting its text. Some idea of the gulf between these two competing texts can be seen in their translation of Matthew 19:9.

**Majority Greek Text** (Byzantine): Now I say to you that whoever shall dismiss his wife—not even over fornication—and shall marry another, he commits adultery.5 And the one who marries one divorced commits adultery.

**Minority Greek Text** (Vaticanus, Bezae, Leicestrensis): 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.

The Nestle-Aland minority Greek text agrees with the Majority Text translation as far as the first occurrence of ‘commits adultery’. It omits the last sentence due to a copying error known as homeoteleuton (meaning, ‘same ending’).

Please note that the Majority Text sentence: “And the one who marries one divorced commits adultery,” has been sloppily omitted in the minority text (but not in Vaticanus, which supports the

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3 This error is found mainly in the Caesarean Text (family 1 and family 13), to which Codex Leicestrensis belongs (MS 69).
5 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.
In any case, it is unlikely that the RC church would have reissued a cheaper version.

First, he uses (with the teachings of their Greek text they threw out as not obligatory on any Christian. 

This blunder is found in Vaticanus (but not in Sinaiticus, which supports the Majority Text at this point), in the Caesarean Text, and in Codex Leicestrensis.

In Codex Leicestrensis, some scribe, realising the blunder, 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). Unfortunately, in making the correction, he slipped in an extra Greek word, namely, ei, which means ‘if’. Now this marginal correction may have been an attempt to convey the sense of “apart from the matter of fornication,” which is the original text of Matthew 5:32, but this is not the original text of Matthew 19:9.

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 (AD 420).

The Latin Vulgate read: “And I say to you that: whosoever shall put away [Latin: dimiserit] his wife unless [nisi] for fornication [Latin: fornicationem]: and shall marry another, committeth adultery. And whoever marries one put away: he commits adultery.” Erasmus altered this to read: “And I say to you that whosoever shall repudiate [Latin: repudiaeuerit] his wife, unless [nisi] it be for disgrace [Latin: stuprum], and shall marry another, committeth adultery”.

By changing ‘fornicationem’ to ‘stuprum’, Erasmus widened his exception 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,’ all of which are the meanings given to stuprum in the Oxford Latin Dictionary. Suddenly, Erasmus offered divorce not just on sexual grounds (for fornication), but for any cause that gave rise to dishonour or disgrace, which may not necessarily be sexual, such as abuse or neglect or anything that a partner feels angry about. This expresses the teaching of rabbi Hillel (who, apparently, used Dt 24:1-3 and Ex 21:1-10).

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 used to produce the first published edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. He produced five editions of his text (the last being in 1536, the year he died). In none of them did he correct his mistake, even though by 1536 he had become aware of, and had consulted, many more manuscripts, including the Complutensian Polyglot, which was produced by the Roman Catholic church in 1522. Erasmus used it to make about one hundred corrections in his third edition. The Complutensian did not have his addition of ei, which he could not have failed to notice, but he deliberately ignored it. Unfortunately, only 600 expensive, but beautifully bound copies of the Complutensian were published, 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.

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.

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6 The Latin could have used excepta ‘except’ here in place of nisi, but it didn’t. Nisi normally means ‘except’ but it can also mean ‘unless’ in some contexts.

7 This new latitude was probably an attempt to draw on the latitude given by Moses, (but not by God) in Deut 24:1-4, to allow husbands to divorce their wives ‘for every cause’, not just fornication (see Mt 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’ belongs only to the unregenerate man, who will follow its urges to rid himself (or herself) of their married partner.

8 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.

9 The Complutensian Polyglot had been completed in 1514, two years before Erasmus issued his first, much cheaper edition. The Roman Catholic church delayed the release of the Greek NT until 1522, which was unfortunate because it allowed Erasmus to flood the market with his faulty Gk NT. In any case, it is unlikely that the RC church would have reissued a cheaper version.

The work of examining the truth of Scripture, as practised by the corrupt 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 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 the 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.

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 to make doubly sure that any movement away from what the Apostles taught and practised is not the result of being duped or misled.

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 Appx 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, objective assessment 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 duplicity, and while all shades of non-evangelical textual scholars are now in agreement, and have been for centuries, in not including the Erasmian addition in any modern critical edition of the Greek New Testament, 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 was based on Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, and 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. 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 from Erasmus’s εἰ μὴ (ei mh) and is not a translation of the two critical editions mentioned in the Preface (p. ix), namely the United Bible Societies Greek text and the Nestle-Aland 27th edition (1993). Both of these Greek New Testaments reject Erasmus’s addition.

The ESV translation would have been a financial disaster for the publisher if it had removed the exceptive clause and replaced it with the exclusion clause. 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,11 and Robinson & Pierpont.12 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. 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

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 modern Greek editions of the New Testament (I include here the Majority and the Minority\(^{13}\) Greek texts, which are united on this textual issue) in respect of Matthew 19:9, they dare not preach against the Reformed/Erasimian 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 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 is living in an adulterous relationship with his second ‘wife’, whose husband is still alive. 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, very little. 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 either deliberately inserted the addition on his own authority, or else he took advantage of the marginal correction in codex Leicestrensis if it was inserted before his time.

I give here some background to the emergence of Erasmus’s 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. 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.\(^{14}\)

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.

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\(^{13}\) For example, the United Bible Society’s Greek New Testament, or the Nestle-Aland editions. These represent the minority Egyptian Text.

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

Manuscript 69 (eap) 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 ‘exceptive clause’ of Matthew 19:9 from the margin of this manuscript. See the extended note below: “Note on Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69).”

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 Apocalypse; the MS served as the printer’s copy.
Manuscript 2 (e) (2), XI/XII cent., Basle, Univ. Bibl., A. N. IV. 1: the MS served as the printer’s copy.
Manuscript 2 (ap) (2815), XII cent., Codex Amerbachiorum, Basel, Univ. Bibl., A.N.IV.4: the 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 “Vulgarius”). 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, namely, 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 (eap) (Brittanicus or Montfortianus) (Dublin, Trinity College, A 4.21). The MS was said to be produced to pressurise Erasmus to include the Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7) in his Greek New Testament (from the 3rd ed. 1522 onwards).
MS 02 (B) (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 (from the 4th ed. in 1527) esp. for Apoc. 22:16-21.

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15 See Kurt Aland, Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter; 2nd ed. 1994).
16 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.
17 This MS was deposited in the Dominican monastery near Basel a century before Erasmus used it. Very little else is known about its origin.
20 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; Dörrfling 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.
21 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.
Reuben Swanson lists only the TR itself in support of Erasmus’s addition of ei in Matthew 19:9. This is surprising. 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.), possibly MS 69 or Codex Leicestrensis (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 ei before μη in Matthew 19:9. However, Tischendorf notes that MS 69 (the asterisk indicates the first hand of the MS) read parektos logou pornei, and a corrector (2nd hand) has added ei μη επι πορεια in the margin. What has happened here is that MS 69 has transferred parektos logou pornei from Matthew 5:32 into 19:9 by mistake, and the corrector has rightly tried to change it back to the original reading, but in so doing he inadvertently added ei before μη probably under the influence of parektos. This is probably where Erasmus got his addition, which has had such a disastrous effect on millions of marriages worldwide since 1516, and is perpetuated by modern, so-called ‘evangelical’ translations.

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

Tischendorf gives the following evidence in support of ei μη. I give his textual apparatus as printed. (Latin is the language used throughout his apparatus.)

As printed:

item c (= Gb Sz) praeimisso ei cum minisc pauc Bas\(^{6th}\) (Clem — libere, et quaeritur quorum spectet—\(^{326}\) χροία λογον πορν. ei\(^{50th}\) πλην ei μη επι λογον πονη.).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>item</th>
<th>= Erasmus’s editions,(^{25}) and all printed editions up to the Elzevir’s edition of 1624 (which would include the 1550 edition by Robert Stephens)(^{27})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(= Gb Sz)</td>
<td>= the printed texts of Griesbach and Scholz (1827)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praeimisso ei</td>
<td>= prefix ei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cum minusc pauc</td>
<td>= with a few minuscules(^{28})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bas(^{6th})</td>
<td>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 Garnierius (3 vols, Paris, 1721-1730).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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.\(^{23}\). Jean Hadot, “La critique textuelle dans l'édition du Nouveau Testament d'Erasme,” in Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensis, 1972, pp. 749-760 [p. 760: “Si l'on veut rester objectif, il faut situer l'oeuvre d’Erasme dans son cadre.”]. J. W. Clark, “Observations on the Erasmian 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>


\(^{24}\) The same mistake was made by BP\(^{20}\)D\(^{15}\) (which includes MS 69) and part of f\(^{1}\).

\(^{25}\) 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 ei, which was noted by Albert Bengel (Io. Alberti Bengeli, Apparatus Criticus ad Novum Testamentum, 2nd ed., prepared by Philippo Davide Burkiu [Tubingae, 1763], p. 127).

\(^{26}\) This was published by F. H. A. Scrivener, Ή ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΦΚΗΝ Novum Testamentum Textús Stephani A.D. 1550 (Cantabrigiae: Deighton, Bell et filii, 1877).

\(^{27}\) 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) 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.

\(^{28}\) Albert Bengel has “cum pauculis mss” = with a few mss (Io. Alberti Bengeli, Apparatus Criticus ad Novum Testamentum, 2nd ed., prepared by Philippo Davide Burkiu [Tubingae, 1763], p. 127).
Clem 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 Poterius (Oxonii, 1715). The Greek text is a modified form of Matthew 5:32.

et παρεκτον λογου πορν. = “but except on account of (the) matter of fornication.” Clement has this text 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 agrees with Tischendorf’s printed evidence. Note that 69 is the number given to Codex Leicestrensis. His evidence reads as printed:†

†praem. ei c. 69².mg. (ei μη επι λογου πορν. Clem. 506.)

Explanation of the evidence:

† = indicates an omission of something.
praem. ei = prefix ei
ei c. = the common Greek Text (presumably all printed editions up to the Elzevir’s edition of 1624).
69².mg. = MS 69 [Codex Leicestrensis] and a second hand (1st corrector) added: ei μη επι πορνιας in the margin. 69⁰ (* = 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.

ei μη επι λογου πορν. Clem. 506 = “except on account of (the) matter of fornication.” Clement reads this Greek text in the edition of his work by Iohannis Poterius (Oxonii, 1715).

What is intriguing about this evidence is that Erasmus appears to have selected his final text from the margin of one Greek manuscript, namely, MS 69, if he examined it, which seems very likely. It is dated to the fifteenth century and the corrector is later, but before 1516, if Erasmus consulted it. Erasmus was born in the fifteenth century (1466). This means that the text he chose was only a few decades old. In terms of being ancient, the ink was hardly dry on the corrector’s work! However, it is quite possible that the marginal reading was taken from Erasmus’s text and inserted in the margin of Codex Leicestrensis.

Now, given that Erasmus was a humanist, and he believed that the Matthean exegetical clause in 19:9 permitted divorce (dissolution of the bond and freedom to remarriage) in cases of adultery, one wonders if his text was affected by his personal view on divorce and remarriage. He published his views 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 exegesis 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 an exemption of something in the three Greek words (μη επι πορνιας), plus Erasmus’s instinct to give the innocent party the right to remarriage, plus a misunderstanding of the genuine exegetical clause in Matthew 5:32 clouded his text-critical approach to the evidence at his disposal.

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

Tischendorf indicated that in Matthew 19:9 μη επι πορνιας was replaced with the text from 5:32, i.e., παρεκτον λογου πορνιας, in the following MSS:

BD 1. 33. al. itText (c d ff² m excepta causa adulterii; e praeter causam fornicationis; a b f ff² g² h q nisi ob causam fornic. Item Aug excepta causa fornicat., nisi ex causa forn., nisi ob causam forn.; Tertius libere om μη επ. πορν., item Athenasæ⁵⁵syri sah cop Or⁵⁴⁴⁷⁴⁸g⁴⁴(Clem⁵³⁵ χωριο λογου πορν.) Bas⁴th Chr (et. mo.⁶).

1.4.4. Tregelles’ evidence against the replacement text of Vaticanus

Matthew 19:9 μὴ ἐπὶ πορνεῖα was replaced with the text from Mt 5:32, i.e., παρεκτος λογοῦ πορνεῖας, in the following MSS:

Both the Nestle 27th edition and the Majority Text omit εἰ before μὴ so that the addition can be confidently ignored as not part of the autograph text.31

1.4.5. Note on 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 R. Swanson, New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Matthew [Pasadena, CA.: William Carey International University Press, 1995].) Family 13 and Family 1 belong to the Caesarean Text.

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 an older man with a shaky hand. The correction, on the other hand, is very neat and done with a very steady hand. There are other instances of shaky underlined text without any marginal correction. They deserve a study in their own right. They could suggest a collation with another Greek text, even though no correction appears in the margin.

The original writing was done with a reed. The correction was probable written with a very fine quill. The lateness of the correction can be judged from the use of the hyphen in ε-μη and πορ-νεια, and the use of the comma after πορ-νεια. I have not seen these in any other Greek manuscript.

It is quite possible that this marginal correction was taken from Erasmus’s printed text (or a later version of the Textus Receptus) and inserted into the margin of Codex Leicestrensis. If so, it means that Erasmus did not get his unique reading of εἰ before μὴ in Matthew 19:9 from this manuscript. This leaves his text without the support of any of the manuscripts available to him in 1516.

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 ἐπὶ πορνεῖα but the word εἰ was added by the corrector.)

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 ERASMUS PUT IN HIS 1516 GREEK NEW TESTAMENT, INCLUDING THE CIRCLED WORD.
THIS MARGINAL CORRECTION WAS INTENDED TO REPLACE THE UNDERLINED TEXT
BECAUSE THE UNDERLINED TEXT HAS BEEN IMPORTED FROM MATTHEW 5:32

31See Appendix D for textual notes on the Matthean exemption clauses.
Below is a greatly enlarged negative view of folio 1 verso, showing the marginal correction. It shows up the use of the modern hyphen and comma. It is possible that Erasmus consulted Codex Leicestrensis and accepted the marginal correction as representing the true text. Or someone may have corrected the codex using Erasmus’s printed text.\footnote{See the extended note in Appendix F on Codex Leicestrensis.}

The addition of ει before μη in Matthew 19:9 was to have catastrophic consequences for Jesus’ ethical teaching on marriage and divorce when the Reformers were drawing up their Confessions of Faith. They assumed that Erasmus had faithfully reproduced the best text from the manuscripts available to him at that time.

\subsection*{1.5. 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.

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\(^\circ\) (Gospels), codex 2\(^{19}\) (Acts and Epistles) and codex 1\(^{\prime}\) (Revelation); and he used a few other manuscripts (1\(^{14}\), 4\(^{19}\), 7\(^{6}\)) to make some minor alterations to the text.\footnote{Leon Vaganay, An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), p. 131.} 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\footnote{According to John Mill, A New Edition of the Greek New Testament (Oxford, 1707).}; 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 the second edition for his 1521 German translation.

The 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 Ximeses’ (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 text 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].

Théodore de Beza (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 of 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, while in Britain, Stephens’s edition of 1550 acquired this authority. There are only 287 differences between these two New Testaments.

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. This 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.

1.6. 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 correct English.

A word of explanation is needed about the use of square brackets and italicised words in translation. Take the sentence: Tom hit Jack but not Jill. What this means is that: Tom hit [Jack but [he did] not [hit] Jill]. The verb ‘hit’ is written once but understood twice.

Similarly, in the sentence: Whoever may divorce his wife, if not for fornication, and marry another, he is an adulterer. Here the verb ‘divorce’ is written once but understood twice. This is the same as saying: Whoever may divorce his wife, if not [he divorces] for fornication, and marries another [woman], he is an adulterer.

Now, since the ‘if’ before ‘not’ is not in the Greek, this leaves only the negative ‘not’. Without ‘if’ the verse now reads: Whoever may divorce his wife, not for fornication, and may marry another, he commits adultery. Here the verb ‘divorce’ is written once but understood twice. This is the same as saying: Whoever may divorce his wife, not [he may divorce] for fornication, and may marry another [woman], he commits adultery.

LUKE 16:18 (JESUS’ ABSOLUTIST POSITION)

Every husband divorcing his wife, and marrying another woman, commits adultery. And every man marrying a divorced wife, he commits adultery.

MATTHEW 5:31-32 (THE EXEMPTION CLAUSE: THE HUSBAND IS NOT HELD RESPONSIBLE)

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Now it was said, “Who, say\textsuperscript{38}, may have divorced his wife, let him give to her a departure document.” \textsuperscript{32} 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 fornication\textsuperscript{39}. And who if, say, may have married a divorced wife he becomes adulterous by marrying her.

MATTHEW 19:3-12 (THE EXCLUSION CLAUSE: NOT EVEN FOR FORNICATION)

\begin{enumerate}
\item And the Pharisees came near to him, tempting him, and saying to him if it is lawful for a husband to divorce his wife for every accusation. \textsuperscript{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? \textsuperscript{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? \textsuperscript{6} So that no longer are they two flesh, but rather, one flesh. Therefore, what God joined together, let man not put asunder.’ \textsuperscript{7} They say to him, ‘Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a scroll of departure, and to divorce her?’ \textsuperscript{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. \textsuperscript{9} Now I say to you that who, for example, may have divorced his wife—not he may have divorced her for 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.’
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}
\item 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.’ \textsuperscript{11} But he, he said to them, ‘Not all men do receive this word, but to whom it has already been given. \textsuperscript{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.’
\end{enumerate}

MARK 10:2-12 (JESUS’ ABSOLUTIST POSITION)

\begin{enumerate}
\item And Pharisees having come near, questioned him if it is lawful for a husband to divorce a wife, tempting him. \textsuperscript{3} But he, having given answer, said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ \textsuperscript{4} Now they, they said, ‘Moses permitted a scroll of departure to write, and to divorce her.’ \textsuperscript{5} And having given answer Jesus said to them, ‘On account of your hard-heartedness he wrote for you this command, \textsuperscript{6} but from the beginning of creation, a male and a female God made them. \textsuperscript{7} On account of this a man shall leave behind his father and mother, and he shall be fused unto his wife, \textsuperscript{8} and they shall be—the two—for one flesh. \textsuperscript{9} So that no longer are they two flesh, but rather one flesh. \textsuperscript{9} Therefore, what God joined together, let man not put asunder.’
\item And in the house his disciples questioned him again concerning the same thing. \textsuperscript{11} 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. \textsuperscript{12} 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.’
\end{enumerate}

ROMANS 7:1-3 (ONLY DEATH ENDS A MARRIAGE)

Are you ignorant, brothers—for to those knowing law I speak—that the law\textsuperscript{40} has lordship over the man as long as he lives? For the married woman has been bound by law to the living

\textsuperscript{38} The small Greek particle (\emph{an}) means, ‘suppose,’ ‘let us say,’ ‘for example,’ ‘for instance’. It introduces a hypothetical situation, especially for teaching purposes.

\textsuperscript{39} Jesus puts the responsibility on the husband for what happens to a man’s wife after he divorces her. The exception to this blame is where she commits fornication before her husband divorced her. Alternatively, the exception to his responsibility/culpability is where his divorced wife does not remarry but commits fornication. 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, 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.

\textsuperscript{40} The ‘law’ here is ‘the law of the husband’ (not the Torah, or Dt 24:1-4), which is implicit in Gen 2:24, which upholds the permanent nature of the one-flesh union.
husband, and if the husband should die, she has been free from the law of the husband. So, then, the husband being alive, she shall be called an adulteress if she becomes another man’s wife. Now if the husband should die, she is free from the law, so that she cannot be deemed to be an adulteress, having become another man’s wife.\footnote{A remarriage can only follow a death, not a divorce.}

1 CORINTHIANS 7:39 (ONLY DEATH ENDS A MARRIAGE)

A wife has been bound by the law so long time as her husband should live. Now if her husband may sleep [die], she is free to be married to whom she desires—only she must marry in the Lord.

Now, 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.

There can be no doubt about the challenge that Jesus has 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 any cause, especially fornication, that displeases him, 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 law meant that all marriages entered into, following a divorce, were adulterous relationships. Jesus, quite bluntly, condemned Moses for introducing his law of divorce. Jesus recognised that Moses was forced into making such a law, because of the hardness of men’s hearts. But bowing to the hardness of men’s hearts compromised the original teaching on marriage that God instituted ‘in the beginning’, between Adam and Eve. Jesus brushed away Moses’ 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.

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, 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 teaching on divorce. The schools of Hillel and Shamai, so often at loggerheads with each other, and vying with each other to be the supreme authority in religious matters, were united in the first item on their
lists of causes that men could divorce their wives for, namely, ‘for fornication’. Then followed an extensive list of decreasing misdemeanours ending in trivial causes such as burning the husband’s dinner. The trap was set to ask Jesus if a man could divorce his wife “for any cause”. They expected Jesus would soften on His hard stance over divorce. But they underestimated Jesus. He knew these men well. They were hypocrites. He knew the way they exploited their wives with their easy divorces. They were ignorant of the fact that a greater than Moses stood in their midst. For the man they were about to tempt was none other than Immanuel—God with us. God Himself was about to give them an answer that would alter their relationship with Moses for ever.

The Pharisees gathered about Him. The question was asked. They stood in intense silence listening and expecting Him to say: “I abolish divorce, except for fornication.” Instead, as He looked them in the eye He said, “not for fornication”. This was the last thing they expected to hear from Him. By denying the first, and unquestionable grounds for divorce, He had effectively ruled out all the long list of causes that came after ‘fornication’. How easily, the Son of God, demolished the Mosaic system of divorce. Little did they realise that a greater than Moses had arrived in their midst according to prophecy. One greater than Moses had spoken, and spoken with such supreme self-assurance and self-belief in His teaching. Exuding tremendous confidence in His own superior authority He demolished the teaching of Moses on which all men were depending on to put away their unloved wives. The implication of His abolition of Moses was that His teaching was vastly superior to that of Moses. And it was superior, because the Son and the Father were one in their hatred of divorce. At this point in history, the dispensation of divorce was abolished. From now on all men were accountable to the Son, and would be judged by Him on the Day of Judgment.

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 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. The man would dispute that implication vehemently. He would argue that once he had handed her her bill of divorce setting her free to marry whomsoever she pleased, 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, 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.

Now here comes the exception clause. Note that the exception is not a loophole to Jesus’ absolutist position, but an exception to the man’s culpability for what happens to his wife after he has set her out in the street.

The exception covers the case where she commits fornication before or after her husband 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 does not remarry but commits fornication. She knows that this is an unlawful state, hence she becomes responsible for her own fornication. But if she remarryes, 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 true explanation for the genuine excessive clause in Matthew 5:31-32.

Likewise, if a wife divorces her husband for fornication, she is not held responsible for his sin. Likewise, when he leaves her, if he chooses not to remarry, but live 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 their 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 (Lk 11:4). It implied that the sin of adultery had
to be forgiven should the offender ask for it (cf. Lk 17:3). The ancients had preached, ‘Love your neighbour, and hate your enemy’ (Mt 5:43), but Jesus turned this on its head and commanded His followers to ‘love your enemies’ (Mt 5:53). They were to bless those cursing them. They were to do good to those hating them; and pray for their persecutors and those saying all manner of evil 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’ (Lk 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.

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, 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 Shammai’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 (Mt 18:21-23), and seven times a day (Lk 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 ruled out when He said: “Whoever divorces his wife—not even for fornication—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. Hosea had forgiven his wife her adultery. Neither divorced their spouses. 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” (Mt 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 exceptive clause. The evil came about through Codex Vaticanus and other corrupt manuscripts, which transferred this grammatically, genuine exceptive clause into Matthew 19:9, where it does not belong. Matthew 19:9 contains an exclusion clause, not an exceptive 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 whoremongers, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, 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 Cor 6:9).

42 Many in Paul’s churches had been adulterers and fornicators (1 Cor 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 Mt 19:15-17, and excommunication (1 Cor 5:1-5) with the object of restoring the sinner to full membership again.
When Codex Vaticanus transferred the exemption clause in Matthew 5:32 into Matthew 19:9, and when Erasmus added εὶ (El) before μὴ in Matthew 19:9, both of these changes introduced a completely new idea. Where Jesus had said, “not for fornication,” meaning, a man may not divorce for fornication, Vaticanus and 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 for fornication and virtually ‘every cause’ that a man could squeeze into the term ‘indecency’. He is rabbi Hillel come alive again.

Jesus, in fact, specifically ruled out fornication as a 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 exceptive clause remains embedded in each succeeding new translation.

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 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 is a sin, because it opposes what God has required of all men from the beginning of the creation.

The constant danger facing the 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.
THE TEACHING OF JESUS ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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.

GOD

JESUS CHRIST

CHRISTIAN

MARRIAGE

IMPOSED ON THE CHRISTIAN

SEPARATION

NO REMARRIAGE PERMITTED

"ANOTHER WOMAN"

ADULTERY

'DEATH'

(EXCOMMUNICATED)

"DEATH" (EXCOMMUNICATION)

SPIRITUAL REALM

WORLDLY REALM

MAN

MOSES

NON-CHRISTIAN

MARRIAGE

CONSIDERED TO BE PERMANENT

DIVORCE

ISSUED IN PLACE OF FORGIVENESS

REMARIAE

"ANOTHER WOMAN"

"ANOTHER WOMAN"

NO PENALTY

DEATH

LIFE WITH THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

LIFE WITHOUT THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

PHYSICAL DEATH UNDER THE OLD COVENANT. SPIRITUAL DEATH UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

A FIXED GULF: THE TRANSITION FROM MAN TO GOD IS THROUGH A 'BORN-FROM-ABOVE' EXPERIENCE

GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

'OF THE SPIRIT'

'OF THE FLESH'

"OF THE SPIRIT"
1.7. A SUMMARY OF JESUS’ TEACHING

The following characteristics can be deduced from Jesus’ foundational teaching about human marriage:

(1) It is indissoluble. God has ordained that once male and female ‘come together’ in marriage the bond between them can never be severed. Only the death of one of the partners can end the relationship. (Mt 19:4b-6, 8b; Mk 6-9; 1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2b, 3b) See (7) below for an apparent exception.

(2) Divorce per se is a violation of God’s law for marriage. No one can use any man-made means to dissolve a consummated marriage, such as secular divorce courts or wilful desertion. (Mt 5:32; Lk 16:18; Mt 19:9; Mk 10:11-12; 1 Cor 7:10b, 11b-13) See (7) below for a real exception.

(3) Remarriage per se is a violation of God’s law for marriage. No one can attempt to dissolve the first marriage bond by making another. Two is a mystery, but three is a monstrosity. A second marriage is always bigamous and adulterous while both partners are alive. (Mt 5:32; Lk 16:18; Mt 19:9; Mk 10:11-12) See (7) below for a real exception.

(4) Adultery occurs when partners use some man-made means to end a consummated marriage and then remarry. Either or both members are guilty of adultery against their partner if they remarry. There is no such thing as an innocent party in a remarriage. The innocent and the guilty party must remain unmarried or be reconciled. (Mt 5:32; Lk 16:18; Mt 19:9; Mk 10:11-12; 1 Cor 7:11, 15; Rom 7:3) See (7) below for an apparent exception.

(5) Anyone who marries a person already married or divorced from an existing partner is guilty of adultery against that person. (Mt 5:32; Lk 16:18; Mt 19:9) See (7) below for an exception in the case of a “divorced” betrothed wife.

(6) Anyone who divorces a person will be held responsible by God for the future sexual sins that that divorced person will commit through a second marriage. (Directly stated, Mt 5:32; Indirectly stated, Lk 16:18; Mt 19:9; Mk 10:11-12) See (7) below for a real exception.

(7) Judaism permitted divorce before marriage as well as after it. This is an anomaly, because until there is actual intercourse, the two have not become one flesh. Consequently, anyone who divorces an engaged spouse will not be held responsible by God for the future relations that that ‘divorced’ person will experience through a ‘second marriage’. This law only applies to cultures which require a bill of divorce to break a binding marriage contract before it is consummated. Because the two persons never became ‘one flesh’ there was no consummated marriage, therefore there can be no adultery following such a ‘divorce’.

It should also be borne in mind that a marriage between Christians was the expected norm (1 Cor 7:39). To marry against this norm was to invite the Lord’s displeasure if not punishment. When one partner becomes a Christian the marriage is still a ‘one flesh’ union, and whether the unbeliever stays or leaves (through getting a state divorce) the marriage bond exists until one partner dies (1 Cor 7:12-15).

The teaching of the Lord Jesus was simple, ‘no dissolution and therefore no remarriage,’ that it was never seriously challenged for the first five centuries. The Early Church set its face resolutely against all remarriages.

The conclusion of this paper can be summed up as follows:
**JUDAISM PERMITTED DIVORCE BEFORE MARRIAGE AS WELL AS AFTER IT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNCONSUMMATED MARRIAGE</th>
<th>CONSUMMATED MARRIAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A BINDING ENGAGEMENT TO BE MARRIED</td>
<td>THE HUSBAND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SIN OF HIS WIFE'S REMARRIAGE</td>
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<td>DIVORCE REQUIRED TO END BOTH RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>ALL CULTURES PERMITTED DIVORCE FOR CONSUMMATED MARRIAGES. UNIQUELY, GOD DID NOT PERMIT IT FOR HIS PEOPLE</td>
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Greeks and Romans did not have a custom of divorce for engaged couples hence Mark and Luke omit mentioning it.

Evangelicals are now deeply split over the issue of divorce and remarriage. 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 first 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. There are a number of difficulties with the interpretation (but not the practice) of the Early Church view as put forward by Wenham & Heth, and these will be outlined later on. First, we shall take a look at the prevailing situation in the world today.

The Early Church view was not rediscovered during the Reformation. Rather, the situation among the main denominations since the Reformation is best summed up in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) Chapter XXIV. Sections V and VI:

Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract [Matt. 1:18-20]. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce [Matt. 5:32], and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead [Matt. 19:9; Rom 7:2-3].

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage [Matt. 19:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:15; Matt. 19:6]: wherein a publick and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed, and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case [Deut. 24:1-4].

When compared to the seven characteristics that should mark every human marriage, none but the seventh (in the opening sentence) is in agreement with the doctrine and practice of the Early Church. Wenham & Heth have ably exposed the weaknesses of this interpretation of Jesus’ teaching. It is sufficient just to highlight a number of objections to it. Note, however, the recognition given to the divorce of betrothed wives in the first sentence. Only the example of Joseph and Mary is given in support of this. The possibility that Matthew’s exemption clauses might refer to the same situation never seems to have occurred to those who drew up the Confession.

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43 Tertullian (AD 155-220), in his later writings (unfortunately not quoted by W-H), accepted that adultery terminated a marriage as death does (Wenham & Heth, op cit., p. 37). It is interesting that Paul deliberately refuses to use the word for divorce (apoluω) and instead goes for non-technical verbs such as aphíëmi (send away) and choríζo (separate), even though these later may have become identified with the old vocabulary. This break with the vocabulary of the Old Covenant Law would be typical of Paul’s attitude to something which was now “obsolete” (Heb 8:13), and surpassed in the New Covenant Law of Christ. It was not until the sixth century that the Eastern Church permitted remarriage after divorce. The Western (Roman Catholic) Church up until the Reformation refused to permit second marriages.
1.8. PAUL ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Paul received his Gospel directly from the Lord Jesus, consequently he was in full agreement with Jesus that there was no legitimacy in any divorce document, and that even when civil courts granted a divorce, divorce did not occur because the marriage union once formed cannot be reversed. The union might be likened to two glasses of blue and red liquid being poured into one glass. The process cannot be reversed. Such is the irreversible union of the one-flesh when it is lawful in the eyes of God.

I take Jesus to mean that all remarriages are sinful relationships if they go through a divorce procedure, for the procedure implies that the spouse is still alive. The follower of Christ must flee the divorce courts as quickly as he is told to ‘flee fornication’. But if the unbeliever wants to depart let him/her depart, but this is not divorce. That is the import of Jesus’ absolute ban on divorce ‘for any cause’ (Mt 19:3). Paul thinks it is beneath Christians to take each other to secular courts to solve their disputes (1 Cor 6), how less likely should a Christian go to a secular court to dissolve a union that God had joined!

Nowhere under the Torah does God withdraw His command to kill adulterers, therefore for the Pharisees to replace it with divorce (if they did), this was to set aside God’s law for their own traditions. It is sometimes argued that under Roman rule the Jews were not able to carry out the death penalty for adultery. But Roger Aus44 has brought forward evidence that the death penalty was still being carried out under Roman rule, so that divorce was not the only option open for adultery to God-fearers. He noted, “It is also recorded that at least one daughter of a priest (still in her father’s house) was burnt to death before 66 CE because of committing adultery (in Jerusalem).” And then, in the next sentence, he says, “If the daughter of a priest was caught while engaging in such behavior, it is very probable that those further down the social scale of priests/Levites/Israelites did so also, and certainly more frequently.”

Divorce ends nothing. Pushing a piece of paper across a courtroom table changes nothing about that relationship in the eyes of God. As far as God is concerned they are still ‘one flesh’ after the paper has been pushed across the table. Divorce is a fiction. It has no reality in God’s world.

Like Jesus, Paul regarded all marriages, Christian and non-Christian, as irreversible. Only the death of one of the partners could separate a married couple (Rom 7:1-3; 1 Cor 7:39). Remarriage, Jesus pointed out, only multiplies adulteries. There are no innocent parties if both spouses believe that by getting a divorce they have untied their marriage knot and are free to remarry. Jesus puts the blame on the spouse (the wife or husband) who initiates the divorce. The initiator is the guilty person, but the other spouse is just as guilty if they agree to it.

Note that New Testament Greek does not have a verb to convey the legal action ‘to divorce’. It uses a variety of common verbs to convey the idea, such as ‘to send away’, ‘to put away’, ‘to send out’, etc. Interestingly, Paul never used the verb ‘to send away’ (apothu), which is the preferred term when referring to Jewish divorces in the Gospels. Instead he prefers to use the more neutral or descriptive term ‘to separate’ (chorizó). Paul uses it to describe the unbeliever’s action. The option is not open to the Christian. This is consistent with Jesus’ attitude toward divorce, which He abolished as having no place among His followers. Unbelievers might believe in its efficacy, but for Jesus it is a sham. It only opens the door to adultery. It is man’s way (through the state) of legalising adultery, just as the state legalises prostitution, abortion and homosexual practices.

To believe that divorce actually annuls a legitimate marriage is to oppose Jesus’ teaching on marriage. To then obtain a divorce and remarry is to sin against the Lord Jesus and God. All divorces are sinful actions if those who obtain them believe that they annul their legitimate marriages. All remarriages are adulterous relationships while both spouses are still alive.

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PART 2. GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS

In any counselling situation the first thing the Christian counsellor needs to do is to establish the theology of the spouses. Knowledge is crucial. On the one hand, the Christian counsellor needs to know exactly what Jesus taught about divorce and remarriage, and crucially, what the Holy Spirit has revealed about the headship of man. If the Christian counsellor has a false view of these two doctrines, or an incomplete or holds a heretical view, then his counselling will be flawed, and indeed, it may be so different from Christ’s teaching that he may advise divorce and remarriage under certain circumstances of his own choosing (claiming, of course, that they are biblical). On the other hand, the Christian counsellor must gain information about the married couple, and see where they are coming from, which will usually be from an unbiblical humanist and/or feminist point of view if they are both unbelievers.

Truth can never be termed ‘extreme’. By its very nature, truth is what is true. And there are some things that have been predetermined by God as ‘right’. One of these is that the marriage union is for life. A wife is for life. Adam and Eve both fell from a state of unselfish love into a state of selfish interest. From this fall emerged divorce and remarriage.

Due to the inability of fallen man to live up to the truth about marriage, divorce was introduced by man to cope with his selfish nature. His incapacity to forgive freely, as God forgives his transgressions, contributed to the emergence of divorce among mankind. It did not come from God. It is not part of truth. It opposes truth.

Jesus reintroduced mankind to the original instruction on the permanency of the one-flesh union. In doing so He abolished what man had introduced. It might seem extreme of Jesus to abolish the provision of divorce, but truth can never be termed ‘extreme’. Truth is what God has determined is ‘right’, and what He has determined as ‘right’ is that marriage is for life, and the union is broken only by death. If the Christian counsellor is armed with the truth that Jesus abolished divorce and remarriage, and has reinstated the life-long, one-flesh union, then he will have a different approach to counselling broken marriages. It is not the job of any counsellor to interfere with the truth as revealed by Jesus, or tone it down, or reinterpret His words to permit what He has forbidden. The Christian counsellor should speak as if the Lord Jesus were speaking through him, as He should be. If he does, he will not have very many followers, and his counsel will not be sought after; he will be ostracised; he will not be popular; and he will certainly not be a minister of a denominational church. He will be regarded as an ‘extremist’ and sidelined.

Our Lord’s teaching on divorce does not rest solely on the absence of ei in Matthew 19:9. The nature of the life He imparts to the Christian is such that an unforgiving spirit is contrary to His spirit dwelling in the Christian. Jesus noted carefully the question the Pharisees put to Him. They asked if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife. They did not ask if it was lawful for a wife to put away her husband ‘for every cause’. Their mindset was sexist and discriminatory. The law in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 was written by man for man’s benefit. It was deliberately loaded against the rights of women.

In the wording of that law there was an ambiguity which the rabbis exploited to the advantage of men. The law read: “When a man takes a wife and has married her, and it transpires that she does not find favour in his eyes, because he has found in her nakedness of something, . . . and sent her out of his house. . . .” The question arose, do the words “found in her nakedness of something,” explain the phrase “she does not find favour in his eyes,” or are they two different grounds for divorce? Rabbi Hillel argued that they were two different issues. She can be divorced if “she does not find favour in his eyes”; and she can be divorced if “she does not find favour in his eyes.” It was on this basis that if a wife burned her husband’s dinner, she would “not find favour in his eyes” and so she could be divorced instantly. Rabbi Shamai argued that there was only one ground for divorce, namely, if a man “found in her nakedness of something.” For him, that meant only sexual misdemeanours constituted grounds for divorce.

These two rabbis, no doubt, drew up their long lists of what constituted grounds for divorce. They both agreed that first on their list was divorce for fornication and adultery, then sexual misdemeanours of an embarrassing nature, such as wives bathing in a public place (Bathsheba), or being indecently dressed, or anything of a sexual nature that would embarrass their husbands. After a long list of sexual prohibitions would come Hillel’s bottomless list of non-sexual matters which could be grounds for divorce, with burning her husband’s dinner near the bottom.

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45 For a detailed study of the love-headship relationship between God and Man, and Man and Woman, see the author’s web-page at: www.btinternet.com/~lmf12
Now these Pharisees had heard of Jesus’ absolute ban on divorce as recorded in Luke 16:18, which is the earliest written record of Jesus’ position on divorce. 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 for 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. 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, 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 of divorce, they may have hoped to use Jesus as an ally to condemn the quick divorces handed out by the Hillel school. So they were both testing and tempting Jesus to say something that they could later 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 was written by men, for men. Women were given no rights to divorce their husbands. It was a one-sided law. It was a very unfair law, an evil law. It could not have been written by God. And Jesus very pointedly stated that this law was given by Moses, not by His Father. He distanced His Father from this law, and He distanced Himself from it. It was an evil law, 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. It did not come from God, or from Him.

Jesus knew that divorce was an evil thing, in and of itself. It was the fruit of hard-heartedness. He could see that divorce was man’s way of saying, ‘I will never forgive you.’

Divorce is the expression of hatred toward a fellow human being.
Divorce depraves the user as much as the abuser.
Divorce deprives the user of fellowship with God.
Divorce is the use of sin to fight sin.
Divorce multiplies sin.
Multiply divorce, and you multiply sin.
Divorce is an admission that forgiveness is impossible.
Divorce can only exist where an unforgiving spirit exists.
Divorce pollutes the innocent and the guilty parties.
Divorce is an unclean state for the innocent and the guilty parties.
There are guilty and innocent parties before divorce. After divorce, both parties are guilty.
After divorce both parties are excluded from the Kingdom of God.
There is no place for divorce in the Kingdom of God.
Where divorce abounds, sin abounds.
Where sin abounds, divorce abounds.
Love is gentle and kind. Divorce is harsh and brutal.
Love is positive. Divorce is negative.
Love is long-suffering. Divorce is short-tempered.
Love seeks not her own. Divorce seeks its own.
Love bears all things. Divorce bears nothing.
Love never fails. Divorce never wins.
Love is soft-hearted. Divorce is hard-hearted.
Love is the zenith of goodness. Divorce is the nadir of evil.
Love is the reaction of the new heart. Divorce is the reaction of the old heart.
God and love go together. Divorce and evil go together.
God and evil are incompatible. Love and divorce are incompatible.

My enemy is my adulterous wife. “Love your enemy.”
My husband hates me. “Bless them that hate you.”
Forgive, if you want to be forgiven by God.
Forgive all, if you want to be forgiven all.
Tell me what is good about divorce, and I will tell what is good about sin.
Avoid divorce, and you avoid sin.

Avoid divorce, and you avoid sin.
Flee divorce as you would flee sin, for divorce is sin.
No divorce is a good thing.

So when the Pharisees eventually got an opportunity to ask their question, Jesus surprised them by specifically excluding fornication as a prime ground for divorce. In effect, by denying the first item on their list, He was denying all that followed in their lists. For they heard Him say, “Who, for instance, may put away his wife—not even for fornication—and may marry another, commits adultery.” By inserting the exclusion clause “—not even for fornication—”, Jesus had carefully remembered and focussed on their words “for any cause”, and He answered their question directly and fully: “there are no causes to justify divorce, not even your prime example,” was His answer. Now they knew for sure that Luke 16:18 and Mk 10:11-12 represented His true position on His teaching about divorce.

Jesus’ absolutist position comes out in Mark 10:10-12, when the disciples in private ask 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.” Here Jesus omits the exclusion clause because he is not speaking to the Pharisees, but to His apostles. This shows that the exclusion clause was deliberately intended to deny the Pharisees any grounds (even adultery) for divorcing their wives.

Jesus was showing the Pharisees, and His own apostles, a better way. Love and forgiveness would characterise all His followers. Truly a new thing had come into the world. A new Kingdom, predicted by Daniel, had arrived; a rock that would fill the earth as the waters cover the seas. Many are called, but few chosen, to be privileged members of the Kingdom of God. The cost is nothing short of giving one’s all to Christ and being transformed into His likeness on a daily basis.

The very nature of Jesus was to forgive the sin of adultery. This nature should abide in every Christian. If He could tell the woman taken in adultery, “Go, and sin no more,” the Christian who has been wronged can say the same (seventy times seven). This leaves no room for divorce. The law of love excludes it. ‘If you do not forgive others their sins, then neither will your sins be forgiven,’ counselled Jesus.

How would a faithful counsellor handle the following cases? There are four guiding principles that will bear on most cases.

THE FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Unlawful sex must cease immediately
2. Reconciliation to a married partner must not be hindered
3. A Christian cannot marry a non-Christian without a cost
4. The Christian’s body belongs to Christ; remain single if possible

PRINCIPLE 1. Unlawful sex must cease immediately
The Lord’s instruction is: “Go and sin no more.” Sex is lawful only in the context of a lawful marriage. By unlawful sex is meant (1) prostitution, (2) fornication, and (3) adultery.
Under (2) would be included (a) singles having sex with singles, or promiscuous sex, and (b) unmarried partners. Under (3) would be included singles marrying a divorced person whose spouse is still alive, and (b) all remarriages where death has not separated lawfully married couples.

PRINCIPLE 2. Reconciliation to a married partner must not be hindered
This principle is paramount where divorce has occurred. A remarriage after divorce is not a lawful marriage in the eyes of God. A remarriage is an adulterous marriage. The goal should be to get back to the original partner, and this will mean dissolving (annulling) the second marriage in order to free up the spouse to return to the original partner. A second marriage is only lawful when the original partner has died.

Note that in Mark’s parallel (10:2-12), he omits the phrase “for any cause” because he knows it is not going to make any difference to Jesus’ absolutist position. But the exclusion clause is included by Matthew because he wanted his readers to observe that Jesus answered their question fully. So the exclusion clause relates to the Pharisees’ interest in any qualifications Jesus would put on His absolutist position.
PRINCIPLE 3. A Christian cannot marry a non-Christian without a cost

Since the body of the Christian becomes part of Christ’s Body, which is holy and undefiled, no Christian can marry a non-Christian. This is an instruction given by the Holy Spirit to the Church. Where, however, two non-Christians or two Christians marry, these are lawful unions in the sight of God. The single Christian cannot marry a non-Christian, but if God calls a non-Christian spouse to follow Him, but not the other spouse, their continuing marriage is still a lawful union (1 Cor 7:14).

So a Christian can be married to a non-Christian, but in one situation it is disapproved of (i.e., the Christian who, against advice, marries a non-Christian), and in the other case it is approved of (because God called only one of the spouses to follow Him).

PRINCIPLE 4. The Christian’s body belongs to Christ; remain single if possible

The Holy Spirit instructed Christ’s followers that if they were single when they were called to follow Him, then they should resolve to remain single as the first and best option. In cases where singles have indulged in unlawful sex (of any degree) and have been forgiven by the Lord Jesus, then out of a deep sense of gratitude they should seriously aim to stay single for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. “If you are unmarried, seek not a wife.”

In the following scenarios some information or advice is not repeated in every instance. It is assumed that the cases are read in the order in which they are presented and that the reader has absorbed the advice from each case and carried it forward to the next case.

Summary of cases noted for pastoral comment.

Case 1. Both spouses believe divorce is legitimate once love is dead.
Case 2. One spouse believes divorce is legitimate once love is dead (see Case 9).
Case 3. Both Christian spouses believe divorce is ‘right’ but only for adultery.
Case 4. Both Christian spouses do not believe divorce is legitimate but cannot live together.
Case 5. Couples live together as man and wife but are not married.
Case 7. One spouse becomes a Christian and is then divorced by the non-Christian.
Case 10. A Christian divorces a Christian.
Case 11. A divorced spouse becomes a Christian.
Case 12. A Christian remarries and then repents of it.
Case 13. Two singles have sex, should they marry?
Case 15. A Christian wife being bullied by a non-Christian husband.
Case 16. Multiple partners.

2.1. FIRST CASE. BOTH SPOUSES BELIEVE DIVORCE IS LEGITIMATE ONCE LOVE IS DEAD

To have this approach to marriage, it is very likely that both spouses are non-Christians. This requires a two-part approach. (A) The counsellor needs to ask the question: Do both spouses believe that it is possible to undo a marriage union? If both of them do, then they have an unbiblical view of marriage. Their marriage has not been founded on a solid foundation.

The first to suggest a divorce will be responsible for the other’s sin of remarriage, if remarriage follows (Mt 5:32). If, after a divorce, neither of them remarries but they have sexual partners, they have both become adulterers, and their new partners are committing adultery with them, because in Jesus’ eyes the first marriage has not ended.

(B) These couples lack true knowledge. The Christian counsellor will need to instruct the couple on what God intended for all marriages, and theirs in particular. Then take them through Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage as set out in the texts above. This, hopefully, should make the couple draw back from going to court to obtain a divorce. Then take them through the Holy Spirit’s teaching on the headship of God, Christ and Man. This is the only effective ‘medicine’ for these loveless marriages.

The world will, undoubtedly, thumb its nose at Jesus’ view of the ‘one-flesh’ indissoluble union, and use the civil courts to dissolve the union (as they think). Then they will go on to remarry
or live with another partner. This, in the eyes of Jesus, is an adulterous relationship, and as part of becoming His disciples, these remarriages/partnerships will have to be sundered if they expect to be with Him in heaven.

2.2. SECOND CASE. ONE SPOUSE BELIEVES DIVORCE IS LEGITIMATE ONCE LOVE IS DEAD

There may be many reasons why one of the spouses does not want a divorce. The reason could be financial, family (children), emotional, religious, or elements of all of them. If the reason is theological because one spouse is a Christian, then the advice to the Christian spouse is: On no account agree to a divorce (see Case 9). If the Christian is under pressure to agree to a divorce, then s/he is under pressure to sin against God’s instructions. Resist it with prayer and through counselling with spiritual church leaders, but most importantly through hourly fellowship with Christ, and a resolve not to sin against Him.

The counsellor should then follow the procedure given in part (B) of the First Case.

2.3. THIRD CASE. BOTH NOMINAL CHRISTIAN SPOUSES BELIEVE DIVORCE IS ‘RIGHT’ BUT ONLY FOR ADULTERY

In this category is the Christian couple who are so ignorant of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage, or so shallow in their knowledge, that they might be on a par with a decent, non-Christian couple.

If their reason for not seeking a divorce is because no adultery is involved, and they are under the impression that Jesus taught that divorce could only be had for fornication (i.e., adultery), then the Christian counsellor’s task is to re-establish the theological basis of their marriage, which will ensure that divorce is shut off from becoming a possibility in the future. Then the counsellor needs to eliminate the false idea that Jesus taught that divorce was possible for adultery.

Then the counselling should move on to an examination of the incompatibilities that are driving the two apart. The issue of man’s headship will be crucial to restore harmony in the home. The husband is called upon to love his wife as Christ loves the Church; and the wife is called upon to obey her husband in everything just as the Church obeys Christ in everything. (See my web book, “Good Order in the Church,” which sets out the distinctive roles that God has ordained for male and females to follow.)

2.4. FOURTH CASE. BOTH CHRISTIAN SPOUSES DO NOT BELIEVE DIVORCE IS LEGITIMATE BUT CANNOT LIVE TOGETHER

The Christian counsellor needs to establish: What are the reasons for believing that divorce is not legitimate? If the reasons are sound, theological reasons, and in particular that divorce per se is a wrong act, because the union is indissoluble, and there is no adultery involved, then the counselling moves on to an examination of the incompatibilities that are driving the two apart.

The issue of man’s headship may need to be examined thoroughly. The solution will usually be found there. The husband is called upon to love his wife as Christ loves the Church; and the wife is called upon to obey her husband in everything just as the Church obeys Christ in everything.

2.5. FIFTH CASE. A COUPLE LIVE TOGETHER AS MAN AND WIFE BUT ARE NOT MARRIED

This can happen with adults coming from Christian and non-Christian homes for financial reasons, usually connected with buying a house, which is seen as an investment for when they do marry. Then they move in together to avoid paying separate rents, which is seen as a waste of money when it could be going toward their mortgage.

However, if the unmarried state is a sexual state, that is, pre-martial sex occurs, then this is fornication. All sexual activity (‘safe’ sex or not) must occur within the bounds that God has fixed for it, which is the married state. Anything outside those bounds is a sin against Him. No fornicator or adulterous person will be allowed to enter heaven.
The Christian counsellor will have to inform the unmarried couple that they are in a sinful state and that either the sexual activity must stop immediately or they get married in the sight of God and man, and regularise their one-flesh union.

2.6. SIXTH CASE. A CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATES MARRYING A NON-CHRISTIAN

The Holy Spirit has instructed Christ’s Church that this is a situation that defiles the Christian, and no defiled person can enter heaven. Each Christian is a member of Christ’s Body, which is pure and holy and undefiled. While a Christian abides in Christ, Christ abides in them. The call of Christ is total and without reserve. It is an ‘all-or-nothing’ challenge to submit totally in all departments of one’s life to His Headship. This, more crucially, means that the physical body of the Christian belongs to Christ as much as the spirit. How can a member of Christ become a member of a prostitute (1 Cor 6), or be in union with a person who is not in union with Christ? If the Christian chooses to be one-flesh with a member who is not a part of Christ, then s/he severs his/her connection with Christ, for the holy and the unholy cannot be married. The Christian cannot be, at the same time, a member of a prostitute and a member of Christ. It is one or the other. “You cannot serve God and mammon,” or be a member of two bodies at the same time.

There is a difference between deliberately withdrawing from being a member of Christ’s Body in order to marry someone who is not a Christian, and Christ calling husbands and wives as individuals (and not as couples) to Himself (see the next case). Where two non-Christians marry, this is a lawful union. Where a Christian marries a non-Christian, the union is not adulterous, but the Christian ceases to be a member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 6:13) because s/he is a defiled (unsanctified) person (cf. 1 Cor 7:14). The Christian in such a union is under an obligation to remain married until death ends the union. If the Christian recognises that s/he has sinned against the Lord Jesus in marrying a non-Christian, and repents of that sin, then they can be restored to membership of the Body of Christ.

However, if the marriage with the non-Christian is done in full knowledge of the teaching of Jesus, and against the explicit warning by the Church, it is a deliberate sin which requires a second crucifixion of Jesus to atone for it (Heb 6:4-6), But Scripture teaches that “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb 6:4-6).

2.7. SEVENTH CASE. ONE SPOUSE BECOMES A CHRISTIAN AND IS THEN DIVORCED BY THE NON-CHRISTIAN

In this case the couple got married before one of them became a Christian. The logic of the Sixth Case is that the Christian partner should immediately cease being in union with an unbeliever in order to be in union with Christ’s Body. The motive is good and commendable. However, the Holy Spirit instructs the newly converted believer to stay married to the unbeliever, because the marriage union preceded the union with Christ. In other words, so irreversible and indestructible is the lawful, one-flesh union that once it is formed it must on no account be severed by man. God Himself will not sever it, not even for His Son’s sake.

Here we enter the significance of the idea of sanctification. Under the Old Testament laws of defilement, the defiled thing coming in contact with a clean thing defiled it. The defilement was contagious. But under the New Covenant this is not the case, but the reverse. No one can defile Christ by being a defiled member of His Body. But in the case where a Christian and a non-Christian are one-flesh (but both were non-Christians to start with), one might expect that the defilement of the non-Christian would defile the Christian, but this is not the case, but the reverse. Important here is the concept of the one-flesh state that the marriage union brings about. Because the Christian is a sanctified member of Christ’s Body and “abides in Christ”, this means that the non-Christian, through the Christian spouse, is also a member of Christ’s Body through the indissoluble nature of the one-flesh state. So the unsanctified body (but not the unsanctified spirit) of the non-Christian becomes sanctified. And the same goes for the children of that one-flesh union. The children, because of the union of one of the parents to Christ’s Body, are sanctified in their bodies, but have yet to be in their spirits (1 Cor 7:14).

Another reason for staying together is that the unbelieving spouse may yet be saved through the witness of the believing spouse. So Paul warns the Christian not to separate if they can, which may mean enduring moderate persecution by an unbelieving spouse for years, because he asks the
question: “for what, have you known, O wife, whether the husband you shall save [by staying in the union]? or what, have you known, O husband, whether the wife you shall save [by staying in the union]?” So Paul’s advice is, ‘Stay in union with your unbelieving partner until they force you to go (on pain of death).’ But this departure should be seen as an enforced, and hopefully, temporary, separation. It is not permission to remarry. Even if the unbelieving husband goes off and remarries, he is committing adultery against his Christian wife if he does so. And if the Christian wife goes off and marries another Christian man both are adulterers.

So while I might counsel someone who is in physical danger to abandon their home, I would never advise them to abandon their unbelieving spouse. I have no authority to counsel that. The Master Himself advised His persecuted ones to flee to the next city, on the principle that we are to save our lives for His service.

If a Christian woman conducts her life according to the Spirit’s teaching on man’s headship of her, then it is very unlikely that her husband would hate her. It is when she refuses to recognise his headship of her that the friction occurs and she brings on herself his disapproval, and rightly so.

2.8. EIGHTH CASE. A NON-CHRISTIAN DIVORCES A CHRISTIAN SPOUSE

The Holy Spirit instructs the Church that where a non-Christian spouse despises the Christian spouse to the extent of divorcing them through the courts, then they are not to battle it out in the courts. Let the non-Christian have his/her way through the charade of having his/her divorce. The divorce means nothing in the eyes of God. It is not the dissolution of the marriage. It is only a separation, a temporary one, so the Christian spouse will pray.

On no account must the Christian spouse take advantage of the non-Christian’s absence to remarry a Christian. That would be an adulterous relationship leading to the loss of salvation for both of them. Even if the unbelieving spouse remarries, it is not a legitimate marriage in God’s eyes. It is an adulterous marriage.

There are more important things in life than worrying about what we will eat, what we will wear, what we will drink, or anything to do with the physical appetites of the body, including sex, which are destined not to go with us into the next world. There is no marriage in the next life, for all who are in Christ will have a spiritual body like His.

The main concern of every Christian should be to put Christ first. He should come before wife and children, before length of life, and possessions. All of these can be sacrificed if they come between the Christian and Him. Hence Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, instructs the Church to let the unbeliever separate if they want to, because the primary concern of every spouse is to be free to serve the Lord without distraction. And it would be a huge distraction to battle to stay married if the unbeliever (who is under the control of the spirit of this age) is determined to go. “Let him/her go, because God has called you to live a life of peace with Him and in fellowship with Him. He is the all-important person in your life. Seek Him and His, and all will go well with you,” says Paul (I paraphrase). But because marriage is for life, there can be no remarriage. While enjoying a life to be free to serve the Lord undistractedly, the Christian must accept his/her unbelieving spouse back again if they so desire to return. That is a standing obligation inherent in Paul’s use of the term “separation” and the avoidance of the term “divorce”. Under the Mosaic Law, God commanded that no such reconciliation should take place. But this is one of the revolutionary changes that Jesus made for those living under His New Covenant law of love.

Even if during the period of separation the unbelieving spouse has been remarried or has had a sexual partner of either or both sexes, or whatever, the door to reconciliation must never be closed. This is what makes remarriage for the Christian an impossible option.

In receiving the unbelieving spouse back again, there is also the motive of evangelising them.

2.9. NINTH CASE. A CHRISTIAN DIVORCES A NON-CHRISTIAN SPOUSE

In this case the non-Christian has wronged the Christian spouse who feels the hurt very deeply, and it is a cause of great anguish to him or her. A Christian counsellor gave the advice that they had “to decide whether the person to be forgiven is actually repentant, or whether they are being hardhearted.” The same counsellor taught: “Christians should never break their marriage vows, but sometime when their spouse repeatedly and unrepentantly breaks their marriage vows, a Christian may divorce them for their ‘hardness of heart’ like God did (Jer. 4.4)”.

If they were not repentant and did not want to change their ways, the Christian was advised to divorce their non-Christian partner on the analogy that Yahweh waited from 1446 to 605 BC before
He finally ‘divorced’ (in the metaphorical sense) His stubborn wife, Aholah (the name given to Samaria, or the Ten Tribes).

This is bad advice. Great care needs to be exercised in using this analogy. It was a Covenant, not a marriage, that God terminated, because the Mosaic Covenant was a conditional Covenant. It is highly misleading to use a metaphor in a real-life situation. No one has permission to divorce a lawfully married couple. Marriage is until death do them part. And no sin between humans is beyond forgiveness. If the Christian expects God to forgive all their sins, then this is the example they are to follow in forgiving their fellowman.

God can take up a situation or make an analogy which He knows will strike home to the men of His Covenant. They become so exasperated with their wives that they get to the point that they hate the sight of them so much that they want them out of their lives and out of their sight for good. Well, says God, that is exactly how I feel about you, and I am going to ‘divorce’ you, and send you out of My land into a foreign country, but, He adds, I will bring you back after you have learned your lesson.

The analogy of ‘divorce’ brings out the Divine longsuffering that should also characterise every Christian in their marriage relationship. Refusal to entertain a divorce focuses the Christian’s mind to accept their lot and find grace to witness to their spouse, because divorce by the non-Christian spouse, followed by a remarriage virtually condemns the unbeliever to hell. This is why Paul permits the non-Christian to ‘separate’ (but not divorce), as it makes reconciliation a permanent option for both parties. But the Christian should do nothing to break up the marriage.

Great care needs to be exercised in using ‘hard-heartedness’ as a reason for divorcing a spouse. From the moment a human being is born they are born “at enmity with God”. They reveal hard-heartedness throughout their lives and only on their death-beds do some of them repent of their hard-heartedness, yet they are forgiven and made part of the family of God. “Be merciful even as your Father is merciful.” The Christian is called upon to show the same dogged patience and put up with the same blatant hostility that God daily endured from us. “Forgive us as we forgive them,” is an abiding pastoral principle when considering hard-heartedness from those we once loved so dearly that we gave up our freedom to be with them “for better or for worse”.

Consequently, it is not for the wronged partner to make a decision “whether the person to be forgiven is actually repentant, or whether they are being hardhearted, . . .” This is irrelevant to the union itself. The union takes precedence over any violation of it. Forgiveness on a daily basis is the means of keeping the union in working order. Hence Jesus’ severe warning that whoever marries a divorced spouse is committing adultery.

From Jesus’ statements condemning all divorces for any cause, the Christian cannot break that union and be free from sin in so doing. The very act, however great the provocation of the unbelieving spouse, is a sinful act in and of itself. It is not a matter of “should not, unless provoked beyond endurance”. The Christian can never knowingly break a lawful union and remain a follower of Christ. If the unbeliever departs that does not constitute a dissolution of the lawful ‘one flesh’ union. That union exists until death breaks it. In such cases the Christian spouse must ‘wait’ indefinitely, and remain single, in the hope of a reunion. The door must never be shut against reconciliation.

2.10. TENTH CASE. A CHRISTIAN DIVORCES A CHRISTIAN

One minister taught his congregation “that a Christian can divorce a Christian partner who repeatedly breaks their marriage vows, and that a person with a divorce based on biblical grounds can remarry.”

The “biblical grounds” turned out to be Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Exodus 21:3. He believed that Jesus taught divorce was permissible to either spouse for (1) adultery, (2) desertion, (3) abuse, (4) hard-heartedness, and (5) neglect. Jesus only condemned the more trivial grounds for divorce that rabbis like the House of Hillel had introduced, said this minister.

This is bringing Christ down to the level of Moses. Jesus is not a second Moses bringing with Him a Second Edition of the Torah. Hard-heartedness has no place in a Christian marriage. The whole point about Jesus’ coming is that He promised to give us the Holy Spirit to live out the spiritual life. Without that Spirit it is not possible to please God. With that Spirit it is possible to please God and grow up to be like Him. The Law was given to lead His people to Christ. It was a holding situation. It was temporary, and it was pitched at a level that was within the reach of the unregenerate man to conform to the outward letter.

Given that we must forgive others as we expect God to forgive us, I do not see how this advice is compatible with forgiving unilaterally the one “who repeatedly breaks their marriage
vows,” and keep showing love to them, just as God does with us. If we can’t forgive others, God can’t forgive us. He has made one conditional on the other.

I would also question who grants the divorce. Are Christians to take Christians to worldly courts to obtain these divorces? This, too, is incompatible with the distance Christians should keep between themselves and the world (or Satan’s kingdom)(1 Cor 5). So who grants these divorces to Christians? Is the Church to set up its own courts to administer these divorces? God forbid!

Given this minister’s unbiblical advice, I see no difference between an unbeliever and a believer in the way they react to their spouses who break their marriage vows. There is no couple, Christian or non-Christian, who do not break their marriage vows every day at some level, if those vows include the husband promising to love his wife, and if she promises to obey him “in everything” (which is the biblical expectation). In the end we are dressing Moses up to look like Christ, and we are looking to Moses, not to Christ, on how to get round the permanency of the ‘one flesh’ union when an unforgiving spirit enters a marriage. Instead of forgiving unilaterally, the wrong advice was given to go back to Moses to see how the union could be legally broken up.

In my opinion, this is not the direction that any pastor or minister should be pointing Christians in. Jesus teaches that there is no alternative to forgiving. It is the only solution on offer. These pastors are suggesting there is an alternative, namely, don’t forgive, fall back on Mosaic divorce certificates, and get them through worldly courts, like all the other unbelievers. This brand of Christianity is no different from how all other religions treat marriage. It is Mosaic-Christianity, or rabbinic-Christianity. It is a Spirit-less Christianity. It is Christianity lived out ‘in the flesh’ (to use Paul’s phrase), as opposed to lived out ‘in the Spirit’.

2.11. ELEVENTH CASE. A DIVORCED SPOUSE BECOMES A CHRISTIAN

In this case two unbelievers, A and B, are married lawfully in the eyes of God. They then get a divorce. Both remarry. A becomes a Christian and learns that s/he is in an adulterous second marriage. What should A do?

The first thing is to stop sinning (“Go and sin no more.”). This means refraining from all sexual relations with the second spouse. It may be necessary, if the second spouse is an unbeliever, to go through the charade of getting a civil divorce to regularise their unmarried state in the eyes of the State.

The second thing to do is to make it possible for A’s first married spouse (who is B) to return to him/her. Nothing should be done to prevent this happening, and all should be done to facilitate it, even if B is happily remarried and has a new family. It is the responsibility of A to recognise that B is still their only lawful spouse in the sight of God, and to keep in touch with B at all times.

If A is remarried and has a second family and then becomes a Christian, then the Seventh Case will deal with this situation.

2.12. TWELFTH CASE. A CHRISTIAN REMARRIES THEN REPENTS OF IT

This is a case where a Christian (distinguished as ‘A’) married an unbeliever, through ignorance, and had children. Then they divorced. The children were left with Christian A to bring up. The non-Christian spouse went off and remarried. The Christian married another Christian (distinguished as ‘B’, who had not been married before) and then both learned that the second marriage was, and is, an adulterous marriage, and repented of their mistake. Children were born in the second marriage. How do the Christians resolve this situation?

Jesus’ reply of, “Go, and sin no more,” must guide what happens next. He would not condone an on-going adulterous relationship. The goal of all counselling must be the restoration of the first marriage, even though, in this instance, Christian A married an unbeliever after s/he became a Christian, through ignorance. (Case Six should have prevented this situation arising.)

The first thing, therefore, is for Christian A to cease immediately having an adulterous relationship with Christian B.

The second thing is to become unmarried, to reverse the procedure that brought them into the adulterous relationship in the first place (through bad counselling, or lax oversight by their respective churches) by a private divorce agreement between the two Christians that they are no longer husband and wife. It may be necessary to go through the charade of a civil divorce in order to regularise their unmarried status in the eyes of the State.

The third decision relates to the children born to the second marriage. Do the two Christians, now no longer husband and wife, stay together, but remain celibate, for the sake of the children?
What if the spouse of Christian A wants reconciliation and to get back together? This must take precedence over all other options, and Christian A must ensure that the door to reconciliation must always be left open. To shut that door, even to an unbelieving spouse, is to manifest an unforgiving spirit.

If the unbelieving spouse dies, then Christian A can marry Christian B, and regularise the status of the children born to them while they were in an adulterous marriage.

This case shows how vital it is to have the knowledge of the truth circulating at all times in the Church. This case started out through lack of knowledge. It should never have arisen. If the leadership of their local church had been alert to what was about to take place they could have prevented the marriage, or if the couple were determined to go ahead they would have had to do so against the knowledge of the truth. At this point they could not claim that they married in ignorance, and this would have a direct bearing on whether God’s blessing would rest on their disobedient decision. No Christian church should have married them, in any case. It would have to be a civil wedding, if forced through. The Christian church to which they belonged would have to excommunicate them due to their adulterous marriage (“hand them over to Satan”) with the prayer that their souls may yet be saved.

This case is not as straightforward as the others because the Christian married a non-Christian after s/he became a Christian, which is a disapproved marriage. But because it was done in ignorance and not against the instruction of the church, we have to assume that it was, and is, considered a lawful marriage in the eyes of God. It is almost on a par with the marriage of two unbelievers. However, if others reason that the marriage was unlawful in the first place and that the Christian should rejoice that they are free to remarry a Christian, then how does this fit with the motive to win the unbelieving spouse to Christ?

2.13. THIRTEENTH CASE. TWO SINGLES HAVE SEX, SHOULD THEY MARRY?

Two singles have sex, should they marry? Yes, otherwise they have sinned against God through fornication, and no fornicator can enter heaven. The two became one-flesh in the sexual union (1 Cor 6). If either or both are prostitutes, then no marriage should take place. The past event should be viewed as a sin of fornication and forgiveness sought with the strong resolution never to repeat the sin.

Many factors can affect this case. Were either of the singles Christian at the time of the fornication? If so, there is the duty of love and respect to be shown toward their partner in sin. If both singles were unbelievers at the time of their unlawful union and subsequently one of them became a believer and has a conscience about his/her unlawful union(s) in the past, what should the Christian do about it?

If some years have elapsed since the one-night stand, or since living together as unmarried partners, and both partners are still single, and meet regularly, then, if possible, provided the other partner is not an unbeliever, they should seek to regularise their one-flesh union of the past.

If many years have elapsed since the event and one or other partner have got married in the meantime, then the initial act was a sin of fornication and forgiveness should be sought from God to erase it.

Over fifty per cent of all teenagers under the age of 16 years have unlawful sex in Britain. These are going to have serious crosses of conscience to bear in the future, should they turn to Christ to be saved from the coming Day of Judgment, which hangs over every human who has lived. All must give an account of their lives to Christ the Judge. It is incumbent on every Christian parent to instruct their sons and daughters to “Flee fornication!” in their youth. The same goes for the churches to which the parents and children belong. Knowledge of the truth is vital to the children of Christians. It must not be denied to them. But the whole congregation have a duty of care toward their teenagers in this educational process.

When Jesus came and introduced His teaching on marriage and divorce, He also opened up the option of celibacy, which He recommended in the interests of serving Him with undivided loyalty. This should be the first option that all His followers should strive for and achieve, if possible.

To some it has been given and they should not marry. To others it has not been given, and they should marry only a Christian. To the list of prohibited degrees of marriage in Leviticus 18, Jesus would add His own (and I paraphrase), “You must not marry one who is not part of My Body.” It is up to Christian parents and church congregations and leaders and teachers to ensure that Jesus’ will is carried through among His followers.

This document is intended to be part of this educational process, so that more and more young people will dedicate their whole body and soul to the cause of Christ and His Gospel, and
avoid the distractions that marriage inherently brings with it. It is a baggage that Christ’s followers could well do without. Pray to God and the Lord Jesus not to be married, if possible.

2.14. FOURTEENTH CASE. ONE CHRISTIAN BULLYING ANOTHER

This is a case where both spouses were married as professing Christians but one of them loses their faith and becomes violent toward their Christian spouse. Is the bullying a ground for divorce?

The Holy Spirit’s instruction to slaves was: “be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked” (1 Pet 2:18). The term ‘crooked’ includes ‘unscrupulous, dishonest, being morally bent or twisted, crooked as opposed to straight.’ The Christian slave must be subject to a master who is not a Christian for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of Christ, and for their own sake in witnessing a good profession of faith. He is further instructed: “Let as many slaves as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim 6:1). “Exhort slaves to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again” (Tit 2:9). Many Christian wives have ungodly and bullying husbands, or husbands who have back-slidden, or husbands who have rejected their Christian faith altogether, but this is not a reason for divorcing them, any more than it is for slaves to run away from their cruel masters. The slave is stuck with his master, and the wife is stuck with her non-Christian husband. The Christian wife is instructed to be subject to her husband in everything. She remains in her marriage to the end, even unto death, enduring hardship knowing that this is a powerful witness to her husband and all who know her, that she has faith in a loving God who knows best. The Christian spouse who comes under persecution from their once Christian spouse, needs to look carefully at their own pattern of life as embedded in the doctrine of Headship, to see if they have not contributed directly to the instability of their marriage relationship. A loving, obedient wife, is hardly likely to be murdered by a murderous husband, but a back-slidden, Christian wife, who refuses to submit to her husband out of hatred for him is likely to get hurt.

2.15. FIFTEENTH CASE. A CHRISTIAN WIFE BEING BULLIED BY A NON-CHRISTIAN HUSBAND

Domestic situations take a variety of forms, but if principles are brought to bear on these cases, then there is a clear path to a resolution.

The first principle that I would apply to every domestic situation is that I will never ever advocate divorce under any circumstances. Temporary separation, yes; divorce, never.

The second principle I would apply in every situation that involves a Christian and a non-Christian is that the Christian partner must be ready to forgive the non-Christian partner his/her sin of adultery if they request it. If the Christian will not forgive, then his/her sins will not be forgiven by God.

The third principle I would apply is that the Christian is to treat their unbelieving partner as if Christ were in him/her. The Christian is called upon to love their partner even if he/she hates Jesus. Love is the only means left to the Christian to win over their partner.

A fourth principle is that a Christian can never initiate a divorce. You will notice in Paul’s dealing with the issue of temporary separation in 1 Corinthians 7 that the initiative to separate always comes from the unbelieving husband, or the unloving wife. The reason for this is that in Paul’s theology every marriage is for life. The responsibility for a separation rests on the head of the one who initiates the separation/divorce. Sin is involved, so let not the Christian ever initiate divorce proceedings. The initiator is the sinner.

A fifth guiding principle is that innocent partners are as rare as hen’s teeth. If the Christian has contributed to the breakdown of the marriage relationship through some thoughtless words or deeds in the past then he/she must seek the forgiveness of their non-Christian spouse. If a Christian wife can truly say that she acknowledged the headship of her unbelieving husband in every department of her life, and loved her husband and submitted to him as though he were the Lord Jesus Himself, then it is hard to see how she could hate him. Likewise, if a Christian husband loved his wife as Christ loved the Church, then it is difficult to see how she could hate him. But it might happen that the hatred for the Christian partner might come from Satan in the unbelieving partner, but these situations would be extremely rare. Blame lies on both sides, and it is seldom that a break-
up occurs over one single issue. Every break-up begins with a hairline crack years before the divorce is granted.

But Paul’s instruction is clear: if the unbelieving partner is determined to separate from the believing partner, then Paul’s instruction is to let them get their way, and the believing partner should use the ‘freedom’ from being yoked to an unbeliever to devote their body and spirit to serving Christ. Remarriage is out of the question. They must await the return of their unbelieving partner, however long that will take. And it might never happen. But, in the meantime, Christ benefits from the estrangement.

We can learn some valuable lessons from the way Peter and Paul handle the case of slaves and masters, and how these principles can apply to the marriage union. See the Fourteenth Case above.

2.16. SIXTEENTH CASE. MULTIPLE PARTNERS.

Where a single man or a single woman has had unlawful sex, once, twice or regularly, this is a sin, which will prevent that person from entering heaven unless it is forgiven by the Lord Jesus. He alone stands between God and man to forgive sins. The number of sins is immaterial. Just one sin is sufficient to lead to eternal damnation, because that one sin reveals a capacity to sin, which the Lord Jesus did not have. He was sinless. Only when He is resident in the Christian does Man’s capacity to lead a sinless life return to him as it was at the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. Until the moment Christ Jesus enters a man, he is a sinner and incapable of entering heaven.

The one seeking unlawful sex is not fully responsible for engaging a partner. Both are equally culpable for what they do with their sex, and both will be answerable to God on the Day of Judgment. 1 Corinthians 6 provides strong guidance in this case. Here we have a situation where married men had unlawful sex with prostitutes, with whom they became ‘one flesh’, but because the union was not lawful in God’s eyes it was not a lawful union, but fornication. Scripture makes a distinction between a lawful one-flesh union (marriage), and an unlawful one-flesh union (fornication, prostitution and adultery).

What if someone who was involved in such unlawful sex becomes a Christian? The obvious reply of Jesus would be, “Go and sin no more.” So the unlawful activity should be stopped immediately by the Christian. Should the Christian regard the first person s/he had sex with as their marriage partner?

It is clear that the pair were not lawfully married when they had unlawful sex, therefore, although they became one-flesh, the act itself was unlawful and they were not lawfully married through the unlawful act. This is a case of fornication.

However, if children were born of such illicit unions, every effort should be made by the Christian to lawfully marry their partner, and look after the child(ren), and protect the status of the child. (Jesus was born before His father and mother became one-flesh, but God protected the child by telling Joseph to take Mary as his wife.) No child should be called illegitimate. The parents are illegitimate begetters of the child.

If no children were born of fornication, then the Christian partner is not obliged to marry the fornicator if s/he is an unbeliever. If, however, the fornicator also becomes a Christian, and if they cannot refrain from sex, then let them be married lawfully before God. But the better option is to remain single and give one’s body to the Lord.
PART III. CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE AUTHOR

3.1. Letter 1. Did God or Moses introduce the idea of divorce?

The origin of the divorce law does not arise from God. It is not as if God, in the time of Moses, contemplated man’s permanent tie to one woman, 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” so that he can have a pleasant time on the earth.” No, says Jesus, this is not the origin of the law on divorce. Its origin lies in the hardness of man’s heart. Hard men decided that they would not live by the one-flesh law. God was not going to budge as regards His stated position. Jesus then lets us into the truth about the origin of the divorce law, “For your hard-heartedness he [Moses] wrote this command for you.” 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, gave them their divorce law.

3.2. Letter 2. God permitted ordinary Israelites to remarry divorced wives, so He endorsed these marriages.

Before addressing the issued raised in the heading, it is worth saying that the concept is not an approved biblical one, in the sense that some believe it was part of God’s provision for His people under the Law, and that it was carried over into Christ’s Church. This is a lie. God never approved of it, and He never endorsed it. 47

There are some who mistakenly assume that because God uses man’s innovation of divorce as a simile (Jer 3:8) for how He feels toward His people, that He therefore approved of divorce! God can take up any simile He chooses, but that does not mean He approves of the simile itself. He may liken His coming to a ‘thief in the night’ (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10), “Lo, I do come as a thief” (Rev 16:15), but that does not make Him a thief, or that He approves of thieves! God takes up the characteristics that mark out the thief par excellence, and applies their unobserved coming to His own coming.

Similarly, man invented divorce in order that he could cut himself off from his hated wife. That was its sole purpose. “Ah!” noted God, “so let me take up that analogy to describe how I feel about you! You understand the implications of what it means to be rid of your wife when you divorce her, well, that is exactly how I feel about you.” So says Jeremiah 3:1. 48 But God takes up His own contribution to the practice of divorce when He banned any reconciliation with a divorced/polluted wife (Deut 24:4). He now uses this to argue that He should not take her back again, because she is an abomination to Him. But, fortunately, for Israel, the language is the language of simile, so she can be taken back.

The use of divorce was a bold simile, but a simile, nevertheless, it was and remains. God was never married to Israel, therefore there could be no divorce. In Ezekiel 23 Yahweh likens Israel’s sin to the sin of adultery. “With their idols they committed adultery” (23:37). They did not commit actual adultery. How could a nation commit adultery with another nation? But, from Yahweh’s perspective, Israel had one Lord, one Baal, one owner—Yahweh. She was to have eyes for no one else but Him, but she took her eyes off Him and began worshipping the gods of her neighbours. This was like

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47 A typical expounder of this misunderstanding of God’s attitude toward divorce (“I hate divorce”, Mal 2:16) would be Jay E. Adams, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), p. 23. He writes: “Contrary to some opinions, the concept of divorce is biblical. The Bible recognises and regulates divorce. Certain provisions are made for it. This must be affirmed clearly and without hesitation. . . . There are some, nevertheless, who so conceive of divorce that, if you followed their thinking you would have to conclude that the Bible makes no provisions for divorce, but (rather) only condemns and denounces it. They would lead one to believe that Scripture says nothing—absolutely nothing—positive about divorce.” Scripture says nothing positive about divorce, unless one accepts Erasmus’s addition to Scripture at Mt 19:9. Jesus’ father was not yet one-flesh with Mary when he attempted to ‘put her away’. The provision of ‘divorce’ for engaged couples is not a biblical concept, but was invented by the rabbis. The Bible has nothing positive to say about divorce for lawfully consummated marriages.

48 Divorce is mentioned elsewhere in Lev. 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:9; Dt 22:19, 29; 24:1-4; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:1-8; Ezek 44:22; Mal 2:14, 16.
committing adultery, because His people were in a Covenant relationship with Him. “As the uncleanness of a separated one [= prostitute] has their way been before me” (Ezek 36:17).

Staying with the marriage analogy, Judah and Israel are likened to two sisters, Aholah and Aholibah, married to Yahweh. But Yahweh says of them, “they are adulteresses” (23:45). The punishment for adultery is death, so Yahweh, consistent with His own Torah law, commands, “Bring up against them an assembly, . . . and they have cast at them the stone of the assembly, and cut them down with their swords. Their sons and their daughters they do slay and their houses with fire they do burn, . . . and the sins of your idols you [both] do bear.” This last sentence shows that the ‘sins’ are apostasy and unfaithfulness in keeping Yahweh’s Torah, and the terms of His Covenant as laid out in the Book of Deuteronomy.” For these two ‘wives’ of Yahweh, there was to be no divorce for adultery, only death. Here, Yahweh confirms His own death penalty Law, and not Moses’s innovative law of divorce. Of course, the death penalty was never carried out, otherwise there would have been no people; and if there were no people, the Covenant made with Abraham would have been broken.

Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham was unconditional, and so He could never be divorced from His people, nor could He exterminate them through stoning. So neither the simile of divorce or stoning to death for adultery, can be pressed to their logical conclusion, which would result in theological confusion. These are only similes that Yahweh chose to use to bring it home to Judah and Israel that Yahweh regarded them as ‘adulteresses’.

Note that in Jeremiah 3:4, Israel calls God ‘my father’, not, ‘my husband’, showing that Yahweh was using a simile of marriage to convey His thoughts, and Israel recognised this. In 3:6 Israel’s worship of other gods is clearly likened to her committing fornication. God continually uses the sanctity and analogy of marriage to highlight the unfaithfulness of Israel. In 3:8, the marriage analogy is taken to another level when Yahweh likens the removal of the Ten Tribes into exile to a post-divorce situation (cf. Isa 50:1). In other words, the Hebrew innovation of divorce carries within it the inflexible law that a wife cannot, under any circumstances, be taken back. Everybody understood that law. Here, Yahweh’s use of divorce to convey His refusal to bring back the Ten Tribes (as Ten Tribes) is likened to the fixed rule that a divorced wife cannot be taken back. He did not need to use any analogy. He could have stated in words that He was not going to bring them back to His land—ever. That He was done with them and would turn His back on them completely with no hope of reconciliation. But the analogy with divorce was so apt that He took it up as an illustration of His changed relationship to the Ten Tribes. So the analogy with human divorce becomes a very apt simile of what happened at the spiritual level between Him and the Ten Tribes.

When it suits Yahweh, He can use any analogy He cares to nominate. In Ezekiel 22:17-22, Yahweh likened Jerusalem to a furnace. He would bring the silver, brass, iron, lead and tin of the nation and throw it in to melt it, and the outcome would be just dross. It was His way of bringing it home to the nation that they were useless. It would be silly to take the simile literally.

In the case of the evil practice of divorce Yahweh saw something in it that illustrated His changed relationship to certain tribes whom He cast off. He also saw something in the evil of adultery which captured their attitude toward Him. Both are appropriate similes under appropriate conditions. The choice of adultery to represent His relationship was very appropriate, seeing that the most common sin among the people was adultery. God accused the entire nation: “Each the wife of his neighbour you have defiled” (Ezek 33:26; 22:11).

God can liken Himself to a rock (drawing on its solidity), or a horn (drawing on it as a weapon), or any inanimate thing, for the purpose of using these things to convey something about Himself. He can use institutions, good or bad, to convey something about Himself. There are no limits, any more than there are in the human world. Human affections and human weaknesses are attributed to God under certain conditions.49

God did not make it impossible for hard-hearted men to divorce their wives, but that is not the same thing as saying that He approved of their action, or legislated for it, or endorsed it. He didn’t. We have a parallel to this. God legislated that men should not see the nakedness of certain categories of women (cf. Lev 18), but we cannot infer from this that He approved of men seeing the

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49 See the range of some bold anthropomorphisms in E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 [orig. 1898]), pp. 871-897. According to Bullinger, the difference between a metaphor and a simile is that “the *Simile* gently states that one thing is like or resembles another, the *Metaphor* boldly and warmly declares that one thing *IS* the other. While the *Simile* says ‘All flesh is AS grass’ (1 Pet. i. 24), the *Metaphor* carries the figure *across* at once, and says ‘All flesh IS grass’ (Isa. xl. 6). This is the distinction between the two.” In Jer. 3 divorce is a simile, not a metaphor.
nakedness of other categories of women. So heinous are some of the categories that the death penalty was the prescribed punishment (Lev 20:11, 17-20). God did not approve of men seeing the nakedness of any category of woman, but He does not go into minute grades of punishment. When there was only one married couple in the world (Adam & Eve), God personally hide their nakedness from one another. This action speaks volumes to the one who is seeking to understand the mind of God. Men should infer what is the mind of God from what He has revealed in the Bible of His attitude toward certain sexual misdemeanours, and keep away from anything that borders on such disapproved actions. So it is with any action that would lead to a divorce.

God was so strongly against any divorce that He imposed a severe condition on anyone who did so, namely, they were not permitted to be reconciled to the woman they divorced during the Mosaic dispensation. They had to stay separate for the rest of their lives. Indeed, such is the sanctity of marriage in God's eyes that when a divorced woman is remarried, at the moment she sleeps with her next husband, she becomes an abomination in His eyes. She becomes a defiled woman. She may have innocently thought that when her husband divorced her she was genuinely free to remarry. But God thinks otherwise.

To prevent a divorcee defiling His sanctuary or Temple worship—for anyone marrying her is defiled by her—God commanded that His priests should never marry a divorced woman, because that would defile him permanently as a priest and disqualify him from ever serving God in the future. His whole priestly ministry was destroyed by marrying her. He became a useless figure in God's service.

God safeguarded His worship and He prevented anyone from polluting it. Ordinary Israelites were not permitted to come near to God. God surrounded Himself with personnel who were under stringent rules and regulations which prevented them from becoming defiled. Thus He chose the tribe of Levi to act as a buffer between Himself and His people. Thus when Nadab and Abihu offered illegitimate incense God burnt them to a cinder. Moses approved of their death quoting God's words that "By those drawing near to Me I am sanctified" (Num 10:3).

The difference between the Church of the Old Covenant and the Church of the New Covenant is that the priestly buffer has been removed and all Christians can now approach God directly. There is no priestly caste standing between us and God. We can come boldly into the presence of God because we are His sons and daughters. But that boldness does not entitle us to come before Him in a polluted state, which an illegitimate remarriage entails. We must not assume that we can treat God like an old buddy, or an indulgent grandfather, or someone who is casual about His relationship to His people. He is still the same God whom Nadab and Abihu worshipped.

God, in the beginning, ordained that a man should marry a virgin. That was to be the norm. Unfortunately, His people disregarded this when they introduced divorce and remarriage. This was totally out of character with His will. However, when it came to the personnel who would act as a buffer between Him and His polluted people, He stipulated that all His priests must marry only virgins. There were to be no exceptions. They were not permitted to married any non-virgin, not even a godly widow. It was a virgin or nothing. Moses was told: "Speak unto the priests, . . . A woman, a prostitute, or a defiled one, they do not marry, and a woman divorced from her husband they do not marry, for he is holy to his God" (Lev 21:7-8). These three categories of women covered all non-virgins. It was irrelevant whether they were godly or ungodly women. It was the fact that they were not virgins that disqualified them from being the wives of priests. Their character did not disqualify them. Their character was not taken into account by God. It was their sexual status that counted.

The clear message that God puts forth here is that He has not abandoned His original design for marriage. Where He can enforce this, He does. He has total control over the lives of His priests, and so He can impose on them His view of marriage, so that ordinary Israelites could ponder His standard, and imitate it in their own marriages.

God reinforces His view of marriage when He commands: "... and he [the priest] takes a wife in her virginity. A widow, or divorcee, or a polluted one, a prostitute, these he does not marry, but a virgin from his own people he takes for a wife, and he does not pollute his seed among his people, for I am Yahweh sanctifying him" (Lev 21:13-14). Here God ensures that Israelite priests

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50 This is borne out in the simile of Aholah and Aholibah, where Yahweh "gave her [Aholibah] into the hand of her [Assyrian & Babylonian] lovers," and "they defile her with their prostitutions, and she is defiled by them" (Ezek 23:17). In keeping with the simile, her punishment is that her nose and ears would be cut off (23:25). But note that Yahweh takes up man's innovation and uses it to bring home the reality of His changed relationship to Judah. The analogy taught them that they could not be reconciled to God, if He stuck to it. Fortunately for them, it was only a simile as far as Yahweh wanted to take it.
married Israelite virgins. They were not permitted to marry foreign women. Ordinary Israelites could marry godly, foreign women.  

The fact that a priest was under an obligation to marry “a virgin from his own people” is taken up by Paul and applied to Christian marriages. Sometimes men came to faith after they had been married to an unbeliever. There was nothing they could do about that. A man, given the choice, should always marry “a virgin from his own people”. By the OT term ‘one of his own people’, Paul would have understood it meant ‘a worshipper of God’ in the Church of the Old Covenant, and this transfers into ‘a worshipper of the Lord Jesus’ in the Church of the New Covenant.

We noted above that all believers, male (with an uncovered head) and female (with a covered head) can now enter directly into the presence of God without a priestly mediator, for Jesus is now the only mediator between God and Man. A big difference that occurred in the transition from the Church of the Old Covenant to the Church of the New Covenant was that God’s new, male priests could marry a Christian widow. This is explicit in 1 Corinthians 7:39. Here Paul gives advice to Christian widows, and he restricts their second (or subsequent) marriage to marrying a Christian man, in other words ‘one of her own people’. Here we have a new order of ‘priests’ who can marry a widow. This contrasts sharply with the situation in the Church of the Old Covenant.

By extension, if a Christian man can marry a Christian widow, then he can marry a converted prostitute (e.g., Rahab the harlot), but Jesus places a ban on marrying a divorcer, even a Christian divorcee. This is consistent with His Father’s view of marriage, that a wife is for life.

Christian parents should so safeguard their children as they grow up that they enter marriage as virgins. They owe this to Christ, to ensure that His Body is not defiled with immorality among His members. God, in the beginning, ordained that a man should marry a virgin. That was to be the norm. It is incumbent on all Christian parents to bring this about in their own family and in all the families that constitute the Church.

We live in an adulterous age, and it might not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly a marriage taking place between two virgin persons. God can and does forgive all pre-marital fornication, so that fallen persons can be forgiven, and enter their marriage as a one-flesh Christian couple. But once married, they are married until death parts that union. If for some reason they separate, then it is just that, a temporary separation, not a dissolution of the one-flesh union. They either come together again, or they stay celibate. Such is the sanctity of marriage in the eyes of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3.3. Letter 3. Can a Christian use Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to get a divorce?

The short answer is no. We are not Jews. We are Christians. We have been ‘born-from-above’; we have been given the spirit of the Lord Jesus to dwell within us. We have His law written on our hearts.

Most Christian marriage counsellors have assumed that because divorce is mentioned in Scripture that it comes from God and it was His provision for hard-hearted, unforgiving Hebrews to avail themselves of. But that is not how Jesus read the Scriptures. Note particularly that Jesus in Mark 10:3 did not say, “What did God command you?” He distances God from this provision by informing us that it was Moses, not Yahweh, who gave them this idea. That is crucial when we go back and read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in the light of Jesus’ revelation. We do not have Moses’s written statement in Scripture, but we have Yahweh referring to it in order to introduce His caveat at v.4. That is how we should approach Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Not every idea contained in Scripture comes from the mind of God. Scripture records the ideas of Satan and evil men, alongside those of righteous men seeking the best for their fellowman.

Just because Yahweh takes up Moses’s command (which has not come down to us in its original wording) with a view to putting a bridle on it, does not mean He approved of it. Three verses later (at Deut 24:7) Yahweh says: “When a man is found stealing a person, of his brothers, of the sons of Israel, and has tyranized over him, and sold him, then has that thief died, and you have put away

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31 Matthew notes three foreign women in Jesus’ genealogy: Thamar the Canaanite, Rahab the harlot, and Ruth the Moabitess (Mt 1:3, 5).

32 Another important reversal concerns the direction of defilement. Under the Law a defiled person polluted a clean person; but now a clean person cannot be defiled by an unbelieving spouse, and the children are considered ‘clean’ (1 Cor 7:14). The unbelieving spouse is ‘made holy’, or sanctified (as regards the flesh) by the believing spouse. All infants are either ‘sanctified or unsanctified, depending on the spiritual state of one of their parents. Sanctified children are members of the visible Church of God.
the evil thing out of your midst." The statement following ‘When...”, right up to “then...”, is descriptive, not prescriptive. Yahweh is not encouraging men to make slaves any more than He is encouraging men to divorce. There is certainly a note of resignation that divorce (like sin) is going to be a permanent fixture of Hebrew society, because the Holy Spirit has not yet been poured out on God’s people. Jesus took the attitude that the whole of the Mosaic system (oral and written law) was only temporary, until His coming. He was the prophet prophesied by Moses, who would take over the running of the nation and reinstate the original will of God for His people, and Genesis 2:24 was part of that revelation. In that original will there was no provision for divorce. The principle of one partner for life is reintroduced by Jesus. There can be no going back to the Mosaic system which tolerated sin, and divorce is a sin, like stealing.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 can be analysed as follows. Part A: verses 1-3. Divorce was Moses’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 it. But hard-hearted Hebrews forced it upon Moses as a fait accompli, so he complied, and introduced an unwritten, un sanctioned, law to alleviate the confusion that would follow if men were permitted to divorce ‘for any cause’. Divorce is an evil. God hates it. Even some advocates for divorce are forced by Christian doctrine to agree that God ‘hates what occasions every divorce... and that although divorce is recognized, permitted and regulated in the Bible... unlike marriage, it was not instituted by God. The Scriptures record no act of God, either directly, or through His prophets and apostles, in which He established, or institutionalized, divorce. God did not originate the concept as a part of His order for society. Divorce, then, is a human innovation.”

God will not positively initiate a law to permit the ‘one flesh’ union to be broken. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is the only case in the whole of the Pentateuch where Moses, not God, made a law for the Israelites. Not every law was good. Yahweh pointed out that when He gave them the Torah on leaving Egypt, “I have given to them statues not good; and judgments by which they do not live” (Ezek 20:25). This was because the Law was given for sinners, not saints. Having seen the unwritten, un sanctioned, law that sinners concocted for themselves 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. What occasions every divorce is sin, and sin cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Where there is no sin, there can be no divorce. It is mischievous to use God’s categories of unlawful marriages to gain His support for divorcing lawfully conducted marriages. Nowhere in Scripture does God lay down any conditions for divorce. But He does lay down conditions where man, in his chosen, unregenerate, fallen world, may not take advantage of his own innovation of divorce. States throughout the world are obliged to follow Moses’s lead in instituting divorce because they cannot (or will not) abide by God’s will for every marriage. Jesus calls every one of His disciples to abide by God’s original will. They have no choice; they have no alternative.

It is right and proper to declare unlawful marriages as abominations in God’s sight, and so it was right for Ezra to break up the mixed marriages in Ezra 10. This was God’s law. It was not something invented by man.

So the only reason why Part A appears in Scripture is because of Part B.

Moses had to give Part B a context, and that context is Part A. The unsanctioned, unwritten, oral law that Moses had introduced was now forced to be given a written form in order to put the rider on it. The rider could not exist on its own. It had to be given a context, which context is given in Part A.

Another way of looking at Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is to envisage Moses receiving a mishpat (a judgment) from God in the form of Part B. Moses is now under an obligation to pass on verse 4 to the people, because what it contains is vitally important seeing it comes from God, and not from man. Now Moses knows that he had been forced to introduce the unholy idea contained in Part A. It came up from below (from man); it did not come down from above (from heaven).

So, given the constraint that Moses was under to impart the mishpat/law in 24:4, he was forced to put in writing what had been in practice in Part A, and this accounts for it appearing in a written form. But the written form is only there because he had to give Part B a context. So think of verse 4 as coming from God, and verses 1-3 as coming from man (from Moses), and you will start to get a handle on these four verses. Too much commentary time is given to Part A as if it was God’s idea. God only has allowed vv.1-3 into His Law book in order to impose His rider on their introduction of divorce, which was contrary to what He set up ‘in the beginning.’

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The commentator should start with verse 4, and ask, “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 (and through faith), and thus enable Jesus’ follower 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 forced into existence.

The rider tells us that God is disgusted when a woman sleeps with two living men. He was disgusted then, and He is disgusted today, when the same thing happens. His disgust has not changed. 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 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 (Rom 5:10; Heb 2:9; 1 Jn 2.2), and that reconciliation includes the forgiveness of the sin of adultery through second marriages.

The Christian should no more think of contemplating divorce than he would think of stealing. Stealing and divorce belong to the 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.

But 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. I have used the ideas that God conveyed about headship in God’s revelation in the OT in my work, “Good Order in the Church.” The obvious one being that a wife cannot make a vow to God except it is first approved of by her husband. She might think that she can act independently of her husband and involve him in her vows, and alter or change his lifestyle, at her desire, but God steps in and says, No, I will not accept any vow you make unless your head—your husband—approves of it. God does not retract the authority of headship which He gave to Adam in the beginning. This idea continues into the Kingdom of God, because it is of God. I repeat, He will not renege on the powers, responsibilities, and authorities He gave to Adam (and so to man in general) ‘in the beginning’. These powers and responsibilities are restored fully to every Christian man because they predate the Mosaic Law. This explains why man is made in the ‘image and likeness of God’, whereas woman is made ‘in the image of God’. She has no powers of headship, which are restricted to God, Christ, and Man. She falls short by not exercising headship over any other being made in the ‘image of God’. It was how she was designed ‘from the beginning’ to function in Man’s world. So the law is good and spiritual if used lawfully. Unfortunately, Mosaic divorce has been reintroduced in Christ’s Church thus corrupting Christ’s express abolition of it.

3.4. Letter 4. What is the ‘nakedness of a thing’ in Deuteronomy 24:1

It is important to make a sharp distinction between the cause that led a man to divorce his wife, and the defilement that attaches to a divorced wife who remarries. The defilement is the fact that a woman has sex with two living men. The defilement can come about before or after: it can come about before a divorce, through a one-night stand, prostitution while still married, and condoned by her husband, or it can come about after she has been divorced. So the defilement is independent of the circumstances that led to her sleeping with two living men. To be a defiled woman it is sufficient to ask: Have you had sex with two living men? If the answer is Yes, then she is a defiled woman. It is irrelevant to ask, Was this before or after your divorce? Either way she is still a defiled woman.

3.5. Letter 5. Deuteronomy 24:1-3. The ‘shameful thing’ is a perverted sexual orientation

One correspondent wrote: “In context I take erawth dawar to mean a perverted sexual appetite. This is something that a man obedient to God could not have found out about his bride in advance of consummation. It does not invariably imply lack of virginity, which the man could have dealt with under Deut 22. Instead of loving his bride enough to keep her, pray for her and consult Israel’s holy men who might be able to help, he divorces her. He consequently bears some responsibility for what happens next. The woman needs a husband and find another man to marry. Now, it is not a sin to
have a perverted sexual appetite — the person needs help — but it is a sin to express it; this issue is at the core of today’s debate about what the church should do with its homosexuals. It is common knowledge that expressing a perverted appetite is liable to reinforce it, and this will have taken place in the woman’s second marriage. I submit that this reinforcement is why she has been ‘defiled’ — and why God would be disgusted that the man who pushed her down that path should remarry her.

This proposal (continues the correspondent) has the merit of being very specific: it fits the reason for the first divorce, it fits the absence of a reason given for the second, and it explains why God is then so against the remarriage. Other explanations do not explain all of these, and commentaries are divided as to whether ‘defiled’ refers to the erwath davar or to her post-divorce sexual experience with the second husband.”

In reply it should be noted that the specific reason that God gives for His sense of disgust is the fact that the wife has had sex with another living man. If one considers the insult that is directed at God through human divorce, then one can understand His anger. He designed one woman for one man, and He designed that only death can sever that union. For a reason which I do not understand, but accept by faith, a woman cannot have sex with two living men.

Notice that she only becomes defiled after she has slept with another man. So it is not the divorce per se that defiles her, but sleeping with another man. That is what horrifies God. He is disgusted by her act. A man may have many wives, but a wife may only have intercourse with one husband at a time.

Her defilement has nothing to do with the original erwath davar, because even if her second husband dies, she still cannot go back to her first husband. This locates the cause of the defilement in sex outside the first marriage. How she came to have sex with another man is irrelevant. Whether this came about through a man-made divorce system or through prostitution or a one-night stand, is also irrelevant. So there is no point looking for a reason behind God’s disgust other than the one He gives in Deuteronomy 24:4.

The reason given there is: “after that she has become defiled” which means that from God’s perspective, He designed a woman to experience sex with only one man at a time. This is not so with a man, where he may have fourteen wives, as in David’s case. God permitted a man to have more than one wife (Dt 21:15), but a woman could not have more than one living husband. So there is something specific about the female of the human species that God never intended her to be serviced by two living men during her lifetime. That is an abomination in His planning for her. It is against His will for her. Now, that attitude toward the female is consistently held by God under both Covenants. It is an abomination for a female to be serviced by two men today as it was under the Old Covenant.

One objection against the proposed solution is that if the woman is ‘cured’ of her perverted sexual orientation, which had delighted her second husband so much, and attracted her to him, then he, out of spite, would divorce her. Why could she not go back to her first husband as a ‘cured’ woman?

My second objection is that God makes no room for exceptions to the ‘no return’ rule. There must have been some cases where a divorced woman had been cured of her sexual perversion, much to the delight of her first husband, who had only divorced her because of her perverted sexual orientation. Her perversion is only one example. We could cite many other scenarios that brought a woman into a state of defilement. But it is the principle: Why could she not return to him if her ‘defilement’ has been removed? that is puzzling. The inflexibility of God in this matter turns our gaze toward God, and makes us aware of His disgust at any woman who has experienced sex with two living men.

If one accepts the reason given by God Himself, namely, that two men have had sex with the same woman resulting in her becoming a defiled thing, then it is not necessary to investigate any other probable cause of her defilement. God does not relinquish His original will for marriage, even though Moses introduced a way round it, due to the hard-heartedness of the Hebrews. Jesus bypassed Moses’s innovation, and now points the entire world back to the original will of God. Consequently it is now a sin for any woman to have sex with two living men. Consequently a divorce followed by a remarriage is now a sinful state. The Church can never divorce any couple, nor can it marry divorced persons. Satan will go on divorcing couples until the end of time, because that disrupts God’s plan for every marriage, and it multiplies sin among mankind.

When examining Deuteronomy 24:1-4 we should take into account the following points.

First, every man could expect to marry a virgin. God had a law in place to ensure this. So Deuteronomy 24:1-3 has nothing to do with her virginity. That we can take for granted. So what was the ‘indecent thing’ that the husband found in his wife? We are not told. We can assume that it was
Christians and their friends have accepted divorce as a ground for marriage without Genesis divorce obsolete Covenant. It is the old leaven. God would legitimise divorce for any more than ‘hate’ or ‘an indecent thing’. Second, and this is a very crucial argument in my siding with Jesus that Moses (not God) gave Israel the iniquitous law of divorce. If God is the same yesterday, today and forever, then I would expect Him to act in a consistent manner. And if He permitted the second husband to divorce his wife legitimately on the grounds that her second husband hated her, then we must allow ‘hate’ to be a grounds for divorce today. This argument is irrefutable, in my judgment.

Third, once you open the door to one exception by God, then you have God on your side to legitimise divorce per se.

Fourth, since divorce is a synonym for sin and evil, I cannot see how God can legitimise divorce any more than He can legitimise sin. He hates both.

Fifth, because Jesus would have nothing to do with divorce and ruled it out completely for all men everywhere, He was never in conflict with His Father. Both had nothing to do with introducing it into the world. Because it had been introduced by Moses, both could show their disapproval of it. God did so by placing a rider on Moses’s law, which prevented reconciliation, no matter what the excuse was to obtain the divorce (and your scenario may have been one such reason, but by no means the only one). Jesus opposed Moses’s law by placing over against it the law in Genesis 2:24. Christians are intended to go back to Genesis 2:24 and not move from it.

The majority of Christian marriage counsellors advocate leaving Genesis 2:24 and going back to Moses’s sub-standard existence. This is Judaic Christianity. That shift is a denial of the superiority of the Law of Christ and the superiority of the New Covenant. In the New Covenant all the people of God have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Divorce belongs to the Old, obsolete Covenant. It is the old leaven.

Sixthly, what these Christian marriage counsellors are constantly striving for is to legitimise divorce in some ulta-special and ulta-specific cases. The very attempt to do so, is to depart from Genesis 2:24 and wander into Deuteronomy 24 and Exodus 21. That is to bring the Church and the Christian back into bondage to Moses again.

Seventhly, God does not guarantee that we marry a woman who is flawless, perfect, or without quirks (even sexual ones). But if we leave the choice with Him, then He knows best whether marriage is going to achieve His goals through our union with Him, or, given our sexual nature, whether He will choose a wife that we deserve (given our past sins). He told Hosea to go and marry a prostitute. Many godly men had horrible wives, and vice versa. I do not pretend to understand the way of God in these matters. Nothing is guaranteed but grace to overcome it.

If we believe that God has chosen our wife for us, then, if it turns out that she has some bizarre ideas, and maybe in the sexual realm, this is no excuse to seek to divorce her. I do not care what disabilities she has, be they in the mental, physical or spiritual spheres, nothing can justify divorce. There is no warrant in the New Testament for divorce on any grounds. To divorce is always a sin against God, Jesus pointed out.

Obviously, the vast majority of Christian marriage counsellors have not reached that point yet. They still want to play with sin (i.e., divorce) and bring it into the life of the Church. I strongly advise, do not entertain sin/divorce, and you will not have room for it in your emerging theology. Many Christians are still wedded to hanging on to some form of divorce in the Christian’s life that is acceptable to God. Hate divorce as you hate sin. Identify them as the same thing. Make no provision for divorce under any circumstances, and you will not fall into the Devil’s temptation.

It is difficult for Christians to see divorce as sin, because they know many fine Christian friends and church leaders, and even some outstanding leaders in the past, who divorced and remarried and God blessed their ministries. There is a sneaking suspicion that if God disapproved of their sin of divorce then He would not have blessed their ministry for Him. We need to ask, Did these Christians remarry out of ignorance? Do we sin out of ignorance and experience blessing on our ministries? Can we sin deliberately and be blessed? Once we come into a knowledge of the truth, then
we are under an obligation to our Lord to conform to His will for us. If we refuse, then our relationship to Him changes.


Some hold that, "... a woman can, in certain (polygamous) situations, demand her freedom if denied food, clothing and sex: see Exodus 21:7-11,..."

In reply, the first thing to note is that this law relates to slave women, who have no social status. They are classed as possessions. Their children belong to their master. They are not freeborn women.

Secondly, I would point out that the text actually says, "If another [woman] he takes for himself, her food, her covering, and her ointment (or oil), he does not withdraw." The same three words occur in an Old Babylonian law on the exact same topic, where it translates as "food, ointment and a garment" (in that order) (cf. E. Oren, Tarbiz 33 [1953/4]). Neither the word 'habitation' or 'sex' may be the right meaning here. Her master does not have to sleep with her under duress. God does not force a man to have sex with his second wife if "it is evil in his eyes", as Scripture puts it. It is sufficient (God points out) that she has all the expectations that a man's daughter should expect in a family. I suspect that personal hygiene rated high among women, but husbands controlled the purse strings so that it was impossible for a second wife to have the financial independence to buy her own perfumes. So if the second wife can keep herself clean (= oils), hide her nakedness (= clothes), and not starve (= food), then she can exist quite comfortably even if she is denied love (and sex).

The third thing to note is that no divorce is necessary in sending out a slave wife (or one bought with money). Her owner can dispense with her as if she were a possession or a commodity. He is not allowed to sell her (Ex 21:11). Alternatively, if her lord does not provide the three things that he would provide for his own daughter; namely, food, clothing and habitation, then she can take the initiative to leave, and return to her own country and family home, without any financial penalty.

In Deuteronomy 22:10-14 God protected the women captured in battle (presumably her parents, husband, and brothers are all dead). She had no status. She was a commodity. A man may marry such a captive woman but God protected these women from abuse. If the husband lost his love and respect for her, and wanted rid of her, he could send her away (no divorce would be needed, as she had no status in law) but only if she so desired. In other words, to send her out penniless would put her in grave danger of exploitation or of capture again, or of being sold on. In this case, her Hebrew husband could not 'divorce' her without her consent. He was obliged to look after her as his wife. The reason why God protected the captive wife is that she had no family to go back to.

The captive wife was given greater protection that a native-born wife, whose consent to a divorce was not required, because if she was divorced she always had her parents and brothers to support her. Here we see God taking special care of vulnerable slave wives. No one else was going to look after their concerns.

Another remarkable instance of God’s protection of vulnerable wives occurs in Deuteronomy 22:13-19. Here we read of a case where a wife was falsely accused of not being a freeborn virgin on her wedding night. If the accusation was upheld, she would have been stoned to death, so the allegation carried with it the death penalty. Her husband wanted her dead, so that he could be free to marry another woman. The enormity of the accusation is taken into account by God. If the accusation proved to be false, then the accuser was chastised and, significantly, he was not able to ‘send her away’ for the rest of his life. God ensured that he could not take advantage of Moses’s law of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 to get rid of her. If his intense hatred continued to be shown toward her, she could not divorce him. So they were locked in to their marriage with no prospect of separation. But he was under an obligation, through law, to look after her. There would have been social pressure on him to do so. Therefore, it was not necessary for God to put the husband’s obligation into writing.

This ruling of God throws light on His view, that the marriage union was for life. While the nation defiantly rejected this view, God could use His power, on occasions, to impose His view when it came to ‘natural justice’, because most men would recognise the deadly peril a hard-hearted husband put his wife in with his allegation of not being a virgin. That his punishment was to be married for life, with no provision for divorce permitted, is a revealing glimpse into God’s view of marriage. What the man wanted most was denied him, and denied him for life. He was glued to his wife for life. This is what God wanted for every union, but He could only enforce it in cases where ‘natural justice’ gave Him the opportunity. Even hard-hearted men would sense that God’s judgment was fit and proper in such blatant attempts to kill off an unwanted wife. These husbands were trying to exploit God’s wise provisions. He drew up good and wise laws to protect the paternity of every
male, but evil men were out to exploit these laws in a way they were never intended to be used. Today we see the same exploitation of the Old Testament laws to introduce divorce by the backdoor into Christ’s Kingdom and Church. As in Moses’s day, so today, evil men will entertain the idea of severing their one-flesh union, and they will go to the courts of Satan to achieve this. Among them are many misdirected and misguided, Christians. Christians may be dragged into these courts but they must remember the marriage vows they took before God that the union was ‘for better or for worse, . . . till death do us part.’

3.7. Letter 7. No divorce for any reason is a very harsh doctrine

The following letter came from a 70-year old retired Elder of a thriving evangelical church.

“You asked me to look at your paper on Divorce and I have tried to do so but I confess that I find your conclusions very harsh. This is not a subject I have studied very closely but some years ago we read David Instone-Brewer’s book and found it quite useful. Your whole argument comes down to whether the ei mh [Greek] should be in the text or not. You acknowledge that Wycliffe translated it [as in the AV] so its origins are earlier than Erasmus. I have to say that to translate your understanding of the correct reading you have had to add a lot of words and the other three ‘correct translations’ are very difficult to understand as they are translated. I know you wouldn’t go this far but the logic of your position seems to be to bring back stoning. It may not be very academic but I liked David I-B because in pastoral cases, it seems to me to be more in keeping with the gospel. E.g., when a wife is being regularly beaten for no reason, should she really stay in that relationship?”

There a large number of issues here that need to be treated separately. I have repeated each section of the letter below and given my comments on it under LMF.

RE] You asked me to look at your paper on Divorce and I have tried to do so but I confess that I find your conclusions very harsh.

LMF] The phrase “very harsh” is the reaction that Jesus’ disciples expressed, so you are in good company. But the disciples had to come to terms with Jesus’ very harsh (or should we say ‘high’) standards. Jesus was not going to soften His doctrine to please human frailty.

When you read Jesus’ teaching in Luke 16:18 (this is the earliest statement of His position) and Mark 10:11-12, the stark simplicity of His doctrine comes across clearly. There are no ‘exception clauses’ here. It is only in Matthew 19:9 that a misunderstanding has arisen because Erasmus altered the Greek text to make it say what he wanted it to say, namely, to create a loophole for divorce, and get Jesus to make a single concession to soften His ‘harsh’ doctrine.

All I have done is expose Erasmus’s faulty Greek text, and translated the original, Majority Text (which is supported by Sinaiticus, but not by Vaticanus, which, disastrously imported Mt 5:32 into 19:9).

What I have attempted to do in my translation is to bring out the meaning of the Greek after I have deleted Erasmus’s addition. I have had plenty of support through many e-mails of the rightness of my translation.

In brief, Jesus’ teaching in Mark and Luke is stark: No divorce on any grounds. The implication is that any man or woman who remarries is an adulterer/adulteress. There can be no getting away from His teaching. No doubt, Jesus lost a lot of disciples once His ‘harsh’ doctrine became known.

The reason why Jesus could never allow divorce is that there is no sin which cannot be forgiven and forgiveness means reconciliation and restoration. Peter wanted to put a limit on the number of times someone could be forgiven, but Jesus said to forgive seventy times seven, which was just another way of saying ‘there is no limit’ (Mt 18:21-22). If we insert the sin of adultery into the text, it reads: “Peter said, ‘Lord, how often shall my wife commit adultery against me, and I forgive her, till seven times?’” Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but to seventy times seven.’” In Luke 17:3-4 the same thought of unlimited forgiveness is expressed by Jesus. We can focus on the sin of adultery and translate as: “Jesus said, . . . Take heed to yourselves, . . . if your wife may commit adultery against you, rebuke her, and if she may reform, forgive her, and if seven times in the day she may sin against you, and seven times in the day may return to you saying, ‘I reform,’ you shall forgive her.”

There is no idea of stoning the one who commits adultery in Jesus’ teaching. He taught forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, ad infinitum. There is no limit to His forgiveness, and this is what we should preach and practise.

45
What Jesus did insist upon is that men should have ‘one wife for life’. A Christian can never go to the world to have his/her ‘one flesh’ union broken. It can never be broken by any word of man, be he an Apostle or a House of Lords’ judge. It can only be broken by death (Rom 7:1-2; 1 Cor 7:39). Marriage is permanent. As Jesus pointed out, this was its state “from the beginning” (in Eden). He goes back to “the beginning” (i.e., to the pre-Law situation) to recover the true doctrine of marriage. It is as if the period, or dispensation, of Law did not exist in His mind.

Jesus drew a sharp distinction between the system operating in the world and the system operating in His Kingdom. He said to the Jews living under the Mosaic Law: “you are of this world, I am not of this world” (Jn 8:23). The two systems are poles apart: Jesus said to His disciples: “if of the world you were, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world — but I chose out of the world — because of this the world hates you” (Jn 15:19). He also said: “I have given to them Your word, and the world did hate them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world; I do not ask that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them out of the evil. Of the world they are not, as I am not of the world” (Jn 17:15-16). Here Jesus identifies the world system as an evil system, and in opposition to Him and His Way. In Jesus’ Kingdom the law that dominates is: “let not man put asunder”; but in the world, the law that dominates is: “let us put asunder what God has joined when it suits us”.

For every doctrine of the Lord, the world has an opposite doctrine. Satan opposes the Lord at every turn. The divorce courts belong to Satan. They are his instruments for ruining mankind, and for throwing the members of Christ’s Church into disorder and disunity. He is happiest when he sees Christians coming into his divorce law courts to end their marriages. Through these courts he can continue to hurt the Lord Jesus, his bitterest enemy. We play into his hands when we enter his courts and obtain a false certificate to put asunder what God ordained should be a permanent union.

Neither God nor the Lord Jesus recognise Satan’s divorce certificate as having any validity or legitimacy. It cannot end any marriage. Satan’s courts are not part of Christ’s Kingdom, but Christians go off to Satan to obtain permission to sever their ‘one flesh’ union. At that moment, such Christians become members of the ‘world’ system, and they cannot continue to be members of Christ’s Body. A Christian cannot be a member of the world and a member of Christ (1 Cor 6:13-20). Membership of both is not possible, because Jesus is not a member of the world. A Christian who claims to be a member of Christ’s body cannot be a member of the world. The two systems are incompatible. The one is of the flesh, the other is of the Spirit of Christ. Satan and Christ can never be one. Their systems cannot be merged. They are diametrically opposed to each other. Enmity and hated exists between them. Jesus noted: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you” (Jn 15:18). This hatred is permanently directed at all of Christ’s followers throughout their time on this earth. The divorce courts of the god of this world are a trap to separate every Christian from Christ.

The only time I would advocate Christians using Satan’s courts is to hurt Satan. Thus, if a Christian, out of ignorance, used Satan’s court to go against Christ’s teaching and divorced his wife and remarried, and then became convicted that his second marriage was an adulterous affair, he will want to reverse that action, so let him go back into Satan’s court and reverse his divorce action and return to his first wife. This would hurt Satan enormously. But in the end, to satisfy the law of the land, every second marriage must be undone through the courts, so that the world can see clearly what is a man’s married status before the law of the land.

What Jesus did allow for was the real possibility that the unbelieving spouse in Satan’s kingdom, would not live with the Christian spouse in Christ’s Kingdom; but in these cases the Christian spouse must be ready at all times to forgive and be reconciled. If the unbeliever goes off and remarries, he is living in sin. There is no such thing as divorce in the Kingdom of God. No provision and no court was set up by the Lord Jesus to grant divorces. Note that if anyone gets a divorce they go to the world (not to Christ) to get it. The world reflects the values of Satan, not Christ. Paul warned Christ’s Church not to go before the courts of the ‘world of unbelievers’, but to settle their disputes among themselves (1 Cor 6).

The early Church Fathers realised the strength of Jesus’ doctrine when He took His standard from the Garden of Eden situation, where God joined Adam and Eve in a permanent union. Only God, therefore, can separate what He has joined together, and Jesus has conveyed God’s will in this matter: God has made no provision for divorce under the New Covenant. This is what Jesus conveyed to His followers.

In Jesus’ day the Jews were given autonomy in the area of their religion, but not in the area of governance (politics). Here, the Roman authorities reserved the right to use the death penalty. But the Roman authorities permitted the Sanhedrin to carry out the death penalty for religious matters. It is sometimes argued that the Roman government removed this religious right, and as a consequence the Jewish authorities brought in divorce as a substitute for the death penalty. This is not so. Paul was
given authority from the Sanhedrin to ‘threaten’ and ‘slaughter the disciples of the Lord’ (Acts 9:1). Paul approved of the slaughter of Stephen (Acts 8:1). The Jews expected the woman taken in adultery to be stoned (Jn 8). There are many incidents where Jews attempted to exercise their right to enforce the death penalty on renegade Jewish Christians (Acts 9:23; 18:14-15; 21:31; 23:29; 25:11, 25; 26:10 (with 22:4)). Under the Mosaic Law God demanded that all renegade Hebrews (later called Jews), who were deemed to be worshiping other gods, should be stoned to death (Ex 22:20), and also all those who would try to lead Jews to worship other gods (Deut 13:6-18). As far as Paul was concerned, this is what the Apostles and Stephen were doing, so in all good conscience he killed Christians, thinking he was pleasing God.

The selfsame enthusiasm drove the zealous Jews to bring the adulteress to Jesus (Jn 8) expecting Jesus to uphold the Mosaic Law (which He was still under), and Jesus agreed that she should be stoned, because His Father had instituted this law. But ever mindful that He was talking to hypocrites He asked the ones who were sinless to carry out His Father’s will. They all slunk away. But Jesus was sinless, so why could He not have stoned her? If He had done so, He would have upheld the law of His Father, but His Father had given Him the power to forgive sins, and so He exercised it, and commanded the woman not to sin again.

We now know that when Jesus lived out His life under the Law, He obtained the righteousness that is through the Law, and it is this righteousness that He offers to the world to receive by faith. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is out of bounds for all His followers. The death penalty for adultery has been abolished, and forgiveness has been put in its place in the new order/kingdom.

For Jews living under the Law, God made no provision for divorce for adultery. Death certificates, not divorce certificates, were instituted by God for adultery. But it would appear that the Jews regarded God’s punishment as ‘harsh’, and so they (Hillel and Shammai) commuted the death penalty to divorce for fornication. But note that it was just this man-made provision that Jesus strikes at when He inserted the exclusion clause: “not he may divorce for fornication,” (meaning, he cannot obtain a divorce for fornication) in Matthew 19:9. Erasmus turned Jesus’ deliberate, exclusion clause, into an exeptive clause in order to restrict Jesus’ insistence on no divorce for any cause.

Now when we examine Matthew 5:32 in the light of Jesus’ ‘No divorce for any cause’ position, we find a consistency in His teaching (as we would expect).

Here, Jesus informs us of the terrible consequences of divorce. He tells His audience that if a man puts his wife on to the street, then he is offering her to any man to have sex with her. Even if she is holding a divorce certificate in her hand, Jesus lays the blame for all her future, sexual sins at the door of her husband, because as far as He is concerned they are still married. The only exemption from responsibility for her future sins is where she commits adultery before he put her out in the street. The husband is not guilty for that sexual sin, and we would heartily agree with our Saviour’s exclusion or exemption clause in this instance. That is what Jesus refers to when He said: “apart from fornication”. So the husband is held responsible for all her future adultery, apart from the case where he did not force her to have sex with another man. The divorce certificate appeared to give him immunity from responsibility. (It might have been her infidelity that drove him to divorce her in the first place.)

Jesus removed this man-instituted immunity by destroying the legitimacy of the certificate in the first place. Because hard-hearted men could not bring themselves to forgive, they invented the idea of divorce, to vent their wrath on their unfaithful or unloved wives. Divorce has its origin in an unforgiving spirit. That unforgiving spirit has no place in Christ or in any of His followers. We have a different spirit—the Holy Spirit, living within us to forgive all adulteries ad infinitum. There is no place for Christian stoning. It is incompatible with Christ abiding within us. He forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, and so must all Christian men and women.

There is spiritual danger in getting involved in the act of divorce. It is fraught with eternal consequences. No adulterer or adulteress can enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus warned. If a Christian thinks he can take a trip into the Law that was created for the Hebrews (the Jews), and selectively choose something that Moses, not God, permitted hard-hearted men to live by, such as Moses’s law permitting divorce (Deut 24:1-4), then they are in for a rude awakening. If they are going to live by this sub-standard law, then they must live totally under all its laws, not just a selection from it. As Paul put it, if you want to live as a Jew, then live under the Law, in which case you will be judged by the Law, and no man living under the Law will enter the Kingdom of God. Living under the Law is a no, no, to every one who professes to have Christ living in him. As a means of salvation, the Law is obsolete, old, gone. It belongs to history. Those Christian counsellors who dabble in the Law, and import its sub-standard laws into the life of the Church, are playing with fire. Selectively choosing what to import and mixing it with Christ’s pure teaching will result in a new Gospel, a Judaistic-Christianity, which is neither one thing nor the other, but a concoction of their own choosing. These counsellors will be held responsible for the lives they have ruined, and the innumerable ‘Christians’
who will not be permitted to enter the Kingdom of God. It is a fearful thing to interfere with the clear teaching of Jesus, and make Him teach that marriage is not a permanent union.

RE] This is not a subject I have studied very closely but some years ago we read David Instone-Brewer’s book and found it quite useful.

LMF] Maybe you should read my comprehensive critique of Brewer’s book, which is on my web site. He has created his own ‘good news’ as far as his provision for divorce goes. It is basically humanistic in origin and appeal. It will appeal to the flesh, to commonsense. It is packaged to make it very attractive to the unbeliever, who would instantly go for it in his unregenerate state. It is a gospel tailor-made for him. You will not find Jesus’ solution of unlimited forgiveness and reconciliation in it. You will not find Jesus’ total denunciation of divorce ‘for any cause’ in it. The Gospel of Grace is contaminated with rabbinic exegesis.

Those who substitute Jesus’ ‘No divorce on any grounds’ for this new doctrine, will find themselves at odds with their Saviour, which must divorce them from Him at the spiritual and psychological levels. Their prayer life will peter out (though the form will be retained). If they enter a second marriage on this humanistic, flesh-appealing package, and then discover that they are living in adultery, their last state is going to be worse than their first, for they will have to disengage with their second partner if they want to enter the Kingdom of God.

The cost to enter the Kingdom of God is nothing less that giving up all things for Christ, including one’s wife if necessary (Mt 19:29; Lk 14:26). For the majority of Christians conned into a second marriage by this new doctrine the cost will be too great, and they will go away into everlasting separation from God.

As a faithful teacher of God’s Word I would warn every Christian not to be attracted to this new, hybrid, Rabbinic-Christianity, which advocates laying aside Jesus’ ‘harsh’ doctrine for a soft option that appeals to the flesh—to the natural man. This new doctrine is sweet to the tongue but it will have a bitter outcome. This attractive doctrine says, ‘Play now and pay later.’

Those who have read this article cannot turn away and think that they will not be held accountable for their clear warning. They have the unbroken witness of the Church right up to Erasmus (1516) and on through to the present day in the Roman Catholic church, that Jesus taught ‘No divorce on any grounds’. Divorce is incompatible with His teaching to forgive seventy times seven. He taught that if we wanted forgiveness, then we must forgive others their sins. The one is conditional on the other. Adultery is not the unforgivable sin.

The consistent witness of the Early Church cannot be dismissed offhand. It has its roots in the practice of all the New Testament churches, and once a practice becomes universal it is difficult to change it. It gains a momentum of its own, resulting in a strong tradition, even if the doctrine that created it in the first place is lost, which, in this case never happened. The Reformers were conned into believing that Erasmus’s Greek text was a true reflection of the manuscripts he had in his possession. But being a humanist, he chose, in this instance, a reading which is not found in any early Greek manuscript, because it agreed with his humanist reasoning. It is his faulty Greek reading in Matthew 19:9 that lies at the foundation of the new, hybrid doctrine.

RE] Your whole argument comes down to whether the EI MH should be in the text or not.

LMF] No, my argument does not come down to whether ei mh should be in the text or not. If you read it again you will see that my objection is to the addition of the little word ei (‘if’) which Erasmus added to the text. You will see that I have retained the word mh (‘not’) because it alone is in all the early manuscripts, except the corrupt codex Vaticanus.

RE] You acknowledge that Wycliffe translated it so its origins are earlier than Erasmus.

LMF] Wycliffe was not translating the Greek text, but the Latin Vulgate.35

RE] I have to say that to translate your understanding of the correct reading you have had to add a lot of words and the other three ‘correct translations’ are very difficult to understand as they are translated.

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34 See Appendix C below for a shortened version of it.
LMF] Once I removed Erasmus’s addition of et, I presented the reader with the most literal translation of Matthew 19:9 that I could make, to bring out the meaning of the Greek, and also that others would see how I arrived at my understanding, and be able to approve or disapprove of it.

If you care to examine my carefully expounded explanation of how I arrived at my understanding of the Greek, you will then be in a position to see that in Matthew 19:9 Jesus pointedly ruled out divorce for fornication to his Pharisaic bystanders, most of whom were probably in a second marriage situation. Rabbi Hillel advocated that a man could divorce his wife if she burnt the dinner. Rabbi Shammai, by contrast, advocated that a man could only divorce his wife on sexual grounds. Jesus’ statement ruled out even this option. He was a Rabbi of a different order altogether. He taught ‘no divorce on any grounds,’ and in this way snubbed both rabbis. While they sought to bring God’s standard down to where unregenerate man was, Jesus sought to bring regenerate man up to where God exists. “Be you perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” This cannot be achieved in the flesh. It requires faith and the Holy Spirit, both of which are the gift of God.

The rabbis operated within a once-only born experience; Jesus operated within a twice-born experience. Jesus lived in a different world to these two rabbis. They were carnal; He was spiritual. There could be no coming together of their worlds or their doctrines. But this is precisely what the new Judaistic gospel has achieved, resulting in a distortion of Jesus’ teaching, and hordes of Christians are taking advantage of this attractive package to have their cake and eat it. It is a painless Christianity. There is no cross to bear. There is no need to be ‘born again’ to enter into this new, false alternative, gospel. It permits the Christian to operate at the same level as Satan’s world system, and obtain divorces on the same grounds that Satan grants divorces to his followers, but obtaining worldly divorces fools these Christians into thinking that they are still members of Christ’s body even though they are committing adultery against their first spouses. This is what makes this new gospel so appealing, but therein lies divorce from Christ’s body and future exclusion from heaven. Divorce from a spouse, and divorce from Christ, are inseparable as two sides of the same coin. They are directly linked. They are inseparable. Therefore, flee divorce if you do not want to be divorced from Christ for all eternity.

RE] I know you wouldn’t go this far but the logic of your position seems to be to bring back stoning.

LMF] This is not a logical reading of my carefully constructed paper. I am only the messenger. I have shown that Jesus taught that marriage was for life. I know you agree with this. I have set out how Jesus carefully took into account how far the husband’s responsibility went after he divorced his wife. He carefully excluded his wife’s sexual sins before he divorced her (Mt 5:32). He would not be held responsible for those sins, but he would be held responsible for all her sins after he had divorced her and she remarried thinking her marriage was truly ended. In the case of Matthew 19:9, Jesus held firm to His absolute statements in Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12, and deliberately condemned divorce on the grounds of fornication in the form of an ‘exclusion clause’.

Jesus never advocated stoning for adultery, and neither do I. I follow my Master’s example in this regard. It is difficult to see how anyone would read into Jesus’ statements that He would advocate stoning for adultery, when clearly He forgave the woman taken in adultery.

RE] It may not be very academic but I liked David I-B because in pastoral cases, it seems to me to be more in keeping with the gospel. E.g., when a wife is being regularly beaten for no reason, should she really stay in that relationship?

LMF] Every Christian should start off with a clear understanding of what Jesus taught about the marriage relationship. If that understanding is not in place, then you will argue from a humanist perspective, and that will not lead to the right solution. Here are four important questions.

1) Are you clear in your mind that Jesus taught that marriage was for life? (2) Are you clear in your mind that He made no exceptions to His absolute statements as recorded in Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12? (3) Are you clear that in Matthew 5:32 Jesus is teaching about who is responsible/culpable for the sins of adultery that precede and follow every divorce? (4) Are you clear that in Matthew 19:9 Jesus is teaching that no man can use fornication as a grounds for divorce?

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See Appendix B of this paper.

Jesus may also have an eye on the divorced wife not remarrying but living a life of fornication after her divorce. Since she knows this style of life is sinful, she, not her husband, is blameworthy.
If you can respond positively to these four questions then you have a foundation on which to analyse any domestic situation. If you cannot respond positively, or are unsure of your ground, then you will not be in a position to analyse any situation with any assurance that it would be in agreement with Jesus’ teaching. To analyse any situation it is imperative that you are in possession of Jesus’ teaching, and I would strongly urge you not to offer any counsel until you are in full possession of Jesus’ mind and understanding. Only then can you hope to bring wisdom to your analysis of any domestic situation involving a threat to the marriage union.

On the specific domestic situation that you raise, see the Fourteenth and Fifteenth case studies below. Suffice to add here that the question: ‘should she really stay in that relationship?’ needs to be analysed carefully. If by ‘relationship’ you mean ‘married’, then clearly Jesus’ answer is Yes. No divorce on any grounds is permitted. If by ‘relationship’ you mean, should she go on enduring physical abuse, then clearly I would say she should get help from her Church, from her relations, from the police, and seek help from his side of the family if the abuse is irrational, gratuitous or unacceptable in a civilised society. But married she is to him until death separates them. No Christian counsellor should ever advise a Christian to go to Satan’s divorce courts to end their lawfully ordained marriage. The most that a Christian can do in a situation where they are in physical danger of abuse or death is to separate and remain single. Divorce is out of the question.

3.8. Letter 8. Can a Christain never, ever, under any circumstances get a divorce?

Most Christians on hearing that divorce is never possible under any circumstances for any human being on this planet throw up their hands in total disbelief. Immediately they cite clear instances of men and women going off with another man or another woman, and they know instinctively who the guilty party is and who is the innocent party. The innocent party is invariably the Christian. The guilty partner could also be a Christian, and they will cite many examples where this was the case. They then use ‘natural justice’ to argue that the innocent party is justified in punishing the guilty part by getting a divorce (to start off with), and would not find anything wrong with a subsequent remarriage to another Christian. In their minds divorce does what it says; it undoes the marriage vows, and both parties, guilty and innocent, are now free to find other partners or none.

When challenged, they always cite Deuteronomy 24:1-4, as God’s provision for Christians to get a lawful end to their marriages. When a marriage begins to go sour, both partners will begin looking toward each other’s pre-marriage sexual misdemeanours as a possible grounds for divorce. We have earlier spelled out the Lord Jesus’ teaching that all sins must be forgiven, even past sexual ones. This is what distinguishes His followers from all other world religions. The Christian must resist looking at other world religions to see how they handle divorce issues. Jesus’ attitude toward divorce is unique among all religions, cults, sects, and faiths. He stands alone against divorce. It is the Christian who can stand alone alongside Him who will experience His presence no matter what ‘hell’ they are going through with their partner.

The danger for the Christian is to take their eyes off Jesus and His clear teaching, and start hankering after an end to their marriage. That is when they will be caught, and before they know it they are heeding the voices of their friends (and the ubiquitous majority of Christian counsellors) telling them to go to the worldly courts to split their worldly goods in half and make a fresh start. The babble of the marriage counsellors is so loud in the Church that it has almost drowned out the still small voice of the Lord Jesus. But Jesus has a way of making His voice heard, and those who are His sheep will hear that voice and follow Him. Those who are not His sheep will not heed His teaching and they will wander off into a barren life.

Because over fifty per cent of all marriages end in the divorce courts, Christians have assumed that it is not a sinful thing in itself. After World War II, a German guard who witnessed hundreds of women and children being herded into the gas chambers confessed that “It is amazing what you can get used to in time.” The operative phrase is ‘in time’. At first he was appalled, but he was slowly worn down by the constant sight of people going to certain death that he was able to live with his awful conditions. He was conditioned to accept something that was wrong. There is a similar gulf developing between the viewpoint of God and the viewpoint of His Church. He hates divorce of any hue or colour. It is an abomination to Him. Unfortunately, that is not the experience of His so-called followers. The Christian must never allow himself to become so used to hearing of divorce that they allow themselves to be conditioned into thinking that it is ‘normal’. They should keep to the old paths and keep reminding themselves that God hates divorce,
and they should too. This constant reminder is the best antidote to the conditioning that is evident all around us.

3.9. Letter 9. Is divorce itself a sin?

When Christians hear that other Christians regard divorce as a sinful act, and that it is on a par with abortion, or murder, they are shocked to hear this, because they have friends who have been divorced and remarried, sometimes in churches. So the anxious question is: Is divorce itself a sin? and should Christians have nothing to do with it? Most Christians would assume that it can’t be a sinful act in itself, because Moses permitted it in the Torah. But we have just noted in the previous letter that the origin of divorce did not come from God, but from man.

The short answer to the question, Is divorce itself a sin? is Yes. It originated in the mind of man, not God. God made no allowance for it ‘in the beginning’. His revealed will was that the one-flesh union of man and woman should not be severed while both are alive. Marriage was designed to be a permanent, life-long union. God hates divorce (Mal 2:16).

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus noted three things about divorce. First, it was introduced by Moses, not by His Father. In all other cases, God used Moses as His spokesman. In this single case, Moses is the author of the law on divorce. Secondly, divorce emerged out of man’s hard-hearted attitude toward the weaker sex. It did not arise out of love, but out of hate. Thirdly, we noted above the circumstances which caused Moses’s oral law to be written down. The divorce law was drawn up by man, for man, to satisfy man’s selfish lusts.

The last point is worth expanding. The law of divorce was blatantly unfair. It was written up in such a way that wives were not allowed to divorce their husbands. Only husbands had the right to divorce their wives. It was not only unfair and unjust, but it was also one-sided. It was a one-way, sexist law, which was designed to operate solely in man’s favour. It has all the hallmarks of an evil provision designed to operate against the best interests of the woman. This law reeks of man’s inhumanity to woman. It legalises bullying. It legalises domestic violence against women. It legally robbed women of the rights she had ‘in the beginning.’ It empowered any husband to put his wife out on the street at a moment’s notice. He did not have to go to court. He did not have to prove her guilt. It was, to all intents and practices, the private affair of the husband. He was judge and jury. There was no appeal against his decision. He was autonomous. He behaved like a god. He made sure that all the cards were stacked in his favour when he drew up this law. Could this law possibly have come from God? The answer is a resounding No, and we have Jesus’ explicit statement that it did not come from His Father.

Evil men drew up a blatantly sexist, chauvinist law of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, which for the first time since the creation of man and woman legally removed the rights of the woman to expect a life-long union with her husband. This could not have pleased God.

Jesus must often have pondered the foul nature of this law and its detrimental consequences for the lives of countless wives dumped on the streets at the whim of their husbands. It was a foul law that issued out of a foul mouth—the mouth of a hard-hearted man. This law legally abolished the woman’s right to a secure home, which she had ‘from the beginning’. Overnight, this law demoted and degraded her to the level of a domesticated animal. What a sad reflection on the mindset of Hebrew men 1440 years before the birth of the woman’s saviour. The male-orientated divorce law represents institutional bullying at its worst. It shows what evil can be passed as law, which then corrupts the entire nation into thinking that what is legal is right in the eyes of God.

But woman’s rights have been restored to her ‘in Christ’. Under Christ’s new rule the rights of the wife which she had in the Garden of Eden are restored. 1 Corinthians 7:2-4 reads: “Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her proper husband. To the wife let the husband the due benevolence render, and in like manner also the wife to the husband. The wife over her own body has not authority, but the husband; and, in like manner also, the husband over his own body has not authority, but the wife.” The idea that the wife had authority over her husband’s body, and that she alone had the right to all of his sexual relations, would have been anathema to those who drew up the divorce law in Deuteronomy 24. But under Christ’s new Covenant rule her rights have been restored to her, and no husband can take them away from her. He might think he can deny her rights and give them to another woman, but in Jesus’ eyes, he is committing adultery against her. She owns the right to his body, and likewise he owns the right to her body. She cannot give her body to another man, otherwise she is committing adultery against him, and vice versa. These are the rights which Adam and Eve enjoyed ‘in the beginning’.

The Torah came into existence thousands of years after Adam and Eve. It is to this pre-Torah era that Jesus went back to, to recover God’s teaching on marriage in Genesis 2:24. Christians are to reach behind the late introduction of the Torah, and recover the original teaching on marriage from that era. This is what Jesus was doing in Matthew 19:9 when he dismissed the existence of divorce
among His people with the statement: “but from the beginning it hath not been so.” There was no thought or provision for divorce “from the beginning of the creation” (Mk 10:6). Jesus has taken His theology from the state of things before the Fall in the Garden of Eden, because it is into this pristine state that He takes His followers through the new birth. They can now live the life that God intended all men and women should have lived from the beginning.

Before looking at God’s reaction to Moses’s divorce law, we need to examine the term ‘abomination’ (Heb. to ādāh; Gk βαρκαλλίμα). Certain things were so disgusting in the mind of God that He demanded the death penalty for them. One such evil was homosexual behaviour (Lev 18:22). Both men were to be killed (Dt 20:13). Other persons were also an abomination to Him (Dt 22:5; 25:16). These persons defiled the sanctity of the land in which they were living. Under the period of Law they had to be eradicated as soon as they were discovered. Now, under Grace, while the punishment of such persons in the Church has been changed to excommunication, the disgust felt by God has not changed. Homosexuals and remarried divorced women are in the same category as persons who are an abomination to Him, and who are defiled persons. Revelation 21 envisages the redeemed nations entering the New Jerusalem (Heaven) and it notes: “there may not enter into it at all any thing that is defiling or doing abomination” (24:27). The two terms ‘defiling’ and ‘abomination’ are used to describe a remarried divorced woman in Deuteronomy 24:4.

God does not change His assessment of the relationship He has brought about through marriage. Once married, always married. His assessment is not changed by some man on the earth pronouncing that a wife and husband are no long husband and wife. He is not in heaven updating His records to agree with the records of a human divorce court. After all, where did the human divorce courts get their authority to separate what God joined? They are self-appointed institutions. Are not all divorce courts under the control of the ‘god of this world’ (Satan)? What agreement can God and Satan have over the status of married couples? It is Satan’s work to divorce. It is God’s work to unite permanently. They are at loggerheads over divorce. Satan will win in the world. God should win in the Church. It is a disgrace for a member of the Church to go to the divorce courts of Satan to ‘undo’ their permanent bond.

One can only understand the disgust felt in the mind of God through the revelation that Jesus gave. While the Jews had been living for centuries believing that divorce was a normal solution to family disputes, they appear to have been oblivious that it was considered a highly abnormal state in the eyes of God. No other Jewish rabbi had ever considered that divorce was an abnormal state. Jesus was the first rabbi to point this out. Now, unless God and the Lord Jesus have undergone a drastic change of mind, homosexuals and remarried divorced women are still an abomination in the eyes of God. It was left to the Lord Jesus to make the further revelation that a remarried divorced husband was also an abomination in their eyes (see below).

Now let us look at God’s reaction to Moses’s discriminatory law. It has two distinct parts. First, He declared that a woman who slept with two men was a defiled and an abominable woman. This was in accordance with His view of the one-flesh union. While her husband lived she could only have sexual relations with him. This substantiates the marriage rule that ‘a wife is for life’. She must never experience sex with two living men. If she does, she becomes a defiled and an abominable woman. God takes a very damning view of her second marriage, it is an abomination, which pollutes the land she is living in. She was judged to be an abomination in Moses’s time, and she is still an abomination today. Has God changed over time? Are not all women in second marriages today equally an abomination in the eyes of God? The answer must be a resounding Yes. It is for this reason (among others) that divorce must be seen as an evil device to undo the work of God.

Even though Hebrew women were legally divorced and legally married to a second husband, according to Moses, she has become a defiled woman in the eyes of God and Jesus, and her offspring would be regarded as unclean\(^8\) (cf. 1 Cor 7:14). God does not recognise Moses’s divorce law as having any legality, and neither did Jesus.

A woman might call herself a Christian, but Jesus and God call her ‘an abomination’, a whore, a defiled person, who has no place as a member of His Body. So God’s first reaction to Moses’s new law (on how to get rid of an unwanted wife) is to say that when a husband divorces his wife, and she remarries, he is forcing her to become a defiled person, and thereby she becomes an abomination in the eyes of God. Jesus made the same observation about the divorced woman in Matthew 19:9, but He made a telling addition. Under Moses’s law there is no explicit suggestion that the husband commits adultery when he remarries,

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8 Whether her children would be regarded as illegitimate is not settled. Illegitimate children were not allowed into the Assembly ‘even to the tenth generation’, which was just another way of saying ‘never’ (Dt 23:2).
and no suggestion that he becomes an abomination. It is left to Jesus to spell out the full implications of divorce on both partners. Both, He says, are adulterers the moment they remarry. So both are an abomination in His eyes. But in the case of the woman, Jesus rules that the responsibility for her adultery is to be laid at the feet of her husband for forcing her out of his home and on to the street (Mt 5:31-32).

So God in Deuteronomy 24:4 and Jesus in Matthew 19:9 (= Mk 10:10-11) are agreed in noting the abomination status of the divorced wife after she remarries. It is left to Jesus to show that when a husband remarries the abomination status transfers to him through his second marriage. But Jesus also reveals that the contagion spreads to those who marry persons who are divorced. They become abominations through their (innocent, as they thought) sexual relations. So one divorce certificate can result in four persons becoming abominations in the eyes of God and the Lord Jesus. Truly, divorce multiplies sin.

God’s second reaction to Moses’s discriminatory law was to step in and place a ban on reconciliation. This ban reflects His utter disgust for the husband. The implication of the ban is serious. There can be no reconciliation even if he repents of his sin toward his wife in divorcing her. God shuts the door firmly on this possibility. Does this state also reflect his relationship with God? It would appear so. God freezes him in his chosen, sinful state with no possibility of reconciliation either to his wife or to Himself. This man will not be in God’s company in the afterlife. Divorce is an evil act, in and of itself.

But what of second marriages in the era of grace? Under the new rule of Christ, all sins can be forgiven, provided the repentant sinner obeys the injunction, “Go, and sin no more.” The clause ‘sin no more’, implies an immediate cessation of sleeping with a second partner, while the first spouse is still alive. Under grace a man can be reconciled to his first wife and return to her, which was not possible under the rider that God placed on Moses’s bill of divorce. This shows that all of man’s attempts to ‘normalise’ divorce are disdained by God and the Lord Jesus as legal fictions. Using the legal system to legalise sin does not make it right in God’s eyes. The law of the land is not necessarily the law of God. Christians give priority to God’s law when the two are in dispute.

God never gave Moses, or any human institution, the right to end a marriage. The Church of God has not been given any authority to end a marriage. Those Christian leaders who take it upon themselves to authorise ending a marriage in divorce are usurping God’s authority. Beware of such leaders because in advocating divorce they set innocent Christians on the road to becoming abominable persons in the eyes of God and their Saviour if they remarry.

Is divorce itself a sin? The short and the long answer is, Yes, because divorce has never been authorised by God under the New Covenant. Jesus fully endorsed His Father’s view of what constitutes an abominable, defiled person. All second marriages following a divorce are abominable relationships in the eyes of God.

What constitutes a defiled, abominable person is not whether one got one’s divorce on the right or wrong grounds, but whether a wife can sleep with another man while her first husband is still alive. That is the issue. If s/he cannot sleep with a second spouse while the first spouse is alive, then the issue of divorce can never arise. It is for this reason that there is no such thing as an innocent party after a divorce has gone through. Both are now in a guilty state of having undone the marriage bond. The Christian must always refuse to get a divorce and must remain in a separated state until the death of their spouse. Only then can they remarry another Christian (1 Cor 7:39).

3.10. Letter 10. Will divorced Christians be saved?

The implications of Jesus’ teaching, which bans all forms of divorce once a marriage has been consummated, have not been lost on many who have read this paper. No one is morally neutral, Jesus once noted. Everyone is either for Him or against Him. Those who are ‘for Him’ can be recognised by their love for Him and for all His commands. “If you love Me you will obey Me,” was one of His key sayings.

In the section that follows, I have replied to a very concerned minister of the Lord Jesus who wrote as follows:

Do you really believe that all those devout believers who have been misled by Erasmus and the Reformers and have remarried in all good conscience contrary to Matthew 19:9 are damned? Do you really believe that otherwise saintly Christians, misled by the theological failures of the contemporary Western Church, are excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven because of their remarriages in the lifetime of a former
spouse? There does have to be a way of reading the *loci* about not inheriting the kingdom/kingship in such a way that they agree with the rest of Scripture’s teaching on saving grace. After all, none of us will die spotlessly perfect. We shall be clinging to our salvation in and through the spotless Lamb of God who gave Himself for us and now lives in us by His Spirit. I totally agree that we must reassert the truth of Matthew 19:9 in its correct form. It is right to challenge our brethren in wrong relationships to bring them into line with Scripture. However, I myself cannot say that they have fallen from grace if they disagree because of their skewed grid of understanding. There has to be a solution whereby true believers who are wrestling with alcoholism (“drunkards”) can know saving grace even if they die in the grip of their sick, sad and sinful cravings.

I shall reply to each element of this minister’s concern.

MINISTER] Do you really believe that all those devout believers who have been misled by Erasmus and the Reformers and have remarried in all good conscience contrary to Matthew 19:9 are damned?

LMF] No, I don’t. I care deeply that they were duped and their lives were not able to be used to the glory of God after they had remarried. Their new marriage was an adulterous relationship in the eyes of God. So marrying “in all good conscience” does not change God’s attitude toward that remarriage. It is a sinful relationship whether they realise it or not. All remarriages are an abomination in His sight where both partners are still alive (Deut 24:4).

Now, who is responsible for this continuing sin in the church? You and me, who know the truth but who are not getting it out.

MINISTER] Do you really believe that otherwise saintly Christians, misled by the theological failures of the contemporary Western Church, are excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven because of their remarriages in the lifetime of a former spouse?

LMF] Others may be responsible, if back in those days, the church (lowercase ‘church’), because it was a corrupt church) could not be trusted. The Reformers were duped, just as the Gibeonites duped Joshua, because Joshua (the inspired commentator informs us) did not consult God. If the Reformers had consulted the Lord Jesus at each stage of recovering the doctrines of Grace would He have allowed them to be duped? I don’t think so. It teaches me that I should not work out any doctrine for myself, or depart from any doctrine, until I have taken it to the Lord in prayer and discussed it with other men who likewise take everything to God in prayer, not forgetting the guidance that the Spirit gave to the Early Church Fathers. The outcome of Joshua’s deception was that God made him keep his promises to the Gibeonites, and he (and the whole Church in the wilderness) had to live with the consequences of the collective leaders’ mistake. Let us not be guilty of making any such mistake personally or on behalf of our hearers.

I take seriously the revelation that no adulterer or fornicator will be in heaven. I also take seriously that God does not judge by a relative standard: adultery is just that—adultery, as He defines adultery. On His definition it is where a married partner has unlawful sex with another person. If God judges by His definition and standard, then all remarried persons will not stand in His presence. (See below where I have more to say on this point.)

Every spouse knows that within a marriage adultery is wrong. So all these adulterers, we can be absolutely sure, will not be in heaven. It is where a divorce takes place and both partners are duped into believing that they are free to remarry that I find the most difficult to resolve. Will God take into account that they were deceived into believing that they were free, and so there was no conscience of doing wrong? Eve was deceived by the serpent, but it was counted as sin, because she disobeyed her husband.

Christians and non-Christians frequent the same, secular divorce law courts. This is wrong. Just who will be held responsible for leading other Christians astray seems to be settled in Scripture. It is the teachers. It is you and me. If we know the ‘Truth and hide it, then we will be judged. Whether God will withdraw His grace altogether from you and me, and damn us, is entirely up to Christ. (See more on this point below.) We certainly deserve to be damned eternally for such a neglect of duty. We are inexcusable. But if we are truly ignorant of Jesus’ teaching, and can put hand on heart before God in making such a declaration of innocence then surely we can hope for His mercy, can’t we?
But I keep hearing the ‘Woe’ of Paul – the ‘Woe of responsibility’, and see behind that one word the disgust and displeasure of God if we hide the Gospel from those who are lost. “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel,” hung over the whole of Paul’s life and ministry and drove him on to travel the world. “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

The Lord Jesus is looking to you and to me, this very moment, to preach His doctrines to the world (not just to England). I have shared His teaching on Headship, on giving total respect to God and the Lord Jesus in how we approach Him with our heads uncovered and in humility. I have shared with you Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage, and it was, and is, reassuring to me that you, too, have been teaching the same thing all your ministry. If the church is not willing to listen to us, that is their problem, but we will have discharged our duty of preaching the truth. Each time we preach (or publish, or communicate) the Truth we put the person who hears it into greater safety or into greater danger. Revelation is a savour of life unto life, or death unto death.

I truly believe that many have published books advocating divorce and they have done this out of ignorance and based on the mistake that Erasmus made. These books are based on a wrong Greek text. But once they have been informed of the Truth, they cannot go on as if they had not heard the truth about Erasmus’s text. If they do, they are now making a deliberate choice to ‘hold down [suppress] the truth,’ and once they do that, then they endorse their published books, and so must, from that point onwards, be held responsible if anyone follows their teaching and divorces and remarries. Paul’s comment to these authors would be, “Therefore, you are now inexcusable, O man . . . ” The damage these books will do to hundreds, if not thousands, of lives is incalculable and I would not be in their shoes for all the money in the world. They are living dangerously close to Paul’s ‘Woe’. If Christ Jesus is disgusted with them, who knows what their eternal fate will be? They cannot hide behind the blood of Christ if their sin is deliberate. But apart from some of them admitting the single mistake of following Erasmus’s corrupted text, they have sailed on as if nothing else has changed. These authors believe that all the Early Church fathers were wrong and only they are right. They seem to rejoice in the fact that they have opened the flood gates to permit all men, Christian and non-Christian, to divorce and remarry on the grounds of adultery. Surely, this cannot be the mark of a true teacher of Christ, can it? I really do fear for their salvation.

To return to your concern about our friends, Christian and non-Christian, who have done the wrong thing and divorced (for whatever reason is irrelevant, because no reason is now valid) and remarried, I see no difference between those sins and all other sins. So in Part Two of my document, I have made it absolutely clear that just as we must repent of every sin and resolve not to repeat it again with God’s help, the same applies to every remarriage. To avoid sin we must make it a matter of conscience, so that when we repeat the sin, it will hurt and prick our consciences. The sin of adultery must cease immediately. Until we inform the mind of all men everywhere we cannot create a conscience in them that divorce per se is wrong, and to go beyond that and remarry is a sin that will debar them from entrance into God’s presence, we leave all men with an excuse.

“Go and sin no more,” is not only relevant to adultery and fornication; it applies to all sin. “Be you holy even as I am holy,” is the new standard both to enter the Kingdom of God (Entrance Requirement), and to remain in it (Continuance Requirement). This standard cannot be kept by any man who does not have the Spirit of Christ living in him. (See more on this below.)

MINISTER] There does have to be a way of reading the loci about not inheriting the kingdom/kingship in such a way that they agree with the rest of Scripture’s teaching on saving grace.

LMF] We do not disagree over this point. See my next comment.

MINISTER] After all, none of us will die spotlessly perfect. We shall be clinging to our salvation in and through the spotless Lamb of God who gave Himself for us and now lives in us by His Spirit.

LMF] You are fully aware of the distinction between (A) Christ’s righteousness, and (B) our personal righteousness. There is a difference between passing God’s required standard of righteousness before being permitted to stand in His presence (let’s call it the Entrance Requirement = Christ’s righteousness), and pleasing God (let’s call it the Continuance Requirement = personal righteousness). In the former, the required standard is the righteousness of Christ. He reached the perfect standard, and we enter with Him into God’s presence on the strength of that standard. The
entrance into heaven has nothing to do with our personal state of righteousness or perfection (except that no sin will enter heaven). You are clear in your mind about this, I’m sure, though the way you have worded your sentence about “clinging to our salvation” might be construed as if the Entrance Requirement was our own standard of perfection.

In the latter (the Continuance Requirement), if we have not deliberately flouted the will of God and refused to abide by His Son’s teaching, then we can have hope that we will receive from Him a personal “Well done, you good and faithful servant.” Jesus said, “If any one loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come into him, and we will abide with him.” If Paul could say to the Thessalonians, “and if any one does not obey our word through the letter, this one note ye, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14), how much more should this be said of our Lord’s teaching?

Scripture informs us that if the Spirit of Christ is not in us then we are not in His Body, and consequently we have no hope of standing in the presence of God, because the Lord Jesus will categorically deny that He knows anyone in whom He did not indwell to the end of their life. So the key to salvation is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ. This is the Continuance Requirement that ensures we remain in the Body of Christ. The key, discerning criterion I have to ask myself is: Do I love Christ? If I profess that I do, then I will be found obeying Him. If I am found professing to love Him but not obeying Him, then He is not in me, and I am lost eternally, even if I have the standing of being a Bishop, or a minister of the Word.

These are two very distinct aspects of what salvation is about. The theological question is can an adulterer be said to ‘remain in Christ’ and, ‘Christ to remain in him’ if he knowingly has remarried against the teaching of Christ? If Christ refuses to indwell a man, then that man is thereby lost for all eternity. Christ is choosing here and now whom He will indwell. My concern is with those ignorant Christians who have been made to sin without being aware of it. Will, or can Jesus indwell such persons? The answer must be Yes, because there is no man living who has not sin remaining in him. But once such ignorant Christians have been fully informed (by someone speaking the truth in love) of the grave danger that they are in; namely, that no adulterer will enter heaven, then they have a decision to make, which is to break off the remarriage relationship immediately as regards its sexual side. Not to do so would grieve the Spirit of Christ within him, and His subsequent withdrawal from abiding in him, because he no longer loves Him.

MINISTER] I totally agree that we must reassert the truth of Matthew 19:9 in its correct form. It is right to challenge our brethren in wrong relationships to bring them into line with Scripture.

LMF] It is our duty. Necessity is laid upon us, because God has blessed us to see and approve of the Truth. We have no choice.

MINISTER] However, I myself cannot say that they have fallen from grace if they disagree because of their skewed grid of understanding.

LMF] As I noted above, the requirement for continuing in Christ’s love is total obedience from the heart to all His teaching. Nothing is to be treated as trivial or secondary, or not essential to salvation, and therefore, optional. None of Christ’s commands are optional, including the head-covering commandment. Every command is a test of the genuineness of a man’s faith and love and commitment. If a minister of the Gospel is faithful in the least, he will also be faithful in the greater commandments of Christ Jesus.

For a man to ‘fall from grace’, he has, first of all, to cease loving Christ. Then the Lord withdraws His Spirit from abiding in him. The consequence of that withdrawal is eternal death. That man will never be able to avail himself of the Entrance Requirement which Christ’s death had made available for him. No man is saved by his own deeds of righteousness, but his deeds of righteousness only flow after Christ has taken up His abode in him. No man can perform a righteous deed unless Christ be first in him, giving him the ability to please God.

If a man professes to love the Lord Jesus but because of poor teaching in his church he has a ‘skewed grid of understanding’, then he comes under the ‘ignorant Christian’ category, and he should be quickly informed of the Truth so that he can obey the Lord whom he loves, as quickly as possible.
MINISTER] There has to be a solution whereby true believers who are wrestling with alcoholism (“drunkards”) can know saving grace even if they die in the grip of their sick, sad and sinful cravings.

LMF] I have covered this type of situation in the body of my reply above, have I not?

3.11. Letter 11. What about those who remarried out of ignorance?

The following comments were made by a minister of the Gospel on an earlier draft of this divorce paper:

“I still remain uneasy in my spirit that remarriage during the lifetime of a ‘previous’ spouse always functions technically as sin. If the perpetrators are genuinely totally unaware of its sinfulness because of an erroneous text and theological teaching/understanding, surely their sin does not function technically as such (cf. Jas.4:17).

My uneasiness may indeed be subjective compromise, for the force of your logic is very compelling. It may also be the witness of the Spirit that your conclusions about exclusion from the Kingdom are somehow flawed.

Purely pragmatically, one would have to concede that some believers are in such a remarriage situation and yet continue to display the fruit of the Spirit, a passion for Christ and effectiveness in witness and service. Such evidence cannot be irrelevant to our exposition of Scripture, whilst also conceding that eisegesis is unacceptable.”

There are three points in these three paragraphs, which I will reply to in sequence.

FIRST POINT

COMMENT: “I still remain uneasy in my spirit that remarriage during the lifetime of a ‘previous’ spouse always functions technically as sin. If the perpetrators are genuinely totally unaware of its sinfulness because of an erroneous text and theological teaching/understanding, surely their sin does not function technically as such (cf. Jas.4:17).”

LMF] I am uneasy with the word ‘technical’ when used with ‘sin’. Sin is sin. Sin is falling short of what one knows to be right behaviour, as James 4:17 has it. God recognises ‘sins of ignorance’ in the Torah, and has made provision for their absolution. But He made no provision for deliberate sin, or sin against right knowledge, sins of a ‘high hand’. He made no provision for these unless (as some believe) the annual Day of Atonement was their absolution.

I suspect that the vast majority of second marriages among Christians were carried out in ignorance. To them Jesus, now says (through you and me): “Go, and sin no more.” These must break off their second marriages (as Neh & Ezra showed) immediately because they have now come into the revelation of the Truth. If these Christians refuse to “Go, and sin no more” then we cannot defend their action or extend the right hand of fellowship to them, can we? There must come a point (as Jas 4:17 puts it) where to sin against knowledge is not a technical matter, but a real sin which will threaten the security of their relationship to Christ. Eternal life is bound up in Christ. If Christ is in us, we have eternal life; if He is not in us; then eternal life is not in us.

SECOND POINT

COMMENT] “My uneasiness may indeed be subjective compromise, for the force of your logic is very compelling. It may also be the witness of the Spirit that your conclusions about exclusion from the Kingdom are somehow flawed.”

LMF] I have sought to abide by God’s Word, and I have searched it diligently, once I discovered the error that Erasmus made in altering God’s Word. We are now in a new ball game. We can put all the past discussions of the Reformers behind us as of no help, seeing that they were all based on a false understanding of the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

In recovering the true text of Matthew 19:9, we can recover the true meaning of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:9. We must not allow the history of past lapses into granting divorces (by the Reformed Churches) to carry over into our new understanding of Jesus’ teaching. We must make a total break with our corrupt past.
We can now see Jesus’ teaching in all its pristine clarity, uncluttered and undimmed by man’s past interference with it.

I now see the logic of Jesus’ teaching in taking us back behind Deut. 24:1-4 to Genesis 2:24. It is there that we pick up the trail again that Adam departed from when he brought us all into, and under, sin. Scrap Deut 24:1-3 completely and go back to Genesis 2:24 and suddenly Jesus’ condemnation of divorce ‘for any cause’ makes perfect sense.

The trouble with us Christians is that we are unable to stay the course with Christ, and we settle for a lower standard of ‘perfection’, and part of that sub-standard existence is to dabble in the world and conform to its alternative life-style. Divorce certificates can only be issued by Satan; not by God, and not by His Church.

It will take some time, for some Christians, before the penny drops that ‘divorce’ can never happen. Men go through the motion of issuing them but nothing is altered: the one-flesh union is still in existence, and will be until death severs it. Nothing else can sever it. Christians are living in an unreal world if they think that Satan, through the State, can sever their one-flesh unions. This logic was so clear to Jesus that He was able to declare all remarriages as adulterous relationships. And so they are, because the one-flesh union continues to exist after the granting of the Divorce Certificate. Jesus’ logic is so compelling that it is unanswerable. There is no crack in His logic. There are no exceptions in His condemnation of all grounds for divorce. I can only follow the strength of His logic and the clarity of His absolutist position. So here I stand, I can do no other.

My conclusions about exclusion from the Kingdom follow on from Jesus’ teaching that no adulterer or fornicator will enter the Kingdom. He has made this statement, not me. Those who challenge Jesus will have to face Him one day and explain where He went wrong. I would not like to be there when they make their case! It is wrong to counter Jesus’ teaching that adulterers, on His definition, will not be in His Kingdom.

There is a spiritual logic in Jesus’ teaching that men must forgive men all their sins, seventy times seven, which would rule out entertaining divorce, which would be incompatible with this teaching. The debate over whether one small Greek word should, or should not, be in Matthew 19:9, to admit or omit divorce, misses the point that the whole tenor of Jesus’ teaching is against divorce. It is a contrary teaching. He offers to come and abide in the believer; to give us a new spirit, and a new nature, and a new heart. He lifts us out of ourselves to become sons of God. We no longer live at the level of the ordinary man of the world, who lives without the Spirit of Christ. To hold back forgiveness for sexual sins within a marriage is to slip back into an unregenerate state of mind. It is to walk in darkness.

POINT THREE

COMMENT] “Purely pragmatically, one would have to concede that some believers are in such a remarriage situation and yet continue to display the fruit of the Spirit, a passion for Christ and effectiveness in witness and service. Such evidence cannot be irrelevant to our exposition of Scripture, whilst also conceding that eisegesis is unacceptable.”

LMF] “…Such evidence cannot be irrelevant to our exposition of Scripture.” An argument from results is never a safe argument. Satan can appear as an angel of light. Ministers can preach the Gospel for a life-time and do many miracles in Christ’s name; but the verdict is still the same, “I never knew you. Depart from Me you workers of iniquity.” Iniquity is a state of mind. It is the refusal to humbly bow the intellect to Christ’s clear teaching; a mental reservation not to go along with Jesus in every aspect of His teaching; to hold back. To distance oneself from His more ‘extreme’ doctrines (as they would see it). This is iniquity, and this will lead to Jesus’ condemnation, “I never knew you.” We need to be one with Him, as He was with the Father.

We must throw in our lot completely on the side of Jesus, and follow the logic of His teaching, because it is good and agreeable to our renewed minds, and because He always knows best.

I’ve been aware of the need to counter the instinctive ‘natural justice’ reaction of Christians to resort to divorce when faced with horrific domestic situations. It is a knee-jerk reaction. But the reaction is due to an acceptance of divorce as a reality of life in the world, which is then wrongly imported into Christ’s Kingdom, where it is totally out of place. This is the danger of not daily distancing oneself from divorce per se, and always regarding it as the goal of Satan.

But when all is said and done, there remains a very important point in the question: What about those who remarried out of ignorance? Yahweh addressed the issue of sins of ignorance in Leviticus 4:1–6:7. Under the Law, no forgiveness is given for such sins, until the person concerned is made aware of his sin. He must then take immediate steps to be forgiven and, no doubt, heed the
injunction of Jesus, “Go, and sin no more.” Once the person concerned has been made aware of his sin he cannot repeat it, as this would be a deliberate sin.

In the case of Christians living under grace, the blood of Jesus Christ will surely cover all sins of ignorance. But once the person concerned has been made aware of his sin he cannot repeat it, as this would be a deliberate sin. Divorce is such a sin. Remarriage is such a sin while the spouse is still alive.

3.12. Letter 12. Can the Christian husband ignore the ‘No reconciliation’ command in Deuteronomy 24:4, and be reunited with his divorced wife?

In the Corinthian church the man who ‘had [sex] with his father’s wife’ (his mother-in-law) may have done so under the mistaken belief that the entire Mosaic Law was to be consigned to the bust-bin of history. His specific sin is condemned, and he is cursed by God in Deuteronomy 27:20, or 23, and his sin remains condemned under the New Covenant (1 Cor 5:1). This teaches us that the moral aspect of the law of Moses was not abolished with the death of the Lord Jesus. How much of the Mosaic Law is still binding on gentile Christians?

If some Christians feel that they can truly forgive their adulterous partner but cannot take them back after they have remarried, because the idea of reconciliation is still an abomination to God, I can understand that because it is grounded in the mind and sensibilities of God.

Deuteronomy 24:4 can be translated as (a) ‘because it [the idea of reunion] is an abomination,’ or (b) ‘because she [the remarried woman] is an abomination in the eyes of Yahweh.’ Note that in God’s eyes the initiative to be reconciled to a former wife rests with, or comes from, the husband, not from the divorced wife. God directs His instruction to the husband, not to the wife. This is in keeping with His regard for the male as the head of the wife. Generally, it is up to the male to decide everything about his own life, unless he is overruled by God, as appears to be the case in this instance.

Yahweh presents His relationship with Israel under the analogy or metaphor of husband and wife in the book of Hosea. God could use the term ‘divorce’ as a metaphor, because there was no literal marriage that could be divorced. But the impact of the metaphor would register deeply because divorce was as common then as it is today, and everybody is familiar with the finality of divorce.\(^59\)

Yahweh’s wife, Israel, committed adultery against Him (by worshipping other gods). And true to the metaphor, He declares ‘she is not my wife and I am not her husband’ (Hos 2:2). She falls on hard times, and then remembers her kind, generous, loving Husband and resolves, “I will go and return back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now” (Hos 2:7). Yahweh does not reject her on the grounds of His ‘No reconciliation’ command in Deuteronomy 24:4, but lovingly accepts her back again.

Yahweh uses Hosea’s domestic situation to convey the same truth that reconciliation to Him is always possible. He instructed Hosea to find his adulterous wife and forgive her and take her back. Hosea tells us that he had to buy her back for fifteen pieces of silver plus some foodstuffs, and he brought her under his roof again, yet she is called an ‘adulteress’ in 3:1. She was a defiled woman, and an abomination in the eyes of Yahweh, yet she is reconciled to her first husband, contrary to the command in Deuteronomy 24:4. This shows that God is not subject to His own laws, but we are subject to His laws.

If God promises to abide in the Christian, then surely the spirit of forgiveness and a willingness to be reconciled where there is true repentance, will be present in the Christian too, and therefore reconciliation is possible. Hosea’s situation was a real, historical, domestic situation, not some unhistorical metaphor. Under Law this reconciliation could not have taken place, but under Grace, this reconciliation can take place, because a new spirit has been put in man and woman, which can overcome sin and hurt.

3.13. Letter 13. Can I consider my partner ‘dead’ if they commit adultery?

Often this question comes in the form of: “Jesus did not allow divorce for fornication (adultery) because the Mosaic law already had in place a penalty for such a sin, and it was death.

\(^59\) Those who insist and persist in introducing divorce among Christ’s followers love to point to God divorcing the northern tribes. They conveniently forget that it is a very apt metaphor to illustrate the breakdown in the relationship between God and Israel. There was no literal divorce between Yahweh and Israel because there was no literal marriage that could be divorced.
Since we do not practise the death penalty for adulterers, in most countries shouldn’t we regard the erring spouse as ‘dead’ in the eyes of God? Paul wrote: ‘But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives’ (1 Tim 5:6; cf. Lk 15:32). So why can’t I regard my erring spouse as if s/he is dead, because the marriage is over, in God’s eyes? Under the Mosaic Law, once the erring spouse has been executed the innocent party was free to remarry.”

Before I answer this question directly we need to take a step back and consider Jesus’ relationship to the Law. Up until the Law was given to Moses, the way to please God was to obey His commands and ponder His statements. But when mankind became increasingly lawless and indifferent to anything God said, and they went their own way, God did not give up on His bigger vision—His long-term goal of being reconciled to all mankind through the substitutionary death of His Son (Rom 5:10⁶⁶). Since that part of His plan of salvation lay far in the future, God introduced the Law as a means of holding His nation in check from becoming so corrupt that the promises He made to Adam, Noah and Abraham would not be able to be fulfilled through genealogical confusion.

The Torah was a temporary measure. It was never intended to replace ‘the righteousness of faith’ that remained in existence from Adam to Jesus. However, by introducing ‘the righteousness of Law’ this was intended to be in addition to, or in support of, the ‘righteousness of faith’. In other words, the man walking by faith was now required to keep the Law. This resulted in two categories of Israelites. In the first category were those who ‘lived by faith’, who then had to obey the Mosaic Law. In the second category were the vast majority, who were not living by faith, but who set about to obey the Law as an end in itself. This obedience would not save one of them, because it was impossible to keep the Law. Theoretically, therefore, if any Israelite could keep the Law perfectly, he would have been saved through his own efforts (through works, as Paul calls it).

What Jesus did in becoming a Jew was to put Himself in the shoes of a Jew and keep the Law perfectly. In that way He obtained the righteousness that is through the Law. It is this righteousness that is on offer to all men. We please God through our proxy—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now once Jesus had kept the Mosaic Law fully, there was no need for anyone to try and keep it perfectly. Jesus effectively closed down the Law as a means of pleasing God. The way to please God was to take Jesus’ righteousness as a gift from Him, and offer that to God. In this way we can be said to have kept the Mosaic Law perfectly. We did not do it ourselves, we did it through Jesus—our proxy.

Jesus’ attitude toward the Law of His Father is that it has ceased to be an independent way to please God. But the Law itself is good, if it is used lawfully (1 Tim 1:8). The Law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14). But, as Paul put it, “We are dead to the Law” (Rom 7:4) as regards seeing it as an alternative way of pleasing God, without having to go through Jesus Christ. Romans 7:6, “and now we have ceased from the Law, that [Law] being dead in which we were [once] held, so that we serve [God & Christ] in newness of spirit.”

It is clear from this short summary that the Law was never designed for the man of faith. It was designed specifically for sinners, not for saints. The saints before Moses were saved by faith. Hence Paul can say: “that for a righteous man law is not set, but for lawless and insubordinate persons, ungodly and sinners,” (1 Tim 1:9). He also said: “so that the law became our child-conductor — to Christ, that by faith we may be declared righteous,” (Gal. 3:24). The Mosaic Law only came into existence “on account of the transgressions, . . . till the seed should come to which the Promise had been made,” (Gal 3:19). That ‘seed’ was Christ.

It is clear from reading the Mosaic Law that God introduced a lower standard of behaviour that was within the reach of the unregenerate man to abide by. It was just possible to be declared a ‘righteous person’ by God, if they could keep every single law perfectly, without one slip up.

Paul recognised that the Law contained divine wisdom, advice on all sorts of topics, and instruction on hygiene, social networking, marriage, warfare, economics, etc., etc. Consequently, there is no reason why we may not avail ourselves of this body of wisdom. What we must never do is make it a condition of salvation or carry over Moses’s introduction of divorce. That is the thing Paul is battling against all the time with Jewish Christians in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. He wants them to take advantage of its wisdom, but he is dead set against those who see it as a condition of salvation.

Christians are confused over the Law. Are they under it, and obliged to obey its every precept? No, shouts Paul, at them. Never, never, never. Should they then ignore it altogether? Paul’s answer is the same. No. The Law is good. The Law is spiritual, but be very careful how you use it, he adds. Paul is clear that when God designed the Law, He lowered His standards to bring His

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⁶⁶ See also 2 Cor 5:14, 18; 1 Tim 4:10; Tit 2:11; Heb 2:9; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14, 16; Jude 3.
‘righteousness’ within the ability of sinners to keep the letter of the law. When His chosen nation of sinners found it impossible to keep certain of His standards which He had introduced to Adam in the Garden of Eden, such as ‘one wife for life’ and no option to divorce, the Israelites rejected this higher standard and forced through a system of divorce. Moses was constrained to accede to the demands of hard-hearted husbands and permit their lower standard to prevail (Dt 24:1-4). God, however, stepped in and put a rider on their lower standard and demanded that once they divorced their wives they could never be reconciled to them again, while they lived. This rider effectively sealed them in their sin, thus making it impossible for these adulterers to be saved (or enter His ‘rest’, as the writer to the Epistle of the Hebrews put it). This was a slap in their face. God reluctantly accepted the lower level that they wanted to live by because they were fleshly, carnal, unspiritual, and unregenerate.

But Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was done away with when Jesus fulfilled the perfect law of God. Jesus has re-introduced the pre-Mosaic standard that God had demanded of all men from Adam to Moses. This is why Jesus went back to Genesis 2:24 for the original standard that was God’s will for all mankind. And it is to this pre-Law standard that all Christians are obliged to live by. It they try to do this in the flesh, then they are not born-again. If they are born-again, and the Spirit of Christ lives in their moral bodies, then it will be easy, or should be. If they are backsliding Christians then Christ’s standard becomes an oppressive burden, and they will remarry to satisfy the flesh. If they are spiritual, and Christ truly dwells in them, then it will be a delight to abstain from all extra-marital relationships and devote their new found freedom to serving Christ (1 Cor 7:27, 37). All marriages following divorce violate the normal standard of behaviour that should characterise all born-again Christians.

The danger facing every Christian is to diminish the influence of Christ’s presence within him or her by allowing the old man to come alive again. If he does come alive again, then that Christian will quench the Holy Spirit residing within him or her, and things will start to disintegrate. He will become more and more worldly in his thinking, and in the end he will return to his unregenerate state, in which he will be hardened by God (2 Pet 2:22; Heb 6:1-6; 10:26).

Paul, John and Peter make the case that being ‘born-again’ is such an other-worldly experience that it cannot be mimicked, though many try. It is truly a transforming experience. The expression, “All things become new,” does not do justice to the experience. If a man does not experience this transformation, he will find it very difficult to follow Jesus’ teaching. This experience lifts one to a higher plane of values. It provides the Christian with an elevated platform from which he can evaluate all things and see how he can use everything to form a very close relationship with his Saviour. To be a Christian one must have the Spirit of Christ living in him, and directing all he does to the glory of God.

If he is spiritual he will never go back to the lower standard of the Mosaic Law and seek to take advantage of its lower expectations to remarry, or to avoid the explicit teaching of the Spirit in the New Testament writings on other topics that he finds a nuisance.

Now with this as background, I come to question: “Why can’t I regard my erring spouse as if s/he is dead, because the marriage is over, in God’s eyes? Under the Mosaic Law, once the erring spouse has been executed the innocent party was free to remarry.” This solution has often been given by Christian counsellors.

The error here is that such a counsellor has gone back to something which “has become obsolete and old” (Heb 8:13), namely, the Mosaic Law. This was the first mistake. He is trying to take advantage of a pre-Christian dispensation.

The second error was to try to apply the Mosaic Law in Christ’s Church. The Lord Jesus abolished the death penalty. Independently of the Law, He introduced His own penalty for departures from standards which should be innate, and normal, in every one who claims to be born-again. We see this in the case of the man who committed incest in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Under the obsolete, Mosaic Law, this violation would have received the death penalty. Under Christ, this violation is punished by excommunication, because for someone to stoop to such a low level of behaviour is clear evidence that the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in him, therefore he is excommunicated because he is not of the Body of Christ, or if he is of the Body of Christ, and has slipped up, then this severe punishment will bring him to his senses, and produce repentance (hopefully). If no repentance comes, then his excommunication fits his unspiritual condition.

The third error is typical of those who want to get round Scripture when it stands in the way of marrying another spouse. A pseudo-principle of interpretation is invented to get round the road-block of the wording of Scripture. Christians are encouraged to use their imagination of going

*See section 1.8.4. below for a fuller treatment of the Christian’s use of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.*
through the court scene in Moses’ day where the adulteress is stoned to death. After her death the husband is free to remarry. And you arrive at the place where you want to be—free, to remarry.

How selective is this kind of interpretation? How does one apply the law of suspicion whereby the wife is forced to undergo the ordeal of drinking the dust of the ground (see Num 5:11-31)? How does one apply the law that if a man is ‘wounded, bruised or cut in the private member’ or is illegitimate that he can not be member of God’s Assembly (Dt 23:1-2)? Satan was not above quoting Scripture when he tempted the Lord Jesus to divert from the path God set for Him.

Jesus upheld the law of the death penalty because the Law had not yet been abolished in His life-time through His death on the cross. He did not commute the death penalty to divorce (as the Jews did) during His life-time. But once the Law had been made obsolete, then His own New Covenant law replaced it. The death of Jesus severed His connection with the Mosaic Law. If Jesus was faced with the woman taken in adultery (Jn 8) after His resurrection, He would not have told the Jews to stone her.

Luther and other Reformers took a long time to disentangle themselves from the Mosaic Law, but today we are a lot clearer on the attitude we should adopt toward the Mosaic Law, and the relationship between the Law and Gospel.

In the eyes of God all lawfully wedded couples, Christian and non-Christian, are in one-flesh union ‘till death do us part’. We have only ‘one wife for life’. The law of Christ is that all lawful unions are under the same law, namely, only death can separate the spouses, and any second marriage, while the spouses are still alive, is an adulterous relationship, and no adulterer or adulteress will be with Him in His Kingdom. They are excluded, see Romans 7:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of Christians in a second-marriage situation, which will prevent them from entering the Kingdom of God, but the majority of them are totally unaware of the dangerous state they are in. It is up to us who know the will of God to warn them to be separate from the unclean thing, and Jesus will welcome them back.

On the same topic, and in relation to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, I received the following question: “. . . how does one escape the logic of Martin Luther . . . that since the Law commanded death for the adulterer, one may see the erring spouse as ‘dead’ in the eyes of God?”

The error here is that Martin Luther has gone back to something which “has become obsolete and old” (Heb 8:13). This was the first mistake. He is trying to take advantage of an obsolete, pre-Christian dispensation.

The second error was to try to apply the Mosaic Law in Christ’s Church. The Lord Jesus abolished the death penalty. Independently of the Law, He introduced His own penalty for departures from standards which should be innate, and normal, in every one who claims to be born-again. We see this in the case of the man who committed incest in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Under the obsolete, Mosaic Law, this violation would have received the death penalty. Under Christ, this violation is punished by excommunication, because for someone to stoop to such a low level of behaviour is clear evidence that the Spirit of Christ does not dwell in him, therefore he is excommunicated because he is not of the Body of Christ, or if he is of the Body of Christ, and has slipped up, then this severe punishment will bring him to his senses, and produce repentance (hopefully). If no repentance comes, then his excommunication fits his unspiritual condition.

The third error is typical of those who want to get round Scripture when it stands in the way of marrying another spouse. A pseudo-principle of interpretation is invented to get round the road-block of the wording of Scripture. The one looking for an argument to justify getting a divorce is encouraged to use his/her imagination of going through the court scene in Moses’ day where the adulterer/adulteress is stoned to death. S/he is then told to reckon their erring partner to be ‘dead’, and so they are now free to remarry, according to Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39. How selective is this kind of interpretation? How does one apply the law of suspicion whereby the wife is forced to undergo the ordeal of drinking the dust of the ground to prove her innocence or guilt (Num 5:12-31)? These laws are obsolete. Christians cannot pick and choose what to accept and what to reject out of the obsolete laws of Moses.

Jesus upheld the law of the death penalty because the Mosaic Law had not yet been abolished in His life-time through His death on the cross. He did not commute the death penalty to divorce (as the Jews did) during His life-time. But once the Law had been made obsolete, then His own New Covenant law replaced it. The death of Jesus severed His connection with the Mosaic Law. If Jesus was faced with the woman taken in adultery (Jn 8) after His resurrection, He would not have told the Jews to stone her.

We live in an adulterous age, and it might not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly a marriage taking place between two virgin persons. God can and does forgive all pre-marital
fornication, so that fallen persons can be forgiven, and enter their marriage as a one-flesh Christian couple. But once married, they are married until death parts that union. If for some reason they separate, then it is just that, a separation, not a dissolution of the one-flesh union. They either come together again, or they stay celibate. Such is the sanctity of marriage in the eyes of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
APPENDIX A

THE TRANSLATION OF MATTHEW 19:9 IN THE ENGLISH VERSIONS

The object of this section is to show that while the majority of English translations are based on a Greek text which has thrown out Erasmus’s unsupported addition of El in Matthew 19:9, they have not thrown out his unbiblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. In this selection there are thirty-eight translations62 which have retained the wrong translation, and only three that translate the Majority Text.

AMERICAN KING JAMES VERSION (AKJV) And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoever marries her which is put away does commit adultery.

AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (1901) (ASV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery: he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery.

ANALYTICAL-LITERAL TRANSLATION (ALT) “But I say to you”, whoever divorces his wife [but] not for sexual sin and marries another commits adultery, and the one having the one having been divorced commits adultery.”

AUTHORISED VERSION (1611). And I say vnto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoseo marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery.63

BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH (1949/1964) (BBE) And I say to you, Whoever puts away his wife for any other cause than the loss of her virtue,64 and takes another, is a false husband: and he who takes her as his wife when he is put away, is no true husband to her.

BIBLE IN WORLDWIDE ENGLISH (BWE) But I tell you this. No man may send his wife away unless she has committed adultery. If he does, and if he marries another woman, he commits adultery. And if a man marries a woman who has been sent away by her husband, he commits adultery.’

CRANMER (1539). I saye vnto you: whosoever putteth awaye his wyfe (except it be for fornicacion) and marieeth another, breaketh wedlocke. And whoso marieeth her which is deuorsed, doeth commyt aduoutrye.65

DOUAY-RHEIMS AMERICAN EDITION (1899) (DRA) (19:8) And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.

DOUAY-RHEIMS BIBLE, CHALLONER REVISION (1899) (DRC) And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.

DOOAY-RHEIMS BIBLE (Jubilee 2000) (Jubilee 2000) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except [it be] for fornication and shall marry another, commits adultery, and whosoever marries her that is put away commits adultery.

ENGLISH JUBILEE 2000 BIBLE (Jubilee 2000) And I say to you, that whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever is marrying a divorcee commits adultery.”

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (ESV) And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” [in red ink]

62These were taken from: http://crosswire.org/study/parallelstudy.
63This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841).
64Does the same apply to the man? If he has had sex before marriage has he lost his virtue? From the woman’s point of view the text would then read: “Whoever puts away her husband for any other cause than the loss of his virtue, and takes another, is a false wife: and she who takes him as her husband when he is put away, is no true wife to him.”
65This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841). The six versions are Wiclif (1380), Tyndale (1534), Cranmer (1539), Genevan (1557), Anglo-Rhemish (1582), and Authorised (1611).
GOD'S WORD TRANSLETION (GosdWord) I can guarantee that whoever divorces his wife for any reason other than her unfaithfulness is committing adultery if he marries another woman.”

GENEA (1557). I say therfore vnto you, that whosoever shal put away his wyfe (except it be for whoredome) and marye another, committeth aduoutrie. And whosoever marrieth her which is diuorced, doeth commit adulterie.66

RHEIMS (1582). And I say to you, that whosoever shal dimisme his vvife, but for fornication, and shal mary an other, doth committe aduoutrie; and he that shal mary her that is dimissed, committeth aduoutrie.67

GENEA BIBLE (1560) (Geneva1560) I say therefore vnto you, that whosoever shal put aweise his wyfe, except it be for whoredome, and marie another, committeth adulterie: and whosoever marieth her which is diuorced, doeth commit adulterie.68

GENEA BIBLE (1599) (Geneva1599) I say therefore vnto you, that whosoever shal put away his wife, except it be for whoredome, and marry another, committeth adulterie: and whosoever marieth her which is diuorced, doeth commit adulterie.

GREEN'S LITERAL TRANSLATION (LITV) And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, if not for fornication, and shall marry another, that one commits adultery. And the one who marries her who was put away commits adultery.

GREEN'S MODERN KING JAMES VERSION (MKJV) And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery.

HEBREW NAMES VERSION OF THE WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE (HNV) I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.”

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD VERSION (ISV) “I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (red ink)

JAMES MURDOCK'S TRANSLATION OF THE SYRIAC PESHITTA (Murdock) And I say to you, That whoever leaveth his wife not being an adulteress, and taketh another, committeth adultery. And whoever taketh her that is divorced, committeth adultery.

JOHN Wycliffe BIBLE (1395) (Wyclife) And Y seie to you, that whosoeuer leueth his wyff, but for fornycaicoun, and weddith another, doith letcherie; and he that weddith the forsakun wyff, doith letcherie. (See the WICLIF translation below.)

KING JAMES VERSION (1679) with Strongs Numbers and Morphology (KJV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (red ink)


ERASMUS'S LATIN (1527) Dico autem ubis, quod quicumque repudiauerit uxorem suam, nisi ob stuprum69, & aliam duxerit, est commitit adulterium. Et qui repudiaret duxerit: is adulterium committit.

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66 This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841).

67 This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841).

68 Margin note: It was to auode the cruelite, that men wolde haue vsed towards their wiues, if theye had beene forced to retaine them in their displeasure, furie and malice. The note at Mt 5:32 reads: In that he giueth her leauie to mary another by y' [that] testimonial.

69 Note the change from “fornicationem” in the Vulgate to “stuprum” in Erasmus. The difference is that “fornicationem” is a sexual sin, but “stuprum” can embrace any dishonourable or disgraceful act, either sexual or non-sexual. The term ‘stuprum’ is not used of dealings with prostitutes, according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary. It can include lewdness, debauchery, defilement and violation. Erasmus may have been attempting to include all the reasons inherent in the term ‘an indecent matter’ in Deut 24:1-4, which the rabbis believed was not confined to sexual sins. If the wife burnt the food, this was grounds for divorce, because it was a disgraceful act in the eyes of the husband. By using the term ‘stuprum’ Erasmus opened the door to divorce for ‘every reason’ which was the question the Pharisees asked Jesus in Mt 19:3.
MONTGOMERY NEW TESTAMENT (Montgomery) “And I tell you that any man who divorces his wife for any cause except her unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery.”

RESTORED NAME KING JAMES VERSION (RNKJV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

REVISED KING JAMES NEW TESTAMENT (RkJNT) And I say to you, Whoever shall divorce his wife, except for unchastity, and shall marry another, commits adultery.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (RSV) “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.”

REVISED WEBSTER VERSION (1833) (RWebster) And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, except for immorality, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoever marrieth her who is put away committeth adultery.

THE COMMON EDITION: NEW TESTAMENT (Common) And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

THE EMPHASIZED BIBLE by J. B. Rotherham (Rotherham) And I say unto you—Whosoever shall divorce his wife, saving for unfaithfulness, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.

THE LIVING ORACLES NT (LO) Therefore, I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for whoredom, and marries another, commits adultery: and whoever marries the woman divorced, commits adultery.

TISCHENDORF’S EIGHTH EDITION GNT (Tisch) [This does not have the Greek εἰ (EI).]

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

TYNDALE (William Tyndale Bible) (1534). I saye therefore vnto you, whosoever putteth awaye his wyfe (except it be for fornicalacion) and maryeth another, breakeith wedlocke. And whosoever maryeth her which is divorced, doeth commyt advoutry.70

UPDATED KING JAMES VERSION (UKJV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away does commit adultery.

WEBSTER BIBLE (Webster) And I say to you, Whoever shall put away his wife, except for lewdness, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoever marrieth her who is put away, committeth adultery.

WESTCOTT-HORT (WHAC) ] [The text does not add the Greek word EI (εἰ). Westcott-Hort did not publish an English translation of their text.]

WEYMOUTH NT (1912) (Weymouth) And I tell you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except her unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery.”

WICLIF (Wycliff) (1380) and I seye to yow that euer leue his wif but for fornycacioun, and weddith another: doith lecherie, and he that weddith the foresakenwiif doith lecherie.71 (See the ‘John Wycliffe Bible’ above.)

WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE (WEB) I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.

YOUNG’S LITERAL TRANSLATION (1898) (YLT) And I say to you, that, whoever may put away his wife, if not for whoredom, and may marry another, doth commit adultery; and he who did marry her that hath been put away, doth commit adultery.

CORRECT TRANSLATIONS

MCFALL’S VERSION. Now I say to you that who, for example, may have divorced his wife—he may not have divorced2 her for fornication—and may have married another woman, he

70 This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841).
71 This has been taken from The English Hexapla, Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1841).
becomes adulterous by marrying her. And the man having married a divorced wife, he becomes adulterous by marrying her.

Alternatively:

**MCFALL’S VERSION.** Now I say to you that who, for example, may have divorced his wife—not even for 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.

**CONSERVATIVE VERSION (ACV)** And I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery. And he who married her who has been divorced commits adultery.

**DARBY BIBLE** (1889) (Darby) But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery; and he who marries one put away commits adultery.

Historical note on English translations.

In the Anglo-Saxon period the NT was translated into Old English, mainly in the time of Ælfric (10th-11th cent.) In the Middle English period the translation of the entire Bible into English was accomplished by Wycliffe (c. 1382). This was based on the Latin Vulgate. The Purvey Revision of Wycliffe’s translation by John Purvey (c. 1354–c. 1421) filled the gap for the next 250 years. The Provincial Council at Oxford in 1408 prohibited English translations of the Bible on pain of excommunication and trial for heresy. From the 16th cent. onwards (except for Coverdale) all English translations were based on Erasmus’s Greek NT. Due to the 1408 ban on translations, Tyndale had to go to the continent to complete his English translation in 1525. Tyndale and Erasmus died in the same year, 1536. In 1549 the Book of Common Prayer was published in English, and a revised edition of the Great Bible placed in every church in England.

Geneva in the 1550’s was a centre for biblical textual scholarship, from whence came the Greek NT of Robert and Henry Stephens [Estienne] and Theodore Beza (1556). The leaders of the English church in Geneva produced the Geneva Bible in April/May 1560 after two years. This translation was heavily dependent on Tyndale’s translation published by Richard Jugge in 1552, and the Great Bible. Elizabeth came to the throne on 17 November, 1558, and many Protestant church leaders flocked back to England. The Great Bible was the official Bible placed in all the churches in England. The Geneva Bible was intended for the ordinary man, hence it was divided into verses for convenience, with brief marginal comments ‘on all the hard places’. It had five maps, also a chronology from Adam to Christ. The Great Bible was revised to become the Bishop’s Bible in 1568. In statistical terms the amount of material carried over into the AV is as follows:__

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wycliffe versions, including English Sermons</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyndale’s work, including the Matthew Bible</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverdale’s work, including Great Bibles</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva Bible and Geneva New Testament</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop’s Bible and its revision</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other versions before 1611</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>61%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King James Bible, new material</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72 The use of the Greek negative particle μη [MH] cannot be followed by the indicative mood. Here, the context permits the repetition of the previous subjunctive verb, ‘may have divorced’. See Appendix B for a fuller explanation of this point.

73 This is ambiguous. It could be taken as an exception, or it could be taken as ruling out divorce specifically for fornication. If the latter, then it would be a correct translation.

74 This is ambiguous. It could be taken to mean ‘not counting for fornication’, in which case it would allow divorce for fornication.

75 From Adam to Noah’s Flood was 1656 years; from the Flood to Abraham was 363 years and 10 days; from Abraham departing from Ur to the Exodus was 430 years [so only 220 years in Egypt]; from the Exodus to Solomon’s Temple was 480 years; from the Temple to the Babylonian captivity was 419 years and a half; from then to the rebuilding of Jerusalem was 143 years; from then to Christ was 483 years. The total from Adam to Christ was 3974 years 6 months, and 10 days.

There is much evidence that both the unlettered clergy and the laity relied on the notes in the Geneva Bible for the proper interpretation of Scripture.
APPENDIX B

AN EXPLANATION FOR THE AUTHOR’S LITERAL TRANSLATION OF MATTHEW 19:9

The author’s fairly literal translation of Matthew 19:9 reads: “Now I say to you that who, for example,7 may have divorced his wife—he may not have divorced her for 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.”

Words in italic font have been supplied to bring out the sense of the Greek.

Matthew has an addition, which Mark has left out. Matthew noted that in the question put to Jesus the Pharisees asked “if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause.” Mark omitted “for every cause”, and he omitted the so-called exception clause. It would appear that both are connected. Mark rightly understood Jesus’ absolutist position on the issue of divorce, as one that denied “any cause”, so he omitted “for every cause”, and omitted “not for fornication” because it was redundant and/or irrelevant.

Matthew, on the other hand, is fully aware of the trap in the words “for every cause”, and he is sharp to notice that Jesus replied directly to the query by denying their prime grounds for granting their divorces, namely, fornication, in the words, “not even for fornication”. This simple addition by Jesus conveyed and established His absolutist position. To the Pharisees’ question: “Can a man divorce for every cause?” Jesus’ devastating answer was, “Not for fornication (μνη επί πόρνεια).” So, if they could not get a divorce for fornication then they could not get it for any lesser sin. Those three Greek words spell the end of the Mosaic Era and the emergence of the Kingdom of God—the Church Age. As Jesus Himself put it: The Kingdom of God has arrived. A completely new life-style had been introduced to planet Earth. A higher level of existence, of life, is now attainable for those seeking after God. Consequently, Matthew and Mark are united in presenting Jesus as ruling out divorce “for every cause”, “not even for fornication.”

This new teaching lifted marriage to a level of sanctity and purity it had never attained since the marriage of Adam and Eve in their unfallen state. Christian marriage has reintroduced that original marriage state into the world, where it is now a picture of the betrothal relationship that exists between Christ and His bride Church (Eph 5:32-33). The reestablishment and reemergence of the original state of marriage was one of the gifts that Jesus the Messiah brought with Him (cf. Eph 4:8).

The Lord’s reintroduction of God’s original intention for a ‘holy and unblemished’ marriage among His followers was truly a new thing in the earth. It could only exist among His followers, not in the ‘world’. It is to the shame of the Church that it has allowed itself to lose sight of the high calling inherent in its distinctive view of marriage, and has dragged it down to the level of the ‘world’, where it is dissected and killed off through divorce. Christian marriage should be an insight into the unbreakable, one-flesh, marriage relationship that now exists between the Lord and His Church.

It makes no difference whether we translate Jesus’ side remark as, “—not he may have divorced her for fornication—” or, “—he may not have divorced her for fornication—”. A neater way of translating the exclusion clause would be: “—not even for fornication—”.76

In either case the text should be read as a prohibition on getting a divorce on the grounds of fornication. For fornication, Moses should not have been issuing Divorce Certificates, but Death Certificates (Lev. 20:10).

The verb, ‘may have divorced’, is in the subjunctive mood, which I have conveyed using ‘may’ to convey the idea of possibility. To understand the text one needs to identify the main clause first, which is here stated using the subjunctive mood: “Now I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife . . . and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous.” This is the main clause, and it agrees with Mark 10:12.

77 The small Greek particle (ον) means, ‘for example’, ‘suppose,’ ‘let us say,’ ‘for instance’. It introduces a hypothetical situation.

78 Even if we assume the participle ‘divorcing’ is understood here, it would read: ‘not divorcing for fornication,’ which would rule out divorce for fornication, but it would not rule out divorcing for burning a husband’s dinner (or non-fornication sins). Wouldn’t it be bizzare for Jesus to permit divorce for the latter, but not for fornication? Only if MH could be forced to mean ‘unless’ can a case be made that Jesus did make one exception to His teaching ruling out ‘all causes’ for divorce. But such a meaning would itself be exceptional in Greek. So an exceptional meaning would be required to establish an exceptional departure from Jesus’ clear statements elsewhere.
In many situations an ellipsis of the main verb often occurs in a qualifying caveat, and especially in exceptive clauses, as in Matthew 11:27, ‘which it is not lawful to him to eat, nor to those with him, except to the priests alone to eat?’ The words in italics, to eat, are repeated from the main clause. They are often redundant or pedantic, and so omitted, as here, and in the following examples.

Matthew 12:4, ‘This one does not cast out demons, except he casts out by Beelzeboul, ruler of the demons.’ Matthew 12:39, ‘A generation, evil and adulterous, seeks a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it, except it shall be given the sign of Jonah the prophet.’ Matthew 17:8 ‘and having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one, except they saw Jesus only.’

In Greek, the use of eu μή, ‘except’, is used in situations where an absolute prohibition, or statement of fact, is qualified. Compare ὁδεῖς ἁγαθὸς eu μή eu ἐς ὁ θεός, ‘No one is good except one–God’ (Mt 19:17; Lk 18:19; Mk 10:18). Matthew 11:27, ‘no one knows the Son except the Father.’

THE TWO TEXTUAL CHOICES

THE FIRST CHOICE

If Jesus was making one exception to His teaching on divorce, and if He had used eu before μή then the translation would be: “Now I say to you that who, suppose, may have divorced his wife—except he may have divorced for 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.”
THE SECOND CHOICE

If Jesus was making no exception to His teaching on divorce, and if He had not used εἰ before μην then the translation would be: "Now I say to you that who, suppose, may have divorced his wife—not he may have divorced for 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."

The overwhelming textual evidence supports the second choice, which means that from the time the Reformation Churches broke away from the Roman Catholic church in the sixteenth century, they have been teaching the opposite to what the Head of the Church taught His apostles. Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been saying the same thing all along. There never had been an exception to Jesus' teaching of 'No divorce for any cause,' not even for fornication.

Luke states Jesus' teaching using the indicative mood. His text reads: "all [=collectively/sg masc]—the man committing (pres act ptc) his woman, and marrying a different woman—she commits adultery against her ['against' his first wife; cf. Mk 10:11]. And all [=collectively/sg masc]—the man marrying (perf pass ptc acc fem sg) from a man—he commits adultery with her (i.e., with another man's wife). (Note the use of the parenthetical clause in Luke and Mark by Jesus to explain what He means by "all"). What Jesus added in Matthew 19:9 is not an exception to His total ban, but a warning (in the form of a parenthetical clause) to His Jewish audience that divorce for adultery was not permitted by God in the Torah. The Torah demanded the death penalty, not divorce.

Is it possible that Jesus had observed Jews obtaining a divorce on the grounds of adultery, which was an illegal thing to do? Jesus knew the entire sexual history of the woman at the well (Jn 4), so maybe He knew that many of His audience had obtained their divorces on allegations of fornication/adultery, which did not amount to being ‘caught in the act,’ but there was the suspicion of unfaithfulness, and this was used by men to divorce their unwanted and unloved wives.

Jesus specifically condemned divorce for adultery in the riper He embedded in His total ban. The paraphrased rider reads: "he may not have divorced for porneia," which amounts to a command. (And, by the way, we have no direct evidence that either Shammas or Hillel, or their respective 'Houses', ever gave permission to use divorce in place of the death penalty. We have only statements from hundreds of years later (after the dispersion of the nation in AD 135) that they might have done so, but these statements may or may not represent the practice of a later age. But Christian doctrine, by contrast, does not rest on such a shaky and uncertain transmission of 'truth'.)

Here is how I go about translating the Greek aorist subjunctive in my Harmony of the four Gospels. I will deal with the two terms 'subjunctive' and 'aorist' separately, because the verb used in Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:11-12 is the aorist subjunctive.

First, the 'subjunctive' is used for hypothetical, possible, uncertain, doubtful, or non-factual events or actions, by using 'can, could, would, might, may, etc.' and the verb is negated with MH (not OU). The subjunctive is generally preceded by the particle AN, as in this instance, which I have translated, as 'say' or 'suppose,' or 'for example,' to bring out the hypothetical situation Jesus is envisaging. (Note that the hypothetical nature is inherent in the verb form itself and not only in a particle used in conjunction with it, such as 'if,' or 'unless'.)

Second, the term 'aorist' refers to an action in its finished (result) form, as opposed to ongoing or incomplete action or state, hence I have used 'have' followed by the Past Tense to distinguish the aorist from the Imperfect, Perfect, or Pluperfect tenses. There is nothing in English which corresponds exactly to the aorist, but if one thinks of an action which is completed in the mind of the speaker, even though it may still be in the future or the present, or it happened in the past, this is the essence of the aorist. It is tenseless, or timeless, which throws the attention on to the verbal result itself as one which is 'done and dusted'. The aorist tells us nothing about the nature of the action itself, whether it was durative, punctiliar, drawn out, swift, slow, repeated, a one-off action, etc. The nature of the verbal action will convey this information.

Third, negation in Greek. There are specific rules governing the grammatical use of OU and MH with the different moods in Greek. There is nothing in English which corresponds to these two negatives in Greek, but, when used, they are a clear indicator which mood is intended to go with it. In the case of Matthew 19:9, the mood is set by the preceding verb, 'he may have put away,' which is to be repeated after MH, hence my precise translation. The indicative mood is not an option in this context.

Fourth, negative commands in Greek. In Greek the negative command is made up of MH plus the subjunctive (present or aorist). It is not made up of OU plus the indicative (present or aorist).
The subjunctive would normally be in the 2nd pers, ‘You may not have divorced your wife.’ But in a 3rd person situation, as in Matthew 19:9, the negative imperative would still be MH+subjunctive, ‘He may not have divorced his wife.’

I have brought out the two main elements of the aorist subjunctive, namely, (1) its doubtful or hypothetical nature, by the use of ‘say . . . may’; and (2) the ‘result’ of the aorist verb by using ‘have’ + past tense. Consequently, my translation reads: “Now I say to you that who, say, may have divorced his wife (note, he may not divorce for fornication) and may have married another woman, he becomes adulterous.” Note the repetition of the aorist subjunctive verb in square brackets because of the use of the particular negative form that is used in conjunction with it, i.e., MH.

However, if we remove the hypothetical nature of Jesus’ use of the subjunctive mood to frame His teaching, here is a paraphrased version. “Now I declare to you that any person who has divorced his wife (note, he may not divorce for fornication) and has married another woman, he becomes an adulterer.” This is what Jesus had already stated in Luke 16 and Mark 10, but without the parenthetical reminder that it was against the Law of God to obtain a divorce for adultery.

Matthew’s Gospel, of course, was written for a Jewish audience worldwide. Matthew’s audience would have known that both partners in an adulterous act had to be stoned to death. Even if it is claimed that the Jews could not apply the death penalty for religious matters, which is incorrect, their legal mind would know that an adulterer would be deemed to be dead in the eyes of God and man, and you do not marry a ‘dead’ person. He is cut off from the community.

Second marriages were probably as common in Jesus’ day as they are today. He lived in an adulterous generation, but He did not shrink from calling all second marriages, while both spouses were still alive, adulterous relationships. He suffered the penalty for upsetting the majority, and the same thing will happen to any preacher who follows Jesus’ daring Gospel. For the majority of Christian leaders the cost of following Jesus is too great, so they say nothing and collect their monthly salary from His Church with no qualms.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN AND THE UNBELIEVER

Adam Clarke, in his Commentary under Matthew 5:31, makes a very perceptive comment.

Rabbi Akiba said, “If any man saw a woman handsomer than his own wife, he might put his wife away; because it is said in the Law, If she find not favour in his eyes.” Deut. xxi. 1. Josephus, the celebrated Jewish historian, in his Life, tells us, with the utmost coolness and indifference, “About this time I put away my wife, who had borne me three children, not being pleased with her manners.”

A. Clarke then cites a full Bill of Divorce, part of which reads, “… 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. . . .”

He adds: “A real Christian ought rather to beg of God the grace to bear patiently and quietly the imperfections of his wife, than to think of the means of being parted from her.” He notes that “what was permitted to an uncircumcised heart among the Jews, should not serve for a rule to a heart in which the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Spirit.” However, Clarke did permit divorce in the statement: “It does not appear that there is any other case in which Jesus Christ admits of divorce.” This was understandable since he was following the TR. However, he failed to understand the significant difference between what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-12.

In his comments on Matthew 19:3-12, he notes that Jesus does not answer them from Shammin or Hillel, but from Moses. “To answer a case of conscience, a man should act as Christ does here; pay no regard to that which the corruption of manners has introduced into divine ordinances, but go back to the original will, purpose and institution of God. Christ will never accommodate his morality to the times, nor to the inclination of men. What was done at the beginning is what God judged most worthy of his glory, most profitable for man, and most suitable to nature.”

SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MATTHEW 5:32 AND 19:9

Matthew 5 is an exception to blame; Matthew 19 is an exclusion to divorce. The two words that sum up the difference are ‘exception’ and ‘exclusion’.

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79 See Section 1.8. Paul on divorce and remarriage.
80 Adam Clarke, Commentary on the New Testament (3 vols.; London: J. Haddon, N.D.) Clarke finished correcting the NT in Jan. 1832, and it was published in 1834.
The exception 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 even for fornication—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 exception come in, unless she commits adultery of her own accord while still married to him, then he is not guilty for her adultery under those circumstances. But he is guilty under all other circumstances. No sin can separate a married couple. What God has joined together let not man put asunder.

In the case of Matthew 19:9, Jesus warns all men everywhere that divorce on any grounds is against God’s will for every marriage. There is no exception. Rather, there is a specific exclusion of divorce for fornication.

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 exceptive 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 article 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 the opposite. It had an exclusion clause. The Lord Jesus deliberately and pointedly excluded getting a divorce on the grounds of fornication. 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 exceptive clauses in Matthew 5 and 19. Through this exercise they will recognise that Matthew 5 is an exception for blame whereas Erasmus’s Matthew 19 is an exception for divorce. Now we know that the exception for divorce 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, which will then become an exclusion to divorce, or an exception against divorce. In other words, the Lord Jesus deliberately and pointedly excluded divorce on the grounds of fornication in Matthew 19:9. Jesus took the position that a wife is for life, and once joined physically, then only death could part a married couple.
APPENDIX C

CRITIQUE OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE


SUMMARY OF MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THIS NEW TEACHING

This book departs from the Apostolic and Early Church practice of refusing to remarry separated or divorced couples. Instead, the author falls back on rabbinical practices and exegesis of the text (particularly Dt 24:1-4, and Ex 21:1-10), in order to press for a change in the Church's universal and consistent teaching on divorce and remarriage. He believes that Jesus taught divorce was permissible to either spouse for (1) adultery, (2) desertion, (3) abuse, (4) hard-heartedness, and (5) neglect.

The author advocates that the Church can legitimately return to following the Jewish teaching on divorce and remarriage. He believes that Jesus only condemned a special 'Any Cause' divorce that Rabbi Hillel introduced before Jesus was born, and which, he claims, came to dominate Jewish life by the time Jesus commenced His ministry. He believes that the question put to Jesus in Matthew 19:3, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" was a tester to see if Jesus approved of Rabbi Hillel's new 'easy divorce' procedure. Everything hinges around the author's interpretation of "every cause" in Matthew 19:3, which he thinks should be viewed as a special kind of legal divorce, which should be put in quotation marks and translated as 'Any Cause', meaning 'Hillel's Any Cause Certificate'.

He believes (because he has no evidence) that the Early Church practised divorce for adultery from the start, so that there was continuity between Jesus and Moses over the issuing of divorce certificates. The Church only departed from this continuity in the second-century when it misread the legal term "Any Cause" in Matthew 19:3, as a non-legal phrase.

This is the biggest claim of the book, closely followed by the claim that when the Pharisees asked the question in Matthew 19:3, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" this was really a tester to find out what Jesus thought about the new 'Any Cause' divorce certificate recently introduced by Rabbi Hillel. The author claims that this Hillel-style divorce was rejected by Rabbi Shammay and Jesus. On these two claims hang the entire work.

These two pivotal claims will need to be examined closely before a single church leader would even begin to entertain the possibility that it presents a serious understanding of Jesus' teaching, let alone a proficient understanding of the rabbinic material itself.

If the author is correct that the Early Church departed quickly and universally from Jesus' teaching then the church is guilty of having inflicted pain on millions of men and women. It is also guilty of misrepresenting what Jesus really taught on the subject of divorce. This is a serious allegation against godly men.

The practical effect of this book is not to point the Christian 'Back to the Bible' but to point him 'Back to the Jew,' and rediscover his original roots in an old form of Judaistic Christianity which the author claims the Apostles followed. The pastoral outworking of this book would, in the eyes of the reviewer, mislead many into the sin of adultery through a second marriage while the first spouse was still alive. The author must bear the moral and practical responsibility for his new doctrine which he wants to substitute for the unanimous teaching of the Church from Apostolic times. It is irresponsible to publish a new doctrine leading to the proliferation of adultery and then blame those who follow it for not examining it for themselves. Having examined the claims made by the author to have uncovered the real teaching of Jesus on divorce, I have to conclude that this claim is false, bogus and misleading and based on poor exegesis of a corrupt Greek text.

First, the author claims to have read the passages on divorce through the eyes of contemporary Jews. A claim is not the same as a demonstration. The author has failed to read Jesus’ teaching through the eyes of His contemporaries. They clearly recognised that Jesus had abolished divorce completely, and this astonished them so greatly that they were impelled to ask the question, “Why, therefore, did Moses permit . . . ?” Consequently, in this book there is no engagement with Jesus’ own statements in which He refuses to allow divorce on any grounds in the Kingdom of God.

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81 A larger, 67-page critique of this book can be read on my web site: www.btinternet.com/~lmf12
82 A much fuller critique can be viewed on my web page at www.btinternet.com/~lmf12.
When Jesus was asked the question about permitting divorce in Matthew 19:3, He replied by asking them a question. And the question expresses His surprise that they have not read what His Father had said about marriage in Genesis 2:24. They ought to have read it, is his rebuke to them. Instead, they had focused on Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Following Jesus’ rebuke for not concentrating on Genesis 2:24, He then quotes it. But it is His deduction from this text that really surprised them. The lesson Jesus drew from this proof text was that it was illegal for any man to divorce his wife. That they understood Jesus correctly comes out in their second question: “(If you are right) Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a bill of departure and to divorce her?” They evidently saw a clear contradiction between what Moses commanded and what Jesus commanded. Jesus had overridden Moses and sidelined his teaching as obsolete and irrelevant for His followers. Jesus then undercut their own position by pointing out that the law on divorce did not come from His Father, but from Moses. And to press home His case, Jesus points out that the law did not so much come from Moses as from themselves. They demanded it. They pressed Moses to give it to them. They refused to forgive their own hearts. They hardened their hearts. Moses simply gave in to their demand. So the origin for the law of divorce sprang from the unregenerate heart of man, and not from God. It originates from sin.

Second, the author makes a bold claim, which he cannot substantiate with any evidence, that the phrase ‘every cause’ in Matthew 19:9 is a ‘highly specialised legal term’, and refers to a particular kind of divorce created by Rabbi Hillel prior to the birth of Jesus. This is pure conjecture.

Third, the author overlooked the important word ‘all’ in the Greek in Matthew 19:9. He has mistranslated it as ‘any’, with the consequent error of identifying Matthew’s ‘every cause’ with the House of Hillel’s presumed ‘Any Cause’ (which he should have translated as ‘A Cause’). The author has created the fiction of a legal divorce procedure called the ‘Any Cause’ divorce. Nowhere in rabbinic literature is the House of Hillel’s difference of exegesis with Shammai over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, captured in a slogan or catch-word phrase. The author, himself, has created the fiction of a legal divorce called ‘Any Cause’. The author has allowed himself to be misled by own creation of the phrase ‘Any Cause’, and when he then identified it with Matthew’s ‘every cause’.

Fourth, throughout his work the author refers to ‘Any Cause’ as if it was known by every Jew living in Jesus’ day. Indeed, the author claims that so well-known was the legal term that Mark felt he could omit it without confusing his readers. This conjecture and claim comes out of the imagination of the author. There is no evidence for such a claim.

Fifth, another claim without any evidence is that the House of Hillel’s interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 was universally accepted by all Jews everywhere, and that all divorces from the second century onwards were based on the House of Hillel’s interpretation. We simply have no evidence for this. This, too, emanates from the imagination of the author. The Mishnah makes no such claim.

Sixth, the House of Hillel argued that the Hebrew term dāḇār in Deuteronomy 24:1 meant ‘a thing’, which is correct. The author, however, has subtly altered ‘a thing’ to mean ‘any thing’, and from there he created the legal fiction of an ‘Any Cause’ style of divorce. If he had kept to what the House of Hillel had said, he should have conjectured that the House of Hillel created ‘A matter’ divorce. So that if someone wanted to use some fault he found in his wife, he could call it a ‘matter’, a dāḇār, and he could obtain his separation under this single word term. But the author was drawn to the translation of ‘any cause’ in the English translations, and assumed that it might refer to the House of Hillel’s ‘matter/thing/word’.

The author attributes to rabbi Hillel and rabbi Shammai (who both lived before the time of the Lord Jesus) teachings and viewpoints which the Mishnah attributes to the ‘House of Hillel’ and the ‘House of Shammai’ respectively. They are not the same thing. We have no evidence that Hillel or Shammai said anything about divorce.

Seventh, the above instance of following English translations of the primary material, led the author to make two more similar errors. He noticed that Josephus was translated as: “for whatsoever cause (καὶ διὰ ἄλλης παράδοσης αἰτίας).” The similarly with Matthew 19:9 is obvious in the English, but not in the Greek. The author clearly did not consult the Greek. The same methodological error was repeated when he noticed that Philo was translated as: “for any cause whatever [καὶ ἢ καὶ ἢ].”

See the longer critique on this point at: www.btinternet.com/~lmf12
Eighth, the similarity in the English translations, led the author to make a fundamental error. He made the following false steps. First, he took the House of Hillel’s ‘matter’ and added ‘any’ to it, to give ‘any matter’. Why? because he wanted to connect it with the words, ‘every cause’, in Matthew 19:9. He then converted his newly created ‘any matter’ into a legal phrase with initial capital letters—’Any Cause’. Why? because the question in Mark asked if it was lawful to divorce which, he says, was a nonsensical question to ask, given that Moses authorised divorce. By altering ‘every cause’ in the parallel in Matthew 19:9 to ‘Any Cause’, he could then claim that he had found a connection between Hillel’s legal term and the, allegedly, very popular ‘Any Cause’ divorce which Hillel introduced into Judean life. From this conjecture he then needed to explain why ‘every cause’ (which he misread as ‘any cause’) was omitted in Mark, so he conjured up the scenario that everyone was so familiar with the term that it could be left out. The ‘evidence’ he needed, he found in the English translations of Josephus and Philo, but this is not found in their Greek texts.

It is clear from this catalogue of errors, and from the fact that they are all connected through English translations, that the author is either slap-dash in his approach94 or he is unable to work with the primary material itself. This work is totally based on English translations, and this has proved its downfall.

Ninth, the author has a low view of the integrity, inspiration, and infallibility of Scripture when it suits his argument. This comes out clearly in Chapter 12 with his imaginative scenario of a series of ‘barriers’ through which Jesus’ teaching had to pass to reach us. However, these were no barriers to the Church because Greek was the universal language at that time. But the author needed ‘barriers’ in order to explain why Jesus’ original teaching (which the author claims to have just rediscovered) could have got lost. If one has to lessen the integrity of Scripture, and the integrity of the Apostles and the leaders who followed them, in order to facilitate the acceptance of a new doctrine, this constitutes a weakness in itself. It has the appearance of being contrived for the purpose of raising its chances of being accepted by those who are not in a position to examine its exaggerated claims.

Tenth, one marvels at the extent to which a writer will go to distort in order to gain a place for his view. The author makes the surprising assertion that: “In the context of this emphasis against sex, it was natural that the second century Church would assume that Jesus taught remarriage was equivalent to sexual immorality and would not be surprised when he [Jesus] appeared to identify remarriage with ‘adultery’” (p. 145). He also states, “The stand which the second century church took against sexual immorality made their new emphasis against remarriage (a misinterpretation of Jesus’ teaching) seem normal. Once this new interpretation had become church doctrine it was difficult for the church to come to terms with the fact that a misunderstanding had taken place” (p.154).

This illustrates compartmental thinking. No regard is taken for a full century of abiding by Jesus’ teaching on ‘no divorce, and no remarriage’. Instead, the author begins the second century as if the Church had no past history, and no tradition, and no memory of what Jesus taught. The author conjures up a scenario in which the Church was faced with promiscuous sex all around it, and it reacted so strongly against this free sex that it assumed that Jesus taught that remarriage was equivalent to sexual immorality or adultery. Even if the Church took a stand against sexual immorality, how did it get from that position to condemning all remarriages as adulterous relationships, unless they were already regarded as adulterous unions? As early as the first Council of Jerusalem, the Church took its stand against sexual immorality (Acts 15:29, ‘to abstain from fornication’), and this was before AD 70! The second century was no different from the first century in this regard.

Eleventh, there is the assumption throughout the book that the rabbis, particularly Shammai and Hillel, permitted divorce for adultery, and that in Jesus’ day the death penalty was no longer applied. (This is incorrect, see I.8.)

First, Jesus said, ‘And I say to you, that, whoever may put away his wife, except for adultery, and may marry another, commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away, commits adultery.’ (Here I have retained the mistranslation of all major English translations.) If Jesus is making provision for divorce for adultery, then He is in direct conflict with the Law of God and with His Father.

Second, even the Mishnah upheld the death penalty for adultery (Mish. Sanh. 7.3, 9; B. Sanh. 52b, 55b, 66b). The tractate Sota gives its own interpretation of the Num 5 passage, stating that the

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94 Note the errors in his translation of the Aramaic texts in chap. 13.
bitter water test ceased when adultery became common (Mish. Sota 9.9). The spirit of adultery (Sota 4b) and lust were also censured (Yoma 29a, Nid. 13b), which Jesus took from His own theology.

We simply have no evidence at all that the Jews up to the time of the codification of their laws in the Mishnah (2nd, possibly 3rd cent. AD) and the Talmuds (5th and 6th cent. AD) ever permitted divorce for adultery. It is unlikely that Jesus was the first rabbi to change the Torah Law and substitute divorce for the death penalty in the case of adultery. Indeed, the most natural translation of Matthew 19:9 shows that Jesus reinforced the Law that divorce could not be had for fornication. ‘And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife—not [he may put away] for fornication—and may marry another, commits adultery.’

That Jesus did not demand the penalty of stoning the adulterer (cf. NIDNTT 2:582–84) can be explained on a number of levels. (1) Two witnesses were required to put anyone to death (Dt 17:6). These would need to be examined by judges, not by an ordinary citizen who was shunned by the religious establishment. (2) According to the Law (Dt 22:22), the man who committed adultery with the woman also had to be stoned. If she was caught in the ‘every act’ then the man should have been too. Why was he not brought before Jesus? (3) He did not come to judge the world or individual adulterers. He was an ordinary citizen of the Jewish nation. He had no position of authority within the leadership of His nation. Besides, a trap could have been laid for Jesus by bringing forward an innocent woman and getting His permission to stone her, only to discover that He had condemned an innocent woman to death. (4) Jesus stood between the two Covenants, fulfilling the Old and introducing the New. He gave priority to the New, while fulfilling the Old in His lifestyle. He lived ‘under the Law’ to redeem those under the Law. (5) God would judge those outside the Church who committed adultery, while Christ would judge those inside the Church, who made up His Body (1 Cor 5:1; cf. Dt 27:20), the new Israel of God. All capital offences in the Old were commuted to excommunication from His Body by being ‘handed over to Satan,’ resulting in a spiritual death penalty if repentance did not follow. In this higher and deeper sense Jesus affirmed the death penalty for adultery.

Twelfth, A surprising methodological defect is the absence of a detailed study of the divorce texts themselves. This might have been done elsewhere, but in a work designed to be read by the ordinary Christian, and where the author has put forward a minority interpretation to advocate a complete break with the clear teaching of the Early Church fathers and the Catholic and Protestant Churches, one would at least expect a summary of how he now translates Matthew 5:32 and 19:9-10. Most of his work is done away from the text itself.

Thirteenth, another surprising defect about this book is that the author is so intent on reading the text through the eyes of Jesus’ contemporaries that he failed to notice that even if Matthew 19:3 was a direct reference to the House of Hillel’s teaching on divorce, and that Matthew 5:32 was a direct reference to Shammai’s teaching on divorce, the references are irrelevant to Jesus’ new teaching on divorce. Jesus dismissed in one sentence all Pharisaic teaching on the subject because they bypassed the teaching in Genesis 2:24 and settled for something less than His Father expected from all human beings. This teaching, Jesus intimated, preceded Moses’s teaching, therefore they should go back to the first thing God taught about marriage and focus on Genesis 2:24 and forget about Deuteronomy 24:1-4 completely as a sub-standard, debased and degrading level of existence, which was introduced by men for men. No wonder Jesus threw the lot out as vigorously as He threw out the money-changers in the Temple.

By abolishing divorce altogether, Jesus made it clear that a power outside man—the Holy Spirit—was needed to come in and lift man out of the sordid, hard-hearted world into which all men are born, and enable them to rise to a level of spirituality that could forgive seventy times seven. This power is what distinguishes Jesus’ followers from all other religions of the world. And Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce distinguishes His true followers from all other religions. No other religion can rise above the fleshly level of the Mosaic divorce law, for all, without exception, practise divorce with hard, unregenerate hearts. They all share in a theology of accommodation and compromise from the spiritual law written in Genesis 2:24. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ stands head and shoulders above all other religions, because it alone makes no allowance for hard-hearted and unforgiving individuals. Many attempts have been made to bring Christ down to the level of Moses, and this book, sadly, is in this category.
APPENDIX D

TEXTUAL NOTES ON MATTHEW 5:32 & 19:9

The purpose of this Appendix is to show that one cannot trust either Codex Vaticanus (B) or Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph, \( \text{\`A} \)), or both, in Matthew 5:32 and 19:1-10.

Assimilation in Matthew 5:32\textsuperscript{85}

The Nestle-Aland 27th edition at Matthew 5:32 reads: \( \pi\alpha\varsigma\ o\ \alpha\pi\omega\lambda\omega\varsigma\ ). This has the support of B L A 1. 33. K M Vulg c. f. \( ff' \). g\( ^2 \). I. m. \( Syr \text{\`a} \). Goth Arm Eth. But the rest of the evidence, including the versions, support the MT reading \( \sigma\nu\ \alpha\pi\omega\lambda\nu\varsigma\ ) which includes: \( \kappa \) D U 2 579 28 346 \( Syr_{\text{tr}}, Syr_{\text{mm}}, \) Sahidic and Bohairic. Nestle-Aland adds \( \text{“pm”} \) to this list.

The use of \( \text{“pm”} \) in the critical apparatus to represent the MT reading here is misleading, because the MT is not “divided in fairly equal strength between two (rarely three) variant reading” as \( \text{pm} \) has been designated to convey.

Von Soden’s apparatus shows that the MT reading is undivided, though, strangely, Hodges & Farstad’s siglum indicates that the Majority Text witnesses are about three-quarters in support of their printed text, for they use M (not M-pt) instead of the Gothic M (\( \text{B} \)), yet Hodges and Farstad’s text was created from von Soden’s apparatus. This shows up the weakness of constructing a major Text-type from a critical apparatus. We know there is a very definite Byzantine Text-type which rivals the Egyptian/Alexandrian Text-type, but we need the full resources of scholars to produce the Byzantine Text-type. In the meantime, where is the ‘even split’ in the MT witnesses to justify the Nestle 27th ‘permulti’ evaluation?

Jesus comments on six teachings of the ancients. The first three religious regulations point to the need to keep the tradition of the ancients at the thought-level, not just the physical level. The last three are all commands which overturn the tradition of the ancients. It would appear that the Nestle 27th preference at Mt 5:32 is due to assimilation with 5:22 and 28 (\( \pi\alpha\varsigma\ +\ \text{particle; cf. Lk 16:18} \)).

\begin{itemize}
  \item Mt 5:22 \( \\text{ο\tau\i\; \pi\alpha\varsigma\; \vartheta\varphi\gamma\zeta\omicron\varsigma\omicron\nu\varsigma\Theta} \) “the one being angry”
  \item Mt 5:26 \( \text{ο\tau\i\; \pi\alpha\varsigma\; \beta\lambda\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma\omicron\nu\varsigma} \) “the one viewing”
  \item Mt 5:32 \( \text{ο\tau\i\; \pi\alpha\varsigma\; \alpha\pi\omega\lambda\omega\varsigma\Theta} \) “the one divorcing” (= assimilation)
  \item Mt 5:34 \( \mu\eta\; \alpha\omicron\nu\omicron\sigma\omicron\varsigma\iota\sigma\omicron\varsigma\ } \) “Do not swear”
  \item Mt 5:38 \( \text{ο\alpha\nu\imath\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\iota\varsigma\Theta} \) “Do not oppose”
  \item Mt 5:44 \( \text{α\gamma\alpha\pi\omicron\tau\iota\e} \) “Love”
\end{itemize}

It is interesting that Jesus does not introduce the third teaching as coming from the ancients but just simply says, “Now it was said.” This could reflect knowledge He had that the third teaching was more recent than the other five. Where is the line to be drawn time-wise? Does the third only go back as far as Moses, and are the rest pre-Mosaic teachings?

Conclusion: Here is a case where the Egyptian text-type is split. MS B is clearly not the autograph text. It shows evidence of assimilation to the style of the first two challenges that Jesus makes to the teaching of the ancients. Despite this evidence, Nestle 27th accepts B as the likely original text.

Assimilation in Matthew 19:9

Another example of assimilation in MS B occurs at Matthew 19:9. Here MS B reads: \( \pi\omega\rho\epsilon\kappa\tau\omicron\delta\varsigma\ \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\nu\; \pi\omega\nu\epsilon\omicron\; \alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\theta\varepsilon\nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\nu\varepsilon\nu\iota\varsigma\Theta\upsilon\alpha\varsigma\ ) This has been imported directly from Matthew 5:32 without any changes and replaces the autograph text at this point.

\textsuperscript{85} Throughout this Appendix MT indicates the Majority Text, two editions of which have appeared in print, which attempt to get back to the original autograph texts. They were made by Zane C. Hodges & Arthur L. Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text (2nd ed.; Nashville: Nelson, 1985), and Maurice A. Robinson & William G. Pierpont, The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform (Southborough, MASS.; Chilton Book Publishing, 2005).

\textsuperscript{86} pm = permulti, which means “a large number of manuscripts, when the Majority Text is divided”; see Nestle’s Introduction p. 56”)
MS D, 33, f13 Sahidic, and possibly Syr\textsuperscript{ew}, plus some lesser known Greek MSS have a hybrid text. These have the first three words in agreement with MS B (\textit{parektos logou porneia}) but accept the MT text in place of the rest of MS B. This hybrid text is unlikely to be the autograph text.

If we combine the textual evidence from Tischendorf and Tregelles for the replacement of μη ἐπὶ πορνεία with παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας, and ignore the surrounding context, the evidence is as follows:

\textbf{BDC} 1. 1582. 33. 13. 69\textsuperscript{a}. 124. 788. 346. \textit{a.b.e.eff}\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{2} \textit{g}.h.m. [=Old Latin MSS] \textit{c d eff} \textit{m} = excepta causa adulterii; \textit{MS e} = praeter causam fornicationis; \textit{MSS a b eff g h q} = nisi ob causam fornic. Item \textit{Aug excepta causa fornicationis, nisi ex causa fornom., nisi ob causam fornom.; Tert\textsuperscript{is} \textit{libere om μη \varepsilon. πορν., item Athenag\textsuperscript{eg} \textit{3\textsc{v}} syr\textsuperscript{ew} sah boh cop Orig. i.ii. 647\textsuperscript{a}. 648\textsuperscript{c}. 649\textsuperscript{b}. (\textit{Clem} \textit{33\textsuperscript{v}} \textit{χωρίς λόγου πορν.} \textit{Bas\textsuperscript{eth} Chr} (et.\textsuperscript{mo} \textit{n}).)

The autograph text is that represented by all the other manuscript and versonal evidence. This evidence will include: \textit{κ Α \textit{MM W \textit{C* Θ \Delta \Pi K L N U 2 28 (69\textsuperscript{me})}} 118 157 565 579 700 1071 1424 plus some versional evidence not recorded in the apparatuses, presumably Eth Goth Arm Syr\textsuperscript{in}. In this case Nestle 27th goes with the MT as probably the reading of the original text.

\textbf{The omission of Matthew 19:9b}

MT reads: ‘And the one having married one having been divorced is adulterous with her.’ This is omitted by Nestle 27th. (The words in italics need to be supplied in English.)

Combining the evidence from Nestle 27th, Tischendorf and Tregelles for the omission, this comes to: \textit{κ Α \textit{C1 D S L 2\textsuperscript{a}} 69 1241 \textit{pc it a.b.e.eff}\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{2} \textit{g}.h. sy\textsuperscript{ks} sa b0\textsuperscript{mm}. The evidence for including the text is: \textit{B Z Μ (= EFGHMYΩ)} K U 078 700 28 157 1071 Vulg. \textit{cf.g.2.m.q. sy\textsuperscript{mah}.lbd} sy\textsuperscript{ks} bo Arm Eth Bas\textsuperscript{eth} Dm\textsuperscript{au} (Tert potius ad 5.32).

The evidence for a very slight variation on the \textit{Μ\textit{M}}-text (reading \textit{γαμ\textit{ων}} for \textit{γαμ\textit{ής}} but keeping the rest of the verse the same) is: \textit{W \textit{C* N Θ Δ \Pi 33 1424 565 1 2\textsuperscript{c} 118 1582 13 124 788 346 (579)}. This evidence should be added to \textit{B Z Μ} making a very strong case for including verse 9b, otherwise how does one explain the wide diversity of manuscripts and versions (Old Latin, Vulgate, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopic and Bohairic) in support of it?

The most obvious cause of the omission was \textit{homoioteleuton} (h.t.) for which Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) is famous (or rather, infamous). A \textit{homoioteleuton} error can occur when two words have similar endings, and the term is now used for similar beginnings as well.

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textit{καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένης γαμήσας μοιχάτας (32 letters)}]
  \item [\textit{καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένης γαμήσας μοιχάτας (31 letters) (omitted by h.t.)}]
\end{itemize}

Here two lines end with the same Greek word \textit{μοιχάτας}. The underlined text has accidentally dropped out of the manuscript. The length of line would be no problem. P\textsuperscript{45} has 51 letters per line; P\textsuperscript{66} has 25 letters per line; and P\textsuperscript{35} has 30 letters per line.

To counter the strong evidence of the Majority Text the theory put forward is that the fact that B reads ‘\textit{μοιχάτας} only once (at the conclusion of the combined clauses) makes it more probable that the text was expanded by copyists who accommodated the saying to the prevailing text of 5.32.’\textsuperscript{87} This, of course, is special pleading.

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textit{καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένης γαμήσας μοιχάτας (Mt 19:9b)}]
  \item [\textit{is said to have been derived from:}]
  \item [\textit{καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένης γαμήσας μοιχάτας (Mt 5:32)}]
\end{itemize}

There are two difficulties with this explanation. If copyists borrowed a line from Mt 5:32 and inserted it into 19:9 why did not some of them copy it exactly as it is (see above)? Why do they all agree on one version of it? Why did some of them not borrow \textit{Luke’s} version? Luke 16:18 reads:

\begin{quote}
  καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀπολελυμένης ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς γαμῶν μοιχεύει
\end{quote}

There is no unequivocal example where the Majority Text has imported lines of text from anywhere in the Gospels, whereas we have a clear example where the Egyptian text has done so. Compare the importation of John 19:34 into Matthew 27:49 where it has created an historical blunder (\(\text{\textit{\sigma\beta\chi\lambda\mu\nu\varphi\pi\upsilon\nu\varepsilon\nu}\ \text{\textit{\varphi\gamma\nu\upsilon}}\ \text{\textit{\nu\alpha\epsilon\omicron\mu}}\) ma)(see the next section on this blunder). Compare also the importation of Mt 5:32b into Mt 19:9a by B which no printed text has adopted as the original text.

Secondly, in Aleph there is a section break at the end of v. 9 which ends with MOIXATAI, which may have facilitated the homoioteleuton error. Also v9a is complete as a sense unit, which would facilitate the same error, especially if a scribe is moving between Mt 5:32 and 19:9 seeking to reconcile the two passages by using the same text (as in B’s case).

CONCLUSION: The Nestle 28th edition should adopt the Majority Text at Matthew 19:9b.

LESSON 1: The Alexandrian Text was a local text, confined to Egypt, whereas the Majority Text has been found throughout the Christian world, which means throughout the Roman Byzantine Empire (hence the alternative name for the Majority Text is the Byzantine Text). MS Aleph (or Codex Sinaiticus) is not to be trusted. It errs, and errs badly on occasions. Unfortunately the pool of MSS making up its Text-type (Alexandrian/Egyptian) is too small to know where it has departed from its text-type. For this reason, and in contradistinction to the Majority Text, it is sometimes referred to as the Minority Text. It is in a minority as regards extant manuscript witnesses and geographical spread. This small base of manuscripts constitutes an inherent weakness in establishing what is the Egyptian/Alexandrian Text-type. The Majority Text, on the other hand, does not have this inherent weakness because of the multiplicity of MSS in its pool, and its unbounded geographical spread. However, we lack a critical edition of both Text-types.

The NU\(^8\) text is basically the text of two manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. It is the direct descendant of Westcott and Hort’s 1881 edition. This can be proved by the observation that in the Gospel of John the NU has altered the Westcott-Hort text in only 167 places (most of them spelling differences), and in every instance it has replaced those readings with the Majority Text. Westcott & Hort worked on the simple rule that where B and \(\text{\textit{\upsilon\nu\alpha\epsilon\omicron\mu}}\) agreed, that was the original text. They departed from this rule on only eight occasions (all of them spelling differences).\(^9\) An exact copy of the original text which had been exactly recopied for ten generations and is dated to 1000 years after Christ, is to be preferred to a first copy which was carelessly copied and which can be dated to 100 years after Christ. It is, therefore, a sound principle of textual criticism that the date of a manuscript has absolutely no bearing on its faithfulness to the original text. The date of a manuscript is meaningless and irrelevant. It is a common error among text-critics to assume that the older a manuscript is, the more faithful it is to the original text. The two concepts are unrelated.

LESSON 2: Bruce Metzger’s *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* illustrates how we can all find a way of justifying our preferred reading. He was not making his comments from a neutral position. He made it known that he regarded the Aleph-B text as the nearest thing to the original text and he regarded the Byzantine Text as an inferior Text-type because he uncritically followed Hort’s subjective opinion (not based on facts) that the Majority Text was the creation of the Byzantine Church in the fifth century. This overriding, flawed assumption influenced every decision he made in his *Commentary*. We need a neutral commentary, not one whose set aim is to produce an eclectic text, but one which will explain how the Text-types come to differ from each other at each point of disagreement. In the end, scholarship must choose between Text-types, not between MSS, and certainly not a pick-and-mix approach to establish the autograph text, as is done in all modern attempts to reconstruct the original text. The significance of the Majority Text is that it is not an eclectic text. Because of this feature it stands apart from all previous editions, revisions, and reconstructions of the Greek text of the New Testament.

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\(^8\) NU stands for the combined witness of the two dominant printed texts of the NT, namely, N = Nestle 27th edition, and U = United Bible Societies edition.

\(^9\) The 8 are at Jn 1:9; 3:20, 23; 10:14; 13:12; 14:17; 15:23; and 16:16. NU agrees with Westcott-Hort in all these departures.
APPENDIX E

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE MAJORITY TEXT

The object of this Appendix is to show that the Reformation Churches were misled in 1881 into giving up the Majority Text (also called the Byzantine text, the Koine Text, the Textus Receptus, or simply MT) in favour of a local Egyptian Text. The Egyptian text came into prominence through Westcott and Hort in the late nineteenth century. Their text was based mainly (if not solely) on two manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. The criterion used was, where these two manuscripts agreed against the MT, their text was to be preferred every time. This criterion still dominates all modern Greek texts of the New Testament.

Westcott and Hort succeeded in replacing the Majority Text with a local, Egyptian text using three false assumptions, namely, that the older a manuscript was the nearer it was to the original text. Secondly, that scribes were more likely to add words here and there in the copying process, than omit them. The latter criterion can be double-edged, in that if a copyist thinks this has happened to the copy he is about to re-copy and sets out to omit what he regards as redundancies, then he will end up with a shorter text, which is the case with the Egyptian text. It is about 3% shorter overall when compared to the MT. All modern English translations are based on this local, Egyptian text, which is a corrupt form of the Majority Text.

Their third assumption was that the Majority Text did not exist before the fifth century. They believed that it was created by an individual called Lucian. It is then postulated that his text was then taken up by the major centres of Christianity, particularly Constantinople, where it became the official text of the Church, resulting in the loss of almost all other text-types. There is no evidence for this conjecture.

No modern scholar now accepts this concocted scenario, but it was accepted in 1881 as a probable fact, and the damage was done before it could be challenged. As a result the Revised Version of 1881 was not the revision of the Authorized Version that it was intended to be, but a version heavily influenced by Westcott and Hort’s new Greek text.

WHY SHOULD CONSERVATIVE SCHOLARS BE SUSPICIOUS OF THE EGYPTIAN TEXT?

The reason why the Egyptian text should not be accepted is that it is a corrupt text. There are two blunders in the Egyptian Text that should alert all conservative-evangelical ministers of the Gospel to the nature of that corrupt text. In Matthew 27:49 Vaticanus and Sinaiticus have transported part of John 19:34 to this place. Their addition, which appears to have come from memory as the Greek words are in a different order, reads: “Now another taking a spear he plunged into his side and out came water and blood.” What betrays this addition as a blunder is the position where it was added in Matthew’s narrative. In John, it occurs after Jesus is dead, and the spear thrust was to make sure Jesus was dead. But in Matthew, it is added at a point where Jesus was still alive.

The second blunder in the Egyptian text occurs in Luke 4:44, where “Galilee” was replaced with “Judaea” in the Egyptian text, resulting in Jesus conducting two major preaching tours in two places at the same time. The error is found mainly in the local, Egyptian text. Apart from these obvious blunders, there are over 200 instances in the Gospels where the Egyptian text has omitted words due to homoioteleuton (‘similar ending’). This mechanical error occurs when the same word occurs nearby and the scribe’s eye shifts forward to the same or similar word, resulting in an omission. The sheer volume of these mechanical errors in the Egyptian text suggests that it goes back to an early, sloppy copy, or a rushed copy made by a careful scribe. There is also internal evidence that the copy from which all the Egyptian manuscripts are descended was made from an old, worn copy, which was unreadable in places. In these instances the scribe had to guess what the text read.

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80 Erasmus’ text and the Complutensian text were both based on Majority Text manuscripts, not on Egyptian or Western texts.

On top of these obvious blunders and scribal mistakes, there are, in addition, thousands of minor changes to the Majority Text,\(^2\) hundreds of which do not affect the translation, but the fact that these alterations were made at all should make one suspicious of following a scribe who is that careless in copying out the Word of God for the next generation.\(^3\)

In the following section it can be shown that: Wherever Vaticanus differs from Sinaiticus, Sinaiticus agrees with the MT, and wherever Sinaiticus differs from Vaticanus, Vaticanus agrees with the MT. This means that all disagreements between Vaticanus and Sinaiticus came about because one or other has departed from the Majority Text. The MT lies behind both manuscripts, and their differences are due entirely to their failure to reproduce it.

We can illustrate this by comparing the two versions of the MT which we find in the printed text of Erasmus and the Complutensian Polyglot. Lines 5 and 6 compare the Complutensian and Erasmus over against the MT.

**LIST OF DEVIATIONS FROM THE MAJORITY TEXT IN ERASMUS’ FIRST EDITION OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (1516)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ERROR</th>
<th>MATT</th>
<th>MARK</th>
<th>LUKE</th>
<th>JOHN</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 OMISSIONS</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ADDITIONS</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SUBSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 TRANSPOSITIONS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 AGREE AGAINST MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(816)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ALL DISAGREE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOSPEL TOTALS</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LIST OF DEVIATIONS FROM THE MAJORITY TEXT IN THE COMPLUTENSIAN POLYGLOT (1514)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ERROR</th>
<th>MATT</th>
<th>MARK</th>
<th>LUKE</th>
<th>JOHN</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 OMISSIONS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ADDITIONS</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SUBSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 VOWEL SUBSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 CONSONANT SUBSTIT</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOSPEL TOTALS</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL NU OMITTED</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1304</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The far right column in both tables gives the percentage for each kind of error. It is clear that in Erasmus’s text substitutions account for the clear majority of the errors (37%),\(^4\) followed by additions (21.1%) and then vowel substitutions (itacisms) (18.5%). The total number of errors is 904 in Erasmus (hereafter abbreviated to Eras), and 601 in the Complutensian text (hereafter abbreviated to CP).

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\(^2\) There are about 9,166 differences between the Majority Text and the combined errors in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus in the four Gospels alone.

\(^3\) A glaring error occurs in MS B which contradicts itself at Acts 10:19. There it states that two men came to visit Peter in Joppa, but in 11:11 it states there were three. It is the only manuscript to contain this contradiction.

\(^4\) This could be due to following a memorised version which was different from the exemplar.
A COMPARISON OF THE DEVIATIONS IN ERASMUS AND THE COMPLUTENSIAN POLYGLOT FROM THE MAJORITY TEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Deviation</th>
<th>Erasmus</th>
<th>Complutensian</th>
<th>Majority Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omissions</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additions</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitutions</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

82 ERASMUS AND COMPLUTENSIAN AGREE AGAINST THE MAJORITY TEXT

6 ERASMUS, COMPLUTENSIAN AND THE MAJORITY TEXT DISAGREE WITH EACH OTHER

ERASMUS' TEXT IS 98.62% IN AGREEMENT WITH THE MAJORITY TEXT
THE COMPLUTENSIAN TEXT IS 99.44% IN AGREEMENT WITH THE MAJORITY TEXT
There are two important facts that emerge from a comparison of the texts of Eras, CP and MT. The first remarkable fact is that in only six cases do Eras, CP and MT all disagree. The second remarkable fact is the figure of 82 agreements between Eras and CP against the Majority Text. This shows that the Greek MSS consulted by Eras and CP came from a common ancestor, albeit probably an ancestor four or five generations back, when these 82 divergences from the MT were introduced.

From these two totals we can make the following important observation: Wherever Erasmus differs from CP, CP agrees with the MT, and wherever CP differs from Erasmus, Erasmus agrees with the MT. This means that all disagreements between Erasmus and the Complutensian come about because one or other departs from the Majority Text.

Why is this important? The answer is that we find an identical situation between MS B (Codex Vaticanus), MS s (Codex Sinaiticus) and the Majority Text. This can be demonstrated from a comparison between Vaticanus (B), Sinaiticus (Sin.) and the Majority Text (MT) in the Gospel of John. Three important facts emerge. The first is that in only 29 cases do Vat., Sin., and MT all disagree. The second fact is that Vat. and Sin. agree against the Majority Text in 666 cases. This shows that the text copied by Vat. and Sin. came from a common ancestor, albeit probably an ancestor four or five generations back. If we deduct the 666 divergences from the MT—plus the 29 where they each disagree—from their combined disagreements with the MT, which is 1529 variants, we can make the following important observation: Wherever Vaticanus differs from Sinaiticus, which happens 610 times, Sinaiticus agrees with the MT, and wherever Sinaiticus differs from Vaticanus, which happens 890 times, Vaticanus agrees with the MT.

An identical study was carried out on Luke’s Gospel which produced the same pattern. There are 14 cases where Vat., Sin., and MT all disagree. The second fact is that Vat. and Sin. agree against the Majority Text in 1157 cases. This is this large number of shared disagreements that constitutes the Egyptian Text as a distinct text-type, and so distinguishes it from the MT. These shared disagreements are found in the local Egyptian text.45 It was never a universal text, like the MT. This shows that the text copied by Vat. and Sin. came from a local, Egyptian common ancestor, albeit probably an ancestor going back to the second century.

If in Luke we deduct the figure of 643 divergences of Vaticanus from the MT—plus the 14 where they each disagree—from their (B+s) combined disagreements with the MT, which is 1425 variants, we can make the following significant observation: Wherever Vaticanus differs from Sinaiticus, which happens 643 times in Luke, Sinaiticus always agrees with the MT, and wherever Sinaiticus differs from Vaticanus, which happens 768 times, Vaticanus always agrees with the MT. The conclusion is inescapable, namely, all disagreements between Vaticanus and Sinaiticus come about because one or other departs from the Majority Text. In the copying of Luke, Sinaiticus has moved further way from the text of Vaticanus, which is closer to the MT. It is the same in the copying of John. Sinaiticus has moved further way from the text of Vaticanus, which is closer to the MT. The same goes for Matthew and Mark; Vaticanus is closer to the Majority Text.

What this study shows is that if the Roman Catholic church had published its Greek New Testament as soon as it was printed, there would not have been the need to produce Erasmus’ Greek New Testament. But the delay between printing the New Testament in 1514 and its release to the public in 1522, allowed an inferior version to swamp the market. Also, the Complutensian was limited to 600 copies. It was expensive, and it was never reprinted.46 Its text is far superior to Erasmus’ both in the use of clear fonts, its pleasing layout, and the complete lack of abbreviations and ligatures which spoil Erasmus’ text, but more importantly, as the diagram above shows, its text of the four Gospels was closer to the Majority Text, and it did not have Erasmus’ addition of EI in Matthew 19:9.

The only English version I would recommend at the present time is the New King James Version (NKJV), but it can only be a stop gap translation because it does not translate the Majority Text as its main text. We need to lay the TR aside and give a straight translation of the Majority Text to the next generation.

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45 The so-called Western Text is a mixture of MT + Egyptian + arbitrary changes.
46 The New Testament portion of the Complutensian Polyglot was reprinted by Christopher Plantin in the Antwerp Polyglot in 1564, 1573, 1574, 1584, 1590, and in Geneva in 1609, 1619, 1620, 1628 and 1632. This disseminated Cardinal Ximenes’ Greek text throughout Europe for a century following his death in 1517.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

In any congregation there will be Christians whose sin is not visible. They may be committing adultery in their mind. But there are others whose sin is visible in the form of their second spouse. Many of these will have obtained their divorce through ignorance, or before they became Christians. Wise counselling will be needed to restore such persons to live a life pleasing to God. The Holy Spirit stipulates, through Paul, that the Elders in Christ’s Church must be the husbands of one wife. And what goes for Elders must also go for all male members, as the norm.

The knowledge that Jesus has abolished divorce for all His followers is considered by many Christians to be a ‘harsh doctrine’. But calling it ‘harsh’ or ‘soft’ makes no difference to the sinfulfulness of divorce. Flee the divorce courts as you would flee the brothel.

During the course of His short ministry Jesus offended many interest groups, and religious parties, and He said some harsh words of rebuke to other groups (Jn 6:61). He stood absolutely alone on occasions. Even His own disciples were offended by some of the things He preached (Lk 11:45). On some occasions His own disciples gave up following Him and returned to their earlier belief-system. The abolition of divorce was one such ‘hard doctrine’ to accept.

Many attempts have been made to soften His teaching, or to bring Jesus down to the level of a mere man, a new Moses, with a revised, updated version of the old Torah. Many have tried to incorporate, accommodate, or merge the old Torah into His new teaching; to mix the old, stale wine, with the new wine of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. We have seen the emergence of a rabbinic-gospel, whereby the leaven of Hillel has been mixed in with the teaching of Jesus. Jesus was aware of rabbinic teaching which he hated: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy,” He preached (Mt 16:12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1). The new wine of Jesus’ teaching requires new wine skins to contain it. The old, rabbinic skins (doctrines) have to be discarded.

In the final analysis, the consensus of scholars counts for nothing, whether they are for or against Christ’s teaching on divorce. When we stand before our Lord to give an account for our lives and teaching what counts is what the Spirit has revealed. I have shown that what has been revealed in the overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts, and in the unanimous witness of the early Church fathers, is that Jesus abolished divorce, as He abolished adulterers, prostitutes and homosexuals, from having any part or place in His Kingdom. Jesus does not play around with sin or make it an integral part of His system, as the rabbis did. Divorce, like stealing, is a sin against God, and no sin can enter heaven.

There is not a single doctrine in Jesus’ teaching which has come about through pressure of the hard-heartedness of His followers, or through the refusal of His disciples to accept any of His doctrines, forcing Jesus to back down, compromise, or concede to their wishes. Yet this is what happened when God introduced His Torah to Israel. They refused to stone the adulterers and fornicators, and forced Moses to regulate their demand to be able to divorce their hated wives for any cause. The response of hate is divorce; the response of love is forgiveness. It is truly astonishing that God permitted Moses to introduce his Bill of Divorce in order to let these hard-bitten husbands get their own way.

It would appear that there are many Christian leaders who are attempting to do the same thing with Jesus’ teaching. Unfortunately for them, Jesus will not change His doctrines to suit their hard-heartedness. It is a case of either you forsake all and follow Him in every detail of His teaching, or you turn back and create your own denomination, or church, or sect. What you cannot do is pretend that Jesus permitted divorce for fornication, and that you are going to take advantage of some perceived loophole in His teaching to punish your wives or husbands. There is no such loophole. If Jesus permitted divorce for fornication then He destroys His own doctrine that men must forgive men all their sins. There is no exception clause for withholding forgiveness for fornication or adultery, Jesus forgave the sin of adultery with the words, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” That has to be the only response of every Christian. Jesus made no room in that statement for the setting up of divorce courts.

God the Father handed over all mankind to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it will be before Him that every individual will give an account of his words and deeds. The more a person knows of God’s teaching and will for them, the more will be expected from them.

It is a privilege to expound the teaching of Jesus clearly in this article. It has made me realise more than ever that to follow Jesus without a born-again experience is not possible. It requires a new spirit and a new heart, one that can love one’s enemy and forgive all men their trespasses in a genuine manner. Where that spirit is present, there is also the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

Divorce is man’s attempt to regulate sin, not kill it. Divorce feeds, fertilises and multiplies sin. Jesus starves, weeds out and exterminates sin in the lives of all His born-again followers. The clear
message coming from Jesus’ teaching and the revelation of the Holy Spirit is to flee divorce as you would flee stealing.
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END

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FOR ARTICLES ON
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(2) LOVE-HEADSHIPS versus FEMINISM (Good Order in the Church)
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(4) EVOLUTION versus AIK-CREATION (‘after its kind’)
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