

Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed

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Introduction

What did Jesus mean when he spoke out prophetically against divorce and remarriage as it would have been understood and practiced by his first-century hearers? How literally should we interpret those pronouncements? Did Jesus intend to set forth an exceptionless absolute? Or should we approach his divorce sayings as rhetorical overstatements intended to emphasize a particular point, but admitting of exceptions? How would his audience have understood those sayings, and what can we learn from his earliest disciples' attempts to understand and apply Jesus' teaching to their respective Christian communities? Did they faithfully reflect the intent of the one they called Lord and master, or would Jesus be displeased with how they had modified his standard? Furthermore, how should we, his twenty-first century followers, apply them in our very different socio-cultural contexts? These are the kinds of questions that scholars ask as they wrestle with the NT records of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage.

The American edition of *Jesus and Divorce* appeared in 1985 with the subtitle *The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus*.¹ What is that consensus? The majority of evangelicals believe that Jesus permits remarriage after divorce for marital unfaithfulness (Matt 5:32; 19:9) and that Paul sanctions remarriage when Christian spouses are abandoned by unbelieving mates (1 Cor 7:15). We argued to the contrary that even though marital separation or legal divorce may be advisable under

some circumstances (persistent adultery, physical or verbal abuse, incest, etc.), Jesus taught that his disciples should not remarry after divorce. In short, remarriage after divorce for whatever reason—even sexual immorality (Matt 5:32; 19:9)—was a violation of the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18).² How do matters stand now?

The consensus appears to be stronger than ever. *Christianity Today's* 1992 readers survey revealed that

The majority believe that fornication (73 percent) and desertion by a non-Christian spouse (64 percent) are two scriptural grounds for remarriage. At the same time, a significant minority believe Jesus taught that believers should not remarry after divorce (44 percent) and that God designed marriage to be permanent, and remarriage constitutes adultery (44 percent). Less than four out of ten believe there may be reason for remarriage other than adultery or desertion.³

Furthermore, nearly every one of the weighty American commentaries on the Gospels written since 1984 essentially defends the majority view,⁴ and so does every article in IVP's reference collection that touches on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery.⁵ Though we continued to defend our views in the face of others' rejection of our exegesis,⁶ only two scholarly monographs and one major commentary affirmed Wenham's and my understanding of the divorce texts.⁷ For me, personally, this proved troubling. This

meant that the best of evangelical scholarship had read our material and found it wanting—scholars that I admired and who sought to handle these texts as critically and fairly as we attempted to (especially Stein, Carson, and Blomberg).⁸

As noted in the 1997 appendix to *Jesus and Divorce*, no major new interpretations of Jesus' teaching have been proposed since its publication in 1984, and of the six major interpretive approaches we originally surveyed, only two remain as viable options today: (1) the majority evangelical Protestant view and (2) the minority early church fathers' or "no remarriage" view. The view that *porneia* in the exception clauses should be understood to mean marriage within forbidden degrees of kinship (Lev 18:6-18) and that it refers to a specific situation facing Matthew's church in which Gentile converts were incorporated into a Jewish Christian context, is no longer a viable interpretive option.⁹

In what follows I will set forth the major positions on the crucial texts for both the majority and minority views and then explain what caused me to reconsider my interpretive grid and modify my perspective over the past nine years. In the chart under the majority view I will substitute some of the more recent arguments related to the OT texts that I have gleaned from G. Hugenberger's work, *Marriage as a Covenant*,¹⁰ for this is the work that has corrected my understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant encapsulated in

Genesis 2:24 and the way all ancient Near Eastern law codes, including the Bible, have always made a distinction between justifiable as opposed to unjustifiable divorces. I would like to quote here at the outset, if not for the reader, at least for myself, R. F. Collins's reminder in the Introduction to his erudite study on *Divorce in the New Testament*:

In the study of the New Testament, there are more than merely methodological issues which must be considered. Exegesis, the science of the interpretation of texts, is not an exact science, as chemistry and physics may claim to be. Exegesis is a matter of the interpretation of data, a matter of sensitivity and judgment. Even scholars viewing the data from the same angle often come to different conclusions. The use of similar methodology does not always provide the same results.¹¹

And I might also add from my own experience that holding fast to one or two inaccurate concepts means that several others will have to be misconstrued in order to bring coherence to the whole.

Majority and Minority Views

Though other considerations could be noted, the following chart depicts the major points of contention between the majority who believe that the NT allows remarriage after divorce for one or more reasons and the minority who believe that Jesus did not want his disciples to remarry after divorce.

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>The nature of biblical covenants</p>	<p>Covenants may be both violated and dissolved.¹² The primary sense of “covenant” (<i>b^erit</i>) is that it is an “elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation established under divine sanction.”¹³ Covenants were “the means the ancient world took to extend relationships beyond the natural unity by blood.”¹⁴ Minority view’s point about Hos 1:9 is correct as far as it goes; but once the covenant is broken by Israel’s infidelity, God can legitimately divorce Israel such that the people are no longer acknowledged as “my people” (Hos 1:9). However, the legal right to disown his people does not preclude the completely unexpected and infinitely gracious possibility that God may yet establish a new covenant.</p>	<p>Covenants are binding and cannot be broken.¹⁵ E.g., Hos 1:9 is <i>not</i> an announcement by God of the dissolution of the covenant comparable to divorce. “The covenant nowhere makes provision for such an eventuality. Covenant-breaking on the part of Israel (unilateral withdrawal) calls for severe punishment. Israel cannot opt out by no longer acknowledging Yahweh. The punishment is not an expression of a broken relationship. On the contrary, it is enforced within the relationship; punishment maintains the covenant.”¹⁶</p>
<p>Gen 2:23 — “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” & Gen 2:24 — “leave and cleave” and “become one flesh”</p>	<p>[Agrees with the Heth and Wenham minority view’s points, but qualifies them.] “[T]he ‘relationship formula’ [Gen 2:23] is not merely an assertion of an existing blood tie, ‘but is rather a covenant oath which affirms and establishes a pattern of solidarity.’”¹⁷ “Clearly, sexual union is the indispensable means for the consummation of marriage both in the Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient Near East.¹⁸” Sexual union probably functioned this way because it was viewed as the oath-sign that ratified the marriage covenant.</p>	<p>The marriage covenant is comparable to the <i>kinship bond</i> that exists between parents and children. The <i>covenanted</i> (“leave” and cleave” are covenant terms; cf. Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh 22:5; 23:8; Ruth 1:14-16) <i>and consummated</i> marriage witnessed and joined by God (Mal 2:14; Matt 19:6 / Mark 10:8b-9) results in the two becoming “one flesh,” that is, kin or blood relatives. The kinship nature of marriage is also indicated by the Gen 2:23 relationship formula, “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (cf. 29:14; 37:27; Judg 9:1-2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12-13).¹⁹</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>Deut 24:1-4</p>	<p>The scholarly consensus is that “the intent of this casuistic law is neither to authorize divorce, nor to stipulate its proper grounds, nor to establish its requisite procedure. Rather its sole concern is to prohibit the restoration of a marriage after an intervening marriage.”²⁰ The v. 4 prohibition closes a legal loophole that otherwise might seem to legitimize a form of adultery.²¹ Other reasons have been offered also.</p>	<p>The minority view agrees with the scholarly consensus (which also notes that there are two types of divorce mentioned in vv. 1-3: the one that has just cause [“some indecency”] and the other based on aversion [“hate”] which has adverse financial penalties for the offending husband). Deut 24:4 prohibits unjust enrichment (due to estoppel).²²</p>
<p>Mal 2:16– “I hate divorce”</p>	<p>Interpretation is vexed by a translation problem. ESV is most probable: “For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts ...” Malachi only condemns divorce based on aversion (i.e., unjustified divorce). “Mal. 2:16 shares the same assessment of divorce based on aversion as seems to be presupposed for the second divorce in Deut. 24:3, with its adverse financial consequences for the offending husband.”²³</p>	<p>NIV translates: “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty.” This is an absolute prohibition of divorce.²⁴</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>Luke 16:18</p>	<p>This is Luke’s one example of radicalizing the law, and the way it is stated admits of no exceptions. The casuistic form is employed for emphasis and exaggeration: it presents an ideal like Jesus’s sayings in Mark 10:11-12. Jesus’ concern is not with legal definitions but with moral exhortation.²⁵ Alternatively, Luke uses this saying as an allegorical statement on Jesus’ non-abolition of the Law (v. 17)— the person who annuls part of the Law in favor of some other practice is like a man divorcing his wife in favor of another woman. Provides no help in determining Jesus’ literal views on divorce and remarriage.²⁶</p>	<p>The introductory “Everyone who divorces” (<i>pas ho apolyōn</i>) employs a legal ordinance form similar to OT casuistic law.²⁷ Jesus teaches a <i>standard</i> (as opposed to an <i>ideal</i>) that he expects his disciples to keep. Paul apparently follows Luke’s (and Mark’s) unqualified form of Jesus’ saying in 1 Cor 7:10-11. Only two alternatives present themselves in case of divorce: remain unmarried or else be reconciled.</p>
<p>Mark 10:11-12</p>	<p>Jesus, a prophetic wisdom teacher, uses rhetorical overstatement to drive home a general point to hostile questioners. Thus Mark simply records Jesus’ emphatically stated divorce saying without intending to specify possible exceptions. Jesus cannot be construed as teaching an “exceptionless absolute” based on Mark because both Matthew (5:32; 19:9) and Paul (1 Cor 7:15) qualify Jesus’ prohibition of remarriage after divorce. Alternatively, Jesus’ sayings should be understood as generalizations that admit of exceptions.</p>	<p>Yes, Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees, but his final word for them is found in v. 9: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” However, Jesus’ absolute prohibition of divorce and remarriage is reserved for the disciples in the Markan place of private instruction, “the house” (7:17; 9:28; 10:10; cf. 4:34). Jesus is clarifying kingdom standards for his disciples, to whom Jesus gives insights into the mysteries of the kingdom of God (4:11), not addressing unbelieving outsiders whom he wants to bring to repentance with a prophetic word.</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
Matt 5:32	<p>The exception, applied in a legal way, qualifies Jesus' prophetic pronouncement (i.e., a wisdom saying that should be read as a prophetic and somewhat hyperbolic summons to an ideal like the preceding sayings about anger and lust).²⁸ The exception reflects the language of Deut 24:1 and identifies a valid divorce. For first-century Jewish readers, a valid divorce by definition included the right to remarry.</p>	<p>This saying employs a legal ordinance form similar to OT casuistic law (cf. Luke 16:18a). This antithesis cannot be read in light of the first two. Jesus sets before the disciples a <i>standard</i> (as opposed to an <i>ideal</i>) that he wants them to keep. The exception restricts the statement "causes her to commit adultery." It is tautologous: if one's wife has already committed adultery, then the husband who divorces her does not make her commit adultery. She has made herself one already. The question of freedom to remarry after a lawful divorce is not addressed.</p>
Jesus' Orientation toward Deut 24:1 in Matthew 19//Mark 10	<p>Matthew sees Jesus as explaining the meaning of the law. Deuteronomy's "some indecency" = Matthew's "sexual immorality." In the OT, divorce for "some indecency" identified a legally valid divorce. Valid divorces always included the right to remarry. Jesus <i>demotes</i> Moses' concession in Deuteronomy and subordinates it to Genesis, but valid divorces are God's permissive will for some innocent victims of divorce.</p>	<p>Jesus <i>opposes</i> the way the Pharisees employed Deut 24:1 and contrasts divorce with God's will "from the beginning." Jesus would neither interpret nor abrogate something Moses never legislated. Jesus prohibited what Moses permitted; he did not permit what Moses prohibited. So Jesus neither divinely interprets nor abrogates Deut 24:1. It was a <i>concession</i> to human sinfulness in the OT era and contrary to God's will all along.</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>Matt 19:9 and the syntax of the exception clause</p>	<p>Exceptions are precisely exceptions. That the clause modifies both the divorce action and the remarriage action is determined more by the concept of justifiable divorce than by Greek grammar. The clause, either spoken by Jesus himself (Carson, Blomberg) or supplied by Matthew under the Spirit’s inspiration (Stein, Keener, Hawthorne), clearly justifies divorce for immorality and permits remarriage. True, marriage must <i>not</i> be dissolved. But if dissolved by persistent sexual immorality, the marriage covenant is violated.</p>	<p>The placement of the clause after “divorces” but before “and remarries” argues that Jesus permitted divorce for marital unfaithfulness but not also remarriage. In a culture that demanded the wife be divorced for immorality, the exception clause relieves the man of the responsibility for the divorce and its consequences. Understands Matthew’s exception in light of the unqualified form of Jesus’ sayings in Mark, Luke, and Paul (i.e., remarriage after any divorce results in adultery) and the Gen 2:24 “kinship” nature of the marriage relationship.</p>
<p>Meaning of “divorce” (<i>apolyō</i>)</p>	<p>Valid divorces always included the right to remarry. Both Jewish and Roman cultural contexts permitted, yea even required, divorce for adultery and remarriage could naturally follow. Thus Matthew’s readers would assume that the divorce Jesus permits for immorality must be the same kind of divorce that Jesus’ contemporaries practiced: it included the right to remarry. If it meant separation or legal divorce only, without the right to remarry, then Matthew’s readers would not have readily recognized this semantic shift without further explanation.</p>	<p>Evidently the bill of divorce does not dissolve the marriage since Jesus states that remarriage amounts to adultery (Matt 5:32b; 19:9b). Matthew’s Jesus rejects the Pharisees’ proof-text for their “remarriage-assumed” view (Deut 24:1) and instead appeals to Gen 2:24 (with its kinship understanding of marriage) as the basis for his views. Three factors suggest that Jesus’ reference to “divorce” does not sanction remarriage: (1) the “one flesh” kinship concept of marriage; (2) the probably authentic longer reading of Matt 19:9 (“and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” [cf. Matt 5:32b]); and (3) Jesus’ response to the disciples’ objection in vv. 10-12.</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>Matt 19:10-12 & the “eunuch saying”</p>	<p>Even with the exception, Jesus’ position is more daunting than Shammai’s. “This saying” (v. 11) refers to the disciples’ objection in v. 10 that “it is better not to marry.” Jesus recognizes that God enables some to remain celibate for the sake of advancing the claims and interests of God’s kingdom (cf. 1 Cor 7:7, 25-38).</p>	<p>“This saying” (v. 11) refers to Jesus’ difficult word against divorce and remarriage in v. 9. “Those to whom it is given” are the faithful disciples (as opposed to Pharisees and outsiders [cf. 13:11-12]) that Jesus encourages (v. 12) to embrace his difficult word that they should remain single after divorce even for sexual immorality.</p>
<p>How do Jesus & Shammai differ?</p>	<p>Jesus is more radical than Shammai. Jewish (and Roman) law <i>mandated</i> divorce for sexual immorality, but Jesus only <i>permits</i> it. This means that broken marriages <i>may</i> still be restored.</p>	<p>Jesus is <i>much</i> more radical than Shammai. Shammai <i>mandated</i> divorce for sexual immorality, but Jesus <i>prohibits</i> most divorces and remarriage after divorce for <i>porneia</i> (i.e., adultery, bestiality, incest, sodomy, homosexuality, etc.)</p>
<p>1 Cor 7:10-11</p>	<p>Paul is talking about divorce in situations other than divorce for sexual unfaithfulness. The believers advocating asceticism (1 Cor 7:1) wanted to enforce their “no sexual relations” slogan on the married (vv. 1-7), the widowers and widows (vv. 8-9, 39-40), those advocating separation (vv. 10-16), and the engaged (vv. 25-28, 34, 36-38), who, like other singles (vv. 29-35), are still free from matrimonial ties and could live single <i>if</i> they have the gift of sexual self-control (vv. 7, 9a; cf. Matt 19:11-12).</p>	<p>Studies indicate that Paul’s teaching on sexuality, marriage, and singleness in 1 Corinthians 6 and 7 stems from the same tradition of Jesus’ teaching that Matthew records in 19:3-12. Yet Paul says that if a divorce or separation takes place, “let them remain unmarried or else be reconciled.” Where Paul specifically mentions the possibility of remarriage, in <i>both</i> instances he notes explicitly that one of the spouses has died (1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2-3). Thus Paul follows the teaching of Jesus.²⁹</p>

Issue	Majority	Minority
<p>1 Cor 7:15—“not enslaved” (<i>ou dedoulōtai</i>)</p>	<p>This phrase distinctly frees the innocent party to remarry.³⁰ The essential formula in the Jewish bill of divorce were the words “you are free to any man” (<i>m. Git.</i> 9:3). Paul employs the same formula for believers abandoned by unbelieving spouses.³¹ <i>Douloō</i> (1 Cor 7:15) and <i>deō</i> (1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2) “are related”³² and used interchangeably (unless one excludes categories so as to have so few examples left as to be able to argue whatever one wishes). Both free someone who was once married to remarry.</p>	<p>Like Matthew’s exception clause, Paul’s qualifier relieves the innocent party of the guilt of violating Christ’s command <i>not</i> to divorce (mentioned 4x in vv. 10-13). Nothing is said about the possibility of remarriage. The following considerations suggest remarriage is not permitted: (1) marriage is a creation ordinance, binding on all irrespective of their faith or the lack thereof; (2) Paul has already specifically prohibited remarriage in vv. 10-11; (3) when Paul speaks about the binding character of marriage he uses the term <i>deō</i> (Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39; cf. 7:27, a promise of engagement), not <i>douloō</i> (1 Cor 7:15); and (4) where he clearly mentions the possibility of remarriage, Paul also refers to the death of one of the marriage partners (1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2).</p>
<p>1 Cor 7:39 & Rom 7:2—“a wife is bound (<i>dedetai</i>) to her husband as long as he lives”</p>	<p>1 Cor 7:39 involves a real case at Corinth and Rom 7:2 occurs as an illustration of how the Mosaic law only has power over people as long as they live. Paul does not have in view divorce for sexual immorality in either place.</p>	<p>Whenever Paul mentions the possibility of remarriage, in both cases he notes specifically that one of the spouses has died. This is Paul’s ordinary usage for the indissolubility of marriage as long as a mate is living.</p>
<p>Church Fathers</p>	<p>A growing, unbiblical asceticism, especially in sexual matters, distorted and restricted the fathers’ interpretation of Jesus and Paul’s teaching. Note the asceticism promoted in 1 Corinthians 7 already.³³</p>	<p>The historic teaching of the church—up to the 6th century in the East and up to the 16th century in the West—stands firmly behind a no remarriage understanding of Matt 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:15.</p>

Initial Doubts about My Minority View

I found my own “no remarriage” understanding of Jesus’ teaching on divorce challenged when I first read C. S. Keener’s book . . . *And Marries Another* in the fall of 1992.³⁴ For the first time since 1982—the year I wrote my Th.M. thesis on divorce and remarriage—I began to wonder if the defense for my “no remarriage” position was as exegetically sound as I had thought.

In November of 1994 I presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society responding to Keener’s exegesis. I revised it and published it as “Divorce and Remarriage: The Search for an Evangelical Hermeneutic.”³⁵ It was that spring that Gordon Wenham and I were finalizing the appendix to *Jesus and Divorce* for the Paternoster reprint that finally appeared in 1997; but to be honest, my heart was not fully into writing it. I had begun to feel the weight of the majority position’s arguments. I had written and read so much about this subject that I felt jaded and numbed by the whole issue. Nevertheless, I held out hope that I still might be right and did as much as I could to keep defending our “no remarriage” view in that appendix.

When people would ask whether or not I still held my view, I simply said, “I don’t know what to believe any more.” I had to face the fact that the key articles in IVP’s *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (by R. H. Stein) and *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (by G. F. Hawthorne) were in essential agreement with Keener’s book. I knew my own intellectual limitations well enough not to presume that “I alone must be right,” and one personal conversation with Bob Stein at a professional meeting convinced me that he was as

eager as I was to follow Jesus’ teaching wherever it might lead. I wanted to understand why the best defenders of the majority view were not persuaded by my arguments to the contrary.

Rethinking 1 Corinthians 7:15

Early on in my study of the biblical teaching on marriage and divorce I was influenced greatly by G. Bromiley’s little book, *God and Marriage*. Bromiley develops a theology of marriage patterned after God’s relationship with Israel and Christ’s relationship to the church and paints the kind of “big theological picture” that helps one see the forest of God’s design for marriage through the sometimes ambiguous exegetical trees.³⁶ I was puzzled, however, why Bromiley agreed with me that Matthew’s exceptions did *not* clearly permit remarriage, but *did* believe that Paul allowed remarriage to the Christian deserted by an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:15).³⁷ If Jesus had taught that marriage is for life, and that remarriage after divorce for whatever reason amounts to adultery, how could Paul permit remarriage after divorce in a situation that seemed “less serious” (depending on one’s viewpoint) than the remarriage after divorce for immorality that Jesus disallowed?³⁸

About ten years later when I read in Keener’s statement that Paul’s “not under bondage” (KJV) “distinctly frees the *innocent* party to remarry” and that “If Paul meant that remarriage was not permitted, he said precisely the opposite of what he meant,”³⁹ I found myself initially agreeing with his straightforward analysis of Paul’s language.⁴⁰ Keener argued that the essential formula in the Jewish bill of divorce, “You are free to marry any man” (*m. Git.* 9:3), functions in precisely the same way as Paul’s “not being enslaved”

in 1 Corinthians 7:15. However, I went on to challenge Keener's arguments that "not being enslaved" is different from being "free" to remarry both lexically and conceptually.⁴¹ Without going into all the details here, having just reread my response to Keener after ignoring it for the past six years, I do not see how I missed the fact that Paul's *negative* formulation ("In such cases the brother or the sister is not enslaved") *was* making precisely the same point as the *positive* formulation in the Jewish bill of divorce ("You are free to marry any man"). That Keener was not at all persuaded by my counter arguments is evident by the italicized word in the following 1 Corinthians 7:15-related statement I recently found in his 1999 commentary on Matthew: "Paul's words recall the *exact* language for freedom to remarry in ancient divorce contracts, and his ancient readers, unable to be confused by modern writers' debates on the subject, would have understood his words thus..."⁴² This meant that if Paul made an exception to Jesus' seemingly absolute prohibition of divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:15, then it was certainly possible that one could interpret Jesus' exception clauses in Matthew in similar fashion.⁴³

Nevertheless, I knew that both Jesus and Paul adopted viewpoints quite the opposite of their surrounding culture, and that where Paul did mention permission for remarriage, in both places he also explicitly refers to the death of one of the spouses. G. D. Fee had also highlighted the similarity between the language of Romans 7:2-3 and Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:39: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." Fee adds that "the language 'bound to a

woman (= wife), '...is Paul's ordinary usage for the indissolubility of marriage as long as a mate is living (v. 39; Rom. 7:2)."⁴⁴ He also makes a telling comment about 1 Corinthians 7:39, one that waves a caution flag in the face of attempts to fill in the answers to nagging interpretive questions by appealing indiscriminately to known first-century cultural backgrounds: "The first statement, 'A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives,' runs so counter to Jewish understanding and practice at this point in history that it almost certainly reflects Paul's understanding of Jesus' own instructions (see on v. 10). As such it is a final word against divorce and remarriage."⁴⁵

To sum up, I had relied quite heavily on 1 Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2-3 as evidence that Paul followed Jesus' understanding of marriage as a "one flesh" kinship relationship that could not be dissolved. I also believed that Paul was reflecting Jesus' sayings in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 when he allowed the divorced believer only two options: "remain unmarried or else be reconciled." However, I had to admit that Paul may not have had divorce for sexual immorality in view in any of those statements. Certainly at Corinth Paul was addressing a situation where divorce was being advocated by those who claimed to be believers, and the ascetic party was trying to force their views of sexual abstinence (cf. 1 Cor 7:1) on both the married and the formerly married (vv. 1-16, 39-40) as well as those pledged to be married and the never-before-married (vv. 25-38).⁴⁶ This led me to reconsider again the possibility that Jesus' teaching on divorce involved either generalizations or rhetorical overstatements that were never intended to be understood as exceptionless absolutes.

Rethinking the Form of Jesus' Divorce Sayings

I have just come off of a fall semester where I was asked to teach the Gospels course at Taylor University to fill in for a colleague on sabbatical. Never having read Blomberg's NAC commentary on Matthew from beginning to end, I chose it as one of my texts for the course. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to work through his entire exposition of Matthew's message and his many insightful practical applications. On a number of occasions I drew my students' attention to his cautious avoidance of interpretive extremes.⁴⁷ I was impacted, too, by his very balanced treatment of Jesus' teaching on divorce. As a result, he gained my trust.

Though it almost seems too obvious to mention now, when the Pharisees asked Jesus where he stood on the matter of divorce (Matt 19:3//Mark 10:2), the pronouncements he made were not addressed to friendly disciples who were eager to obey fully his every word. Blomberg's warning caught me off guard: "The specific historical background that informed this debate, the particular way in which the question is phrased, and the unscrupulous motives behind the Pharisees' approach all warn us against the notion that Jesus was comprehensively addressing all relevant questions about marriage and divorce."⁴⁸ Thus it is quite likely that we should not treat "Jesus' words as if they were the objective, referential language of jurisprudence seeking to convey a legal precept."⁴⁹

The sayings in both Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 give the impression that under no circumstances would divorce or remarriage be possible. However, there are two ways to understand the form of Jesus' divorce saying. It is either an exaggeration (Stein, Keener, Hawthorne, Collins) or "a generalization which admits of certain exceptions."⁵⁰ The former view emphasizes that Jesus referred to himself as a prophet (Matt 13:57), taught as a wise man (Matt 12:38-42), and spoke out powerfully against the religious hypocrisy and injustices he observed (Matthew 23). Therefore, if Jesus wanted to drive home a particular point in the midst of a hostile audience, "his omission of any qualification may be understandable."⁵¹ Davies and Allison note that

Jesus' saying about divorce was, when first delivered, probably intended to be more haggadic than halakhic; that is, its purpose was not to lay down the law but to reassert an ideal and make divorce a sin, thereby disturbing then current complacency (a complacency well reflected in Hillel's view that a woman could be divorced even for burning food: *m. Git.* 9.10). Jesus was not, to judge by the synoptic evidence, a legislator. His concern was not with legal definitions but with moral exhortation (cf. 5:27-30).⁵²

On the other hand, I would prefer to classify Jesus' sayings as generalizations, even though the exposition is essentially the same under either category. I just think words like "exaggeration," "hyperbole," and "rhetorical overstatement" convey the wrong idea. Based on what I have recently learned, I now find myself in agreement with Blomberg:

Few try to make the pronouncements in various other controversy or pronouncement stories absolute (cf. e.g., Matt 19:21, 9:15, and esp. 13:57, a particularly interesting parallel because of its similar exception clause . . .), so one should be equally wary of elevating 19:9 (or Mark 10:11-12) into an exceptionless absolute. The casuistic legal form ("whoever") does not undermine this

claim; parallel “sentences of law” (e.g., Matt 5:22, 27, 39, 41) also contain implicit qualifiers.⁵³

I think a good case can be made that Jesus himself uttered the exception clause. I formerly held that the disciples’ incredulity (v. 10) in the face of Jesus’ saying on divorce in v. 9 could only be explained if Jesus had prohibited all remarriage after divorce, even divorce for sexual immorality. Stein, too, admitted that “Even in the Matthean account the reaction of the disciples seems best understood in the light of a total prohibition against divorce (see Matt 19:10-12). Such a reaction would be surprising if Jesus had uttered the ‘exception clause’ since this was essentially the position of the school of Shammai.”⁵⁴ I think there is a third alternative. From Jewish writings outside the Bible, we know that first-century pre-rabbinic marriage and divorce practice influenced Jewish custom on several points. Not only had the discussions of Hillel and Shammai turned the concession of Deut 24:1 into a right to be claimed (cf. Matt 5:31), a veritable “husbandly privilege,”⁵⁵ but first-century Judaism had distorted the intent of the Mosaic *command* found in Deuteronomy 24:4. This prohibition of a man returning to his first wife after she had remarried and divorced a second time (or her husband had died) was cast in the extreme so that a husband was prohibited from *ever* returning to his wife if she had sexual relations in any form with another man. She had to be divorced (cf. Joseph and Mary in Matt 1:19), even if she was an innocent victim of rape.⁵⁶ If Jewish law *mandated* divorce for sexual unfaithfulness *and prohibited* a wife from ever returning to her husband after she had been unfaithful, Jesus may be countering both of these notions via the excep-

tion clause, which would *permit* divorce for immorality and might even *encourage* offended spouses to forgive and take back unfaithful mates.⁵⁷ I am convinced that Jesus’ goal would parallel Yahweh’s relentless pursuit of unfaithful Israel throughout the OT and that he would try to save a marriage at all costs. Thus the exception clause means that Jewish marriages *may* still be kept together even if divorce for *porneia* occurs (cf. the forgiveness requirement in Matt 18:21-35 and the model of the father in Luke 15:11-32). This would have been shocking to first-century Jews, suggesting that Jesus’ view is more strict than Shammai’s—the radical love of God does unexpected things—and adequately explains the disciples’ horrified reaction to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19:10.⁵⁸

Rethinking the Meaning of “Divorce”

The major criticism of the minority view that Jesus did not permit remarriage after divorce, even divorce for sexual immorality, has always been that in the first-century world a legitimate divorce included the right to remarry. C. S. Mann states the point emphatically: “The notion that Jesus was allowing separation, but not divorce, cannot be sustained—as Judaism had no such custom, he would perforce have had to explain it.”⁵⁹ I tried several times to argue that Jesus *had* made it sufficiently clear that he was investing *apolyō* (“I divorce”) with a different semantic content,⁶⁰ but my arguments have not proved convincing. I knew the syntactical argument we employed only opened the door to harmonizing Matthew with an absolute reading of Mark, Luke, and Paul.⁶¹ Further, I have always taught my Greek exegesis students that when it

comes to validating exegetical problems, grammar gets you into the ball park, and sometimes gets you on base, but it will never get you to home plate.⁶² So why did I persist? Why did I continue to think that Jesus must be using the word “divorce” with a new sense?

It seemed very clear to me. Jesus brushes aside the Pharisees’ Deuteronomy 24:1-based concept of “divorce” and replaces it with the Genesis 2:24-based concept that husband and wife become “one flesh.” After quoting Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5//Mark 10:7-8a, Jesus reiterates the significance of the two becoming one flesh by saying, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What God has joined together let no one separate” (Matt 19:6//Mark 10:8b-9). This meant that the “one flesh” concept in its OT context was the basis for whatever Jesus was saying about the permanence of marriage. Yet none of the books or articles on divorce and remarriage—I had collected around 100 by then—ever nailed down this concept.⁶³

Then in the midst of doing research for my 1982 Th.M. thesis, I stumbled across an obscure yet impressive doctoral dissertation done by A. Isaksson at the University of Upsala, Sweden.⁶⁴ This is where I learned two concepts that steered my exegesis from that point on (cf. minority view of Gen 2:24 in the chart above): “leave” and “cleave” were covenant terms and were later employed to refer to God’s covenant with Israel, and “one flesh” in Genesis 2:24 was an abbreviation of Adam’s remark in Genesis 2:23. To be someone’s bone and flesh was a common OT expression to denote kinship and family solidarity. Since (1) I assumed God’s covenant with Israel could not be broken (cf. Rom 11:28-29), (2) that the fidelity of

Yahweh towards Israel, whom he had joined with himself in a covenant (*b^erit*), is implicitly put forward as a model for husband and wife in Malachi 2, and (3) that kinship relationships cannot be undone, then marriage must be a covenant-based kinship relationship that lasts until death.

There was only one problem. I was missing two crucial details about biblical covenants and the nature of that Genesis 2:24 “one flesh” relationship: (1) biblical covenants can be violated and dissolved and (2) the “one flesh” marital-kinship union is not a literal flesh and blood relationship. (I have already incorporated both of these points in the top two boxes in the chart under the majority view.)

Rethinking the Meaning of “One Flesh” and the Nature of Biblical Covenants

Gordon Hugenberger’s *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* is the most comprehensive study of its title’s focus to date. He also draws upon all the pertinent ancient Near Eastern and related biblical legal and narrative material touching on betrothal, marriage, divorce, and sexual offences.⁶⁵ This study supplied the final “programming” that I needed to resolve the cognitive dissonance on the subject of remarriage after divorce that I have experienced for the past ten years. On my former “no remarriage” view of Jesus’ teaching, what proved most troubling to me all along (though I did have an answer for it) was that Jesus would be labeling as adultery the remarriage of someone whose spouse’s unrepentant sexual immorality or subsequent remarriage had made the restoration of the original marriage impossible. This just did not sound

like the God “who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” (Jer 9:24).

Hugenberger notes from the start that “the relationship between biblical marriage law and covenantal concepts has been left largely unresolved and, much of the time, virtually ignored.”⁶⁶ He adds that a study of the covenantal nature of marriage could help resolve some of the remaining difficulties in comprehending the biblical ethics and practice of marriage; and one such difficulty is the dissolubility of marriage, i.e., what constitutes covenant breaking. Some say that if marriage is a covenant, then it might be possible to break the covenant by divorce.⁶⁷ Others argue that not divorce, but only sexual infidelity “breaks” the covenant. P. F. Palmer, on the other hand, claims that covenants, unlike contracts, are inherently “inviolable” and “unbreakable.”⁶⁸ The data in my head began to reformat when Hugenberger responded to Palmer’s “unbreakable” covenant notion by saying that “in terms of Hebrew usage covenants may be both violated and dissolved—with both of these concepts expressed by the same underlying Hebrew expression which is customarily rendered ‘broken’ in most English versions...”⁶⁹ I knew immediately that my no remarriage view had been placed in jeopardy.⁷⁰

I learned that the primary sense of “covenant” (*b^erit*) is that it is an “elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation established under divine sanction.”⁷¹ Covenants were “the means the ancient world took to extend relationships beyond the natural unity by blood,”⁷² and “*b^erit* is nowhere employed of naturally occurring relationships and the ordinary obligations which attend them, such as

those which exist between parents and a child or between blood brothers (cf. Gen. 4:9).”⁷³ I had argued that the covenant and consummation of marriage made two totally unrelated people as closely related as they will be to their own flesh and blood children. However, the unity between unrelated persons established by the marriage covenant is *not* the same as a vertical blood relationship between a parent and a child nor the horizontal blood relationship that exists between siblings. The Genesis 2:24 phrase, “they become one flesh,” refers “to the bondedness which results from and is expressed by sexual union” and “refers to the establishment of a new family unit” (cf. Gen 29:14; 37:27; Lev 18:6; 2 Sam 5:1; Isa 58:7).⁷⁴

As already noted in our chart above, “leave” and “cleave” in Genesis 2:24 are clearly covenant terms, as Hugenberger also argues,⁷⁵ and there are four essential ingredients in the OT understanding of “covenant” (*b^erit*): “it is used of 1) a relationship 2) with a non-relative 3) which involves obligations and 4) is established through an oath.”⁷⁶ The scholarly consensus is that an oath is indispensable for ratifying a covenant, and God is invoked in any ratifying oath to act as “the enforcer” of the covenant.⁷⁷ The marriage covenant, as opposed to a contract, involves three persons—the bride, the groom, and God. Furthermore, “covenant-ratifying oaths often consist of *verba solemnia*, that is, a solemn declaration of the commitment being undertaken—solemn because the deity was implicitly invoked as a witness.”⁷⁸ These oaths were not just *verbal* (nor primarily so), but were frequently symbolic: they consisted of “oath-signs” (sharing in a meal, the giving of a hand, etc.).⁷⁹ Adam’s verbal oath-sign is found in Genesis 2:23: “This is now bone of my

bones and flesh of my flesh" (NIV). Far from being a "jubilant welcome" addressed to Eve, Adam addresses these words to God as witness, says Hugenberger: "[T]hese words appear to be a solemn affirmation of his marital commitment, an elliptical way of saying something like, 'I hereby invite you, God, to hold me accountable to treat this woman as part of my own body [cf. Eph 5:28].'"⁸⁰

So what role, then, does sexual union play in the formation of the marriage covenant? Hugenberger argues "that sexual union (*copula carnalis*), when engaged in with consent (i.e., both parental, in the case of dependent daughters, and mutual), was understood as a marriage-constituting act and, correspondingly, was considered a requisite covenant-ratifying (and renewing) oath-sign for marriage, at least in the view of certain biblical authors."⁸¹ "Clearly," says Hugenberger, "sexual union is the indispensable means for the consummation of marriage both in the Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient Near East."⁸²

It should be obvious now that sexual infidelity is a particularly grave violation of the marriage covenant, a sin against both the covenant partner and against God,⁸³ and if covenants can be violated and dissolved, this sin strikes at the marriage covenant in a unique way. As Carson noted years ago in his commentary on Matthew:

... sexual sin has a peculiar relation to Jesus' treatment of Genesis 1:27; 2:24 (in Matt 19:4-6), because the indissolubility of marriage he defends by appealing to those verses from the creation accounts is predicated on sexual union ("one flesh"). Sexual promiscuity is therefore a *de facto* exception. It may not necessitate divorce; but permission for divorce and remarriage under such circum-

stances, far from being inconsistent with Jesus' thought, is in perfect harmony with it.⁸⁴

Though I was cognizant of Carson's point the year his commentary was released, a few other possibly misconstrued pieces of biblical data (see above) caused me to believe that marriage was "'till death do us part.'" What ultimately caused me to do an about face was a series of OT passages that were lumped together over several pages in Hugenberger.⁸⁵

I was struck with the gravity of the sin of adultery in the eyes of both God and man. Hugenberger noted that "the Old Testament appears to presuppose a general moral consciousness in man, shared even by pagans, which acknowledges adultery as a heinous wrong committed not only against the injured husband, but also against God" (cf. Gen 20:6, 9, 10).⁸⁶ God exclaimed to Abimelech, a Gentile, that if he did not return Sarah to Abraham, "know that you shall surely die, you, and all who are yours" (Gen 20:7). The seriousness of the sin of adultery was obvious to Joseph too. When Potiphar's wife said, "Lie with me" (Gen 39:7), Joseph exclaimed: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God" (39:9).⁸⁷ If this is how offensive God viewed a sexual violation of the marriage covenant, then how could I continue to believe that Jesus, God's son, would not view that same sin similarly?

To conclude, the Genesis 2:24 "one flesh" relationship that results from the covenant of marriage ratified by sexual consummation is not an indissoluble union, just one that should preeminently not be dissolved, and a sexual sin like adultery is *the* preeminent violation of the marriage covenant. When we realize that ancient Near Eastern and OT (Deut 24:1,

3; Mal 2:16) divorce law distinguished between divorce without justification (“hate and divorce” in Deut 24:3; Mal 2:16) and divorce with grounds (“some indecency” in Deut 24:1),⁸⁸ it seems most probable that the exception clause in Matthew points to divorce with just cause, a valid divorce that would permit remarriage,⁸⁹ and Jesus limits that just cause to *porneia*.

Pastoral Implications

What does all of this mean for the application of the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage now that I have come to believe that Paul’s (1 Cor 7:15) and Jesus’ (Matt 5:32; 19:9) words point to a just cause for divorce? As I mentioned earlier, under my “no remarriage” view I felt odd about saying that Jesus would forbid remarriage to the innocent person whose spouse’s unrepentant sexual immorality or subsequent remarriage had made the restoration of the original marriage impossible. This has now been resolved in my mind. Second, in the case of the genuine exceptions, after innocent parties have made all reasonable attempts to save the marriage, neither the church nor mission agencies should stigmatize one’s subsequent decision to remarry or to remain single. Third, if we factor in our own contemporary cultural differences, reflect on the accumulated canonical witness to God’s merciful dealings with his people, take seriously the call to model the forgiveness we received from Christ at the cross and the call to imitate our heavenly Father as his beloved children (Eph 5:1-2), then we should know *not* to apply Jesus’ and Paul’s exceptions in *exactly* the same way their first-century hearers would have applied them. Their culture mandated divorce for sexual immorality. Both Jewish and Roman law, “required a

husband who learned of his wife’s affair to divorce her immediately,” and if he did not do so, “Roman law allowed him to be prosecuted for the offense of *lenocinium*—pimping”⁹⁰ Today I think Jesus would label as unforgiving someone who divorced their spouse for a “one night stand.”

Though we do not have any NT examples illustrating the precise way Jesus’ (or Matthew’s) and Paul’s exceptions might be applied, at least two paradigms teach us to be gun shy of getting trigger-happy with them. First, though Yahweh had the legal right to disown his people due to their infidelity (cf. Hos 2:2a/ /1:9), he only threatened Israel with divorce. However, “just as the threatened covenant of dissolution in Hosea 1 is followed by an unexpected promise of covenant renewal in Hos 2:1-3 [ET 1:10–2:1], so also the threatened divorce in Hos. 2:4ff. [ET 2ff.] is followed by an unexpected promise of a new marriage in Hos. 2:16ff. [ET 14ff].”⁹¹ God’s gracious covenant love ultimately overcomes Israel’s infidelity. Second, I agree with R. B. Hays that “the Christ/church typology [cf. Eph 5:21-33] presents an extraordinarily high standard for marriage; if marriage truly reflects the love between Christ and the church, it should be characterized by infinite loyalty and self-sacrificial love.”⁹²

What, then, do the two exceptions in the majority view have in common, and what can we learn from them about how to handle divorce cases today? At this point in my study, I would second Keener’s summary of Blomberg’s insightful comparison of the two. The principles that unite both Jesus’ (or Matthew’s) and Paul’s exceptions are: (1) both sexual immorality and abandonment violate one of the two fundamental components of

marriage (either the “leaving and the cleaving” or the “one flesh” unity); (2) “Both leave one party without any other options if attempts at reconciliation are spurned”; and (3) “Both recognize the extreme seriousness of divorce as a last resort and as an admission of defeat.”⁹³

Might there be additional legitimate grounds for the dissolution of a marriage?⁹⁴ Here one must be cautious. Some do feel that physical abuse justifies divorce, and I am sympathetic with this suggestion.⁹⁵ Even on my former “no remarriage” view, I taught that in a home where a parent was abusing the children or a spouse was being abused, common ethical sense dictates that Jesus would not require the concerned parent to stay. I agree with Keener that both Jesus and Paul would “would advise the one parent to take the children and leave, at least temporarily.”⁹⁶ However, incompatibility and fits of anger would not fit under the banner of *porneia*. Also, provision for a spouse’s food, clothing, and housing, affection, communication, spiritual leadership, and a host of other qualities, are, no doubt, important requirements in marriage—but failures in these matters do not justify divorce. I am leery, too, of appealing to verses like 1 Corinthians 7:9 (“It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion”), which Paul addresses to widowers and widows (vv. 8-9), and then turn this into a basis for remarriage because one’s sexual needs go unfulfilled if a spouse invalidly divorces them and chooses not to remarry. Paul is quite clear that believers are to remain unmarried or be reconciled in this situation (1 Cor 7:10-11; cf. Matt 5:32b / Luke 16:18b). Also, the OT stories of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39) and David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) imply that God has given

us control over the sexual area of our lives and that we are not slaves to bodily passions. Furthermore, my never-before-married single friends are quite suspicious of arguments that seek to justify remarriage primarily to satisfy unfulfilled sexual desires. Certainly, as a lesser of two evils, it would be better to marry than to commit sexual immorality, but this raises other questions I cannot address here.

If we have understood Paul correctly in 1 Corinthians 7:15, willful desertion by an unbelieving spouse who subsequently remarries makes the restoration of that marriage impossible, and I would see no barrier to remarriage (unless, perhaps, for conscientious reasons the abandoned believer desires to remain single). But what if the unbelieving deserter does not remarry? In time and with great assurance that the marriage cannot be restored, it would seem that the Christian could remarry. Just how long one should wait would be determined by one’s theologically informed conscience and whether or not God providentially brings along a Christ-centered believing partner.

One or two writers find in Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 explicit permission for divorcees to remarry. I am quite confident that Paul is *not* here making a blanket statement that “remarriage—like the marriage of a virgin—has problems, but also that it is not sinful.”⁹⁷ This makes Paul explicitly approve of remarriage after divorce without qualification. The ESV now helps clarify Paul’s intent: “Are you bound to a wife (*dedesai gynaike*)? Do not seek to be free (*mē zētei lysin*). Are you free (*lelytai*) from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman (*hē parthenos*) marries, she has not sinned.” There is a growing consensus,

though not without its problems, that Paul is speaking to the concerns of some engaged couples in vv. 25-38 (cf. NIV, NRSV, RSV translations of vv. 36-38).⁹⁸ The men were asking Paul whether or not to follow through with their promise to marry (cf. *deō* in v. 27) in view of the ascetic teaching they had come under in Corinth.⁹⁹ Paul's initial (vv. 25-28) and final (vv. 36-38) remarks in this section are directed specifically to these couples.¹⁰⁰ Though Paul personally prefers the single state, he wants them to know—contrary to what the ascetics probably taught—that it is *not* sinful to go through with their plans to marry (vv. 28, 36). Thus 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 should not be brought into discussions of the NT teaching on the ethics of remarriage after divorce.

I would like to comment on one final implication of the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage for church leaders, namely pastors/elders/overseers, deacons, and deaconesses. The most recent studies of “the husband of one wife” requirement (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) argue that it is a typical ancient way of saying “faithful to one’s marriage.” Paul does not prohibit from church office those who, against their own wishes, have been abandoned or sexually betrayed, but those who are unfaithful to their marriage.¹⁰¹ Thus divorcees should not automatically be excluded from leadership positions in the church, nor should those who have remarried after the very limited cases in which the NT permits remarriage after divorce (i.e., divorce with just cause).

Conclusion

It may sound odd for me to say this now, but my switch to the majority view could be wrong. Nevertheless, I have tried to enumerate the conceptual, theological,

and exegetical reasons for my shift at this time in my life, and the reader will have to decide for himself or herself whether or not I have made the right decision. I think there are some excellent arguments to be made in favor of the minority view. Yet I have found that scholars like Collins, Davies and Allison, Hagner, and Hays, whose exegesis leads them to believe that Jesus categorically prohibited divorce and remarriage, eventually speak of Jesus’ divorce sayings as an ideal that must be realistically applied in this “not yet” era. Their suggested modern applications are almost identical to what we find among proponents of the majority view. Both majority and minority views want to avoid extremes in their application of the NT teaching. Minority view proponents may unfortunately prohibit what God would permit,¹⁰² and majority view proponents may permit what God would prohibit. The latter is the danger in a culture that emphasizes “self-actualization,” personal fulfillment, and “being true to oneself” rather than being true to the attendant commitments and obligations of one’s marriage covenant. Hays writes:

[T]he church must recognize and teach that marriage is grounded not in *feelings* of love but in the *practice* of love. Nor is the marriage bond contingent upon self-gratification or personal fulfillment. The church has swallowed a great quantity of pop psychology that has no foundation in the biblical depiction of marriage; When the marital union is rightly understood as a *covenant*, the question of divorce assumes a very different aspect. Those who have made promises before God should trust God for grace sufficient to keep those promises, and they should expect the community of faith to help them to keep faith, by supporting them and holding them accountable.¹⁰³

Let's teach God's word, preach to his glory, and disciple and equip God's people so that they find their greatest satisfaction and enjoyment in being obedient to Jesus. Only as we seek to please the Lord and imitate our heavenly Father as his dearly loved children (Eph 5:1) will we please one another—and that includes spouses. "He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church" (Eph 5:28b-29).¹⁰⁴

ENDNOTES

¹W. A. Heth and G. J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: Towards an Evangelical Understanding of New Testament Teaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985; updated ed.; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997). In the ten year update we added a 34 page appendix and over 350 additional bibliographical entries, most of them appearing since 1984.

²ESV and so throughout unless indicated otherwise.

³Haddon Robinson, "CT Readers Survey: Sex, Marriage, and Divorce," *Christianity Today*, 14 Dec 1992, 31. Over two-thirds of the 1,500 readers surveyed—primarily church leaders—responded. This was one of the highest responses in two decades of subscriber research. Only one out of ten respondents were divorced.

⁴D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel accord-*

ing to Saint Matthew, 3 vols. (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-95); C. S. Mann, *Mark* (Anchor Bible 27; Garden City: Doubleday, 1986); C. M. Blomberg, *Matthew* (New American Commentary 22; Nashville: Broadman, 1992); R. H. Stein, *Luke* (New American Commentary 24; Nashville: Broadman, 1992); J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word, 1993); D. L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994-96); C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). The exceptions are R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) and D. A. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2 vols. (Word Biblical Commentary 33; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993-95). This sample is not intended to be exhaustive.

⁵R. H. Stein, "Divorce" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 192-199; G. F. Hawthorne, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 594-601; C. S. Keener, "Marriage, Divorce and Adultery" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 712-717; C. S. Keener, "Adultery, Divorce" in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL:

InterVarsity Press, 2000) 6-16.

⁶G. J. Wenham, "Matthew and Divorce: An Old Crux Revisited," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22 (1984) 95-107; "The Syntax of Matthew 19.9," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (1986) 17-23; "Divorce," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 169-171. W. A. Heth, "The Meaning of Divorce in Matthew 19:3-9," *Churchman* 98 (1984) 136-152; "Matthew's 'Eunuch Saying' (19:12) and Its Relationship to Paul's Teaching on Singleness in 1 Corinthians 7" (unpublished doctoral dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986); "Divorce and Remarriage," in *Applying the Scriptures: Papers from ICBI Summit III*, ed. K. S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 219-239; "Unmarried 'for the Sake of the Kingdom' (Matthew 19:12) in the Early Church," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (Spring 1987) 55-88; "Divorce, but No Remarriage," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. W. House (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 73-129; "The Changing Basis for Permitting Remarriage after Divorce for Adultery: The Influence of R. H. Charles," *Trinity Journal* 11 ns (1990) 143-159; "Divorce and Remarriage: The Search for an Evangelical Hermeneutic," *Trinity Journal* 16 ns (1995) 63-100.

⁷A. Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Warren Carter, *Households and Dis-*

ciplanship: A Study of Matthew 19-20 (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 103; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Hagner, 549. Cf. also M. Bockmuehl, "Matthew 5.32; 19.9 in the Light of Pre-Rabbinic Halakah," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989) 291-295. Others not dependent on us include R. H. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 191; J. C. Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1981); "No Divorce & No Remarriage" in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. W. House (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 15-54. A recent survey and affirmation of our book is D. Warden, "The Words of Jesus on Divorce," *Restoration Quarterly* 39 (1997) 141-153.

⁸See also Blomberg's article "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," *Trinity Journal* 11 ns (1990) 161-196.

⁹Wenham and Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*, updated ed., 205-209. The demise of the forbidden degrees of kinship view is the first of four trends we identified as emerging in the decade following the publication of our study. Another recent critique of this view appears in D. Janzen, "The Meaning of *Porneia* in Matthew 5.32 and 19.9: An Approach from the Study of Ancient Near Eastern Culture," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 80 (2000) 66-80, esp. 69-70.

¹⁰G. Hugenerberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Supple-

ments to *Vetus Testamentum* 52; Leiden: Brill, 1994; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). I would like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Hugenerberger for several e-mail exchanges and the assistance he provided in the midst of his busy schedule as pastor of the historic Park Street Church in Boston and as adjunct professor of OT and semitic languages at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.

¹¹R. F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Good News Studies 38; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 6-7. See my review of Collins in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996) 676-678. Collins's approach is thoroughly historical-critical: Matthew is dated in the late 80s; he is a collector of traditions; the form of the exception in 5:32 is pre-Matthean (from his community); and the one in 19:9 is Matthew's formulation.

¹²Cf. Hugenerberger, 3, n. 25.

¹³*Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 1st ed. (Analecta biblica 21a; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963) 175.

¹⁵Cf. P. F. Palmer "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?" *Theological Studies* 33 (1972) 617-665.

¹⁶F. I. Anderson and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (Anchor Bible 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980) 221.

¹⁷Hugenerberger, 165.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁹Cf. BDB, "bsr," 142, #4; N. P. Bratsiotis, s.v. "bsr," *TDOT*, 2:327-328.

²⁰Hugenerberger, 77.

²¹*Ibid.*, 77, n. 144.

²²Cf. R. Westbrook, "The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in

Deuteronomy 24:1-4," in *Studies in the Bible 1986* (Scripta Hierosolymitana 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986) 387-405, adopted by Heth, "Divorce, but No Remarriage," 82-87.

²³Hugenerberger, 83.

²⁴Note: As I recall, neither Heth nor Wenham ever advocated this view of Mal 2:16.

²⁵C. S. Keener, . . . *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 26-27.

²⁶Blomberg, "Matthew 19:3-12," 162, n. 5.

²⁷J. A. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV* (Anchor Bible 28a; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 1120.

²⁸Keener, *Marries Another*, 23.

²⁹Cf. Heth, "Matthew's 'Eunuch Saying,'" 255-266.

³⁰Keener, *Marries Another*, 61.

³¹Keener, "Adultery, Divorce," 6.

³²Stein, "Divorce," 194.

³³Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 292-293.

³⁴I first met Craig in July of 1992 when *Christianity Today* brought us together at O'Hare Airport for a CT Institute on divorce (see the Dec. 14, 1992 issue, pp. 26-37). Craig gave me a copy of his book at that time.

³⁵Heth, "Divorce and Remarriage."

³⁶See R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) for a more recent brief but excellent canonical synthesis (361-376) after his exegesis of the relevant texts (349-361).

³⁷G. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 67-68. So also F. F. Bruce: "presumably remarriage would not be completely excluded for the believer"

(1 and 2 Corinthians [New Century Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 70; and his *Hard Sayings of Jesus* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983] 61); W. F. Orr and J. A. Walter: "The deserted partner, then, is free to marry again" (1 Corinthians [Anchor Bible 32; New York: Doubleday, 1976] 214); Stein, "Divorce," 198; Hawthorne, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest," 599; T. R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 431. In 1979 Stein was more nuanced about the intent of 1 Cor 7:15: "One cannot be dogmatic and claim that the believer 'no longer being bound' (7:15) implies the right to remarry, but it would be equally wrong to be dogmatic and say that it excludes the right to remarry" ("Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 [1979] 120).

³⁸The answer to this question will be found under "Pastoral Implications" section in the words of Blomberg (*Matthew*, 293), seconded by Keener (*Matthew*, 191-192, n. 96).

³⁹Keener, *Marries Another*, 61. Keener still stands firmly behind this assertion: "The basic element of the Jewish divorce contract was the phrase 'you are free,' permitting the wife's remarriage (*m. Git.* 9:3; *CPJ*, 2:10-12 §144); Paul employs the same formula for believers abandoned by unbelieving spouses (1 Cor 7:15; see *DPL*, Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest)" ("Adultery, Divorce," 6).

⁴⁰This was true despite the seven

arguments I had advanced to the contrary in *Jesus and Divorce*, 140-144. I also knew, however, what G. D. Fee had said about 1 Cor 7:15b: ". . . several converging data indicate that Paul is essentially repeating his first sentence: that the believer is not bound to maintain the marriage if the pagan partner opts out. . . . Remarriage is not an issue at all; indeed, it seems to be quite the opposite. In a context in which people are arguing for the right to dissolve marriage, Paul would scarcely be addressing the issue of remarriage, and certainly not in such circuitous fashion" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 302-303).

⁴¹Heth, "Divorce and Remarriage: The Search," 84-89. Ph.D. student, R. G. Olender, seconds and extends my arguments in his "The Pauline Privilege: Inference or Exegesis?" *Faith and Mission* 16 (1998) 94-117. Olender adopts a preterite-type view of Matt 19:9.

⁴²Keener, *Matthew*, 191.

⁴³Cf. Bock, 2:1358, n. 27.

⁴⁴Fee, *First Corinthians*, 331; cf. 295-296, 303, 355-356.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 355.

⁴⁶This is why Paul reminds them twice in this section that "it is no sin" to marry (1 Cor 7:28, 36).

⁴⁷Blomberg, *Matthew*, 111, 190, 198, 204, 342-343 (especially relevant to Jesus' saying in 5:32), 377-378.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 289-290. Cf. G. D. Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part II: The Crucial Issue—Authorial Intentionality: A Proposal Regard-

ing New Testament Imperatives," *Crux* 6:3 (1990) 41.

⁴⁹Stein, "Divorce," 197.

⁵⁰Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy," 162. Cf. W. Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 63: "The form of these sayings ["If any man . . .," "Whoever," or "Whenever"] makes them general rules and principles, . . ."

⁵¹Stein, "Divorce," 194. "Matthew, led by the Spirit (Jn 16:13, 15), has interpreted Jesus' words and shown that Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 are overstatements addressed to a hostile audience and that Jesus did not intend in a single sentence to establish a law which would cover ever conceivable situation" (Stein, "Divorce," 194-195).

⁵²Davies and Allison, 1:532; cf. 95-96. I find it precarious to maintain that Jesus *always* spoke in this manner. Thus I disagree with Davies and Allison's assessment that "Matthew must be found guilty of misunderstanding Jesus" when he included the exception clause because it "betrays a halakhic interpretation: it turns the Lord's logion into a community regulation" (532). See further Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, updated ed., 218-219.

⁵³Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy," 162-163. Blomberg also notes, contrary to the rhetorical overstatement approach, that the exception clause in v.9 need not be understood as "a later, inspired addition. It is rather more likely a portion of Jesus' original teaching which Mark omitted and Matthew restored" (163, n. 8).

⁵⁴Stein, "Is It Lawful," 118. Stein does add that "Matthew goes further than the school of Shammai, however, by relativizing Deut 24:1 as being given 'due to the hardness of men's hearts'" (ibid.).

⁵⁵Gundry, *Mark*, 530.

⁵⁶Cf. Bockmuehl, "Matthew 5.32; 19.9," 291-295. Also Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 56-89. Nearly every one of the premishnaic texts that Bockmuehl works with were already discussed by A. Tosato, "Joseph, Being a Just Man," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979) 547-551 (*Jub.* 33:7-9; 41:20; 1 QapGen 20:15; cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* 22:26).

⁵⁷This is different than saying Matthew inserted the clause in order to bring Jesus' teaching in line with the then current practice in the Matthean community (older historical critical view). It also differs from Collins's view that the Matt 5:32 form of the clause, with its allusion to Deut 24:1 (cf. Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, 168), suggests that the exception served as a conscience clause for those Jewish Christians who felt themselves duty-bound to divorce adulterous wives, either to be faithful to God's will or to obey then current Jewish (and Roman) law, which demanded they divorce adulterous spouses (*Divorce*, 212).

⁵⁸Interestingly, Collins (120-126) follows the minority view on Matt 19:10-12, but believes that divine enablement to remain single is given to those who divorce or have been divorced for *reasons other than unchastity* (v. 9). Collins's exegesis is seconded by Hays, 376-377, n. 17.

⁵⁹C. S. Mann, 388. Cf. Stein,

"Divorce," 193; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 111.

⁶⁰Heth, "The Meaning of Divorce," 136-152; "Divorce and Remarriage: The Search," 94-97. Gundry also proposes, based on the reaction of the disciples in Matt 19:10 (cf. 5:31-32 where remarriage goes unmentioned), that Jesus allowed an exception with respect to divorce but not remarriage. "If so and if they understood Jesus correctly, he redefines divorce as a dissolution of marriage without the right to remarry" (*Survey*, 191).

⁶¹Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, updated ed., 116-120, 227-229; Wenham, "Matthew and Divorce," 95-107; "The Syntax," 17-23. Jonathan Tripple, one of my former Greek students in my Gospels' course, recently noted in one of our conversations about his excellent 28 page paper on Matt 19:3-12: "To say that the majority view would have been affirmed without a doubt if Matthew had placed the exception clause after the verb 'remarries' rather than between 'divorces' and 'remarries,' is really an argument from silence." For the most recent critique of the syntactical argument, see Janzen, "Meaning of *Porneia*," 70-71.

⁶²" . . . we can feel confident that no reasonable writer would seek to express a major point by leaning on a subtle grammatical distinction—especially if it is a point not otherwise clear from the whole context (and if it is clear from the context, then the grammatical subtlety plays at best a secondary role in exegesis)" (M. Silva, *God, Language and Scrip-*

ture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 15).

⁶³For example, S. A. Ellisen repeatedly states that the sin of adultery "breaks" or "dissolves" the one-flesh union of husband and wife (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977] 52, 53, 58, 68, 72, 97, 98, 99), and mentions "one flesh" at least five times, but never once tells us what it signifies and in what sense it is dissolved. Ten years later I read Keener's *Marries Another*, and was convinced he still did not know either. He says that "husband and wife become one flesh when they are united sexually" (*Marries Another*, 40), that "They become one flesh in marriage (Gen. 2:24) because they were originally male and female (1:27) and *began* as one flesh (2:23); for the Hebrew idiom, cf. 29:14; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13; 1 Chr. 11:11" (160, n. 18), and that "Jesus uses *this image of spiritual unity* [italics mine] to argue that marriage should not be dissolved by people, not to argue that it *can* not be" (41).

⁶⁴A. Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple. A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19.13 [sic]-12 and 1 Cor. 11.3-16*, trans. N. Tomkinson with J. Gray (Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis 24; Lund: Gleerup, 1965).

⁶⁵Among other surprises, Hugenberger calls into question the traditional view, largely based on Lev 20:10; Jer 29:23, that within the OT a married man could not commit adultery against his wife if he had

sexual relations with an unmarried woman (313). “[T]here are, in fact, no texts which condone a husband’s sexual infidelity,” and “a number of texts, including Job 31:1; Hos. 4:14; and particularly Prov. 5:15-23, make clear that, whether or not there was an *legal* obligation, there definitely was a *moral* obligation for exclusive fidelity on the part of husbands” (338). This view finds its most explicit support from Lev 20:10 and Jer 29:23.

⁶⁶Hugenberger, 1.

⁶⁷Cf. D. J. Atkinson, *To Have and To Hold. The Marriage Covenant and the Discipline of Divorce* (London: Collins, 1979) 91. Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 111 (on Matt 5:32b).

⁶⁸Cited in Hugenberger, 3.

⁶⁹Hugenberger, 3, n. 25. Cf. also R. W. Pierce, “Covenant Conditionality and a Future for Israel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (1994) 27-38.

⁷⁰Blomberg was referring to someone like me when he wrote that “marriage is best described as a covenant, which tragically can be broken, rather than as an indissoluble, mystical union that remains even after divorce (as traditionally held by Roman Catholics, and, curiously, by some very conservative Protestants)” (*Matthew*, 290, n. 6). One week after reading Hugenberger, I checked *Jesus and Divorce* (103-104) and realized that I had quoted from Palmer the very “binding and inviolable” portion with which Hugenberger had taken issue. I had used Palmer to identify the two crucial parts in the formation of ancient Near Eastern marriage covenants:

oaths and witnesses.

⁷¹Hugenberger, 174. This sense is operative in Mal 2:14 (“the wife of your covenant”) where the immediately preceding context (v. 15, “Did he not make them one . . .”) contains a reminder of the “one flesh” nature of marriage in Gen 2:24 (cf. Hugenberger, 124-167).

⁷²D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* 2nd ed. (Analecta biblica 21a; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 175, cited in Hugenberger, 11; cf. 164, n. 161 & p. 180.

⁷³Hugenberger, 180.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 162-163.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 184.

⁷⁷Cf. *ibid.*, 11-12, 193, 215.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 278.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 165.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 248.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 279.

⁸³Cf. *ibid.*, 281-294.

⁸⁴Carson, 417.

⁸⁵Hugenberger, 288-294.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 291.

⁸⁷In addition to the Abimelech and Joseph narratives, B. S. Childs adds that the seriousness with which Israel viewed adultery is also seen when King David “falls under the death sentence for his adultery with Bathsheba. In the other portions of the Old Testament adulterers are commonly linked with murderers (Job 24.14f.) and treacherous men (Jer. 9.2) who misuse God’s name (Jer. 29.23) and oppress the widow (Mal. 3:5)” (*The Book of Exodus* [Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 422). Cf. Heb 13:4: “Let marriage be held in honor

among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

⁸⁸See the Westbrook bibliographical reference in the chart at Deut 24:1-4. “Some indecency” would refer to “a cause serious enough to permit the husband to divorce his wife while avoiding any financial penalty. Cf. also, e.g., M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 115 (cited in Hugenberger, 81, n. 154).

⁸⁹This is the burden of the article by Janzen, “Meaning of *Porneia*,” 66-80. He understands the Pharisees’ question in Matt 19:3 to be “is divorce without just cause permissible? Can a husband divorce ‘for every kind of reason’?” (78). Janzen argues that the Matthean Jesus is much more stringent than his Pharisaical contemporaries. “Not only does he not permit divorce without just cause, but he limits just cause to sexual offenses, a much narrower interpretation than that found in the Mishnah” (79).

⁹⁰Keener, “Adultery, Divorce,” 9. This concern to avoid the charge of “legalized adultery (closing a possible loophole in the prohibition against adultery)” may well be the ultimate reason for the prohibition in Deut 24:4. In support, Hugenberger cites J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the form of a Harmony*, III, 94: “The reason of the law is, that, by prostituting his wife, he would be, as far as in him lay, acting like a procurer” (*Marriage as a Covenant*, 77, n. 144).

⁹¹Hugenberger, 233.

⁹²Hays, 364. Hays writes: “Once mar-

riage is construed within the story told by Scripture, divorce—even if it is permissible in some narrow sense—is seen to be antithetical to God’s design for male and female” (351).

⁹³Blomberg, *Matthew*, 293. Cf. Keener, *Matthew*, 191-192, n. 96. Blomberg adds: “These observations seem to leave the door open for divorce as a final step, as perhaps the lesser of two evils, when all else has failed, similar to excommunication of unrepentant sinners. To open this door of course means that some will abuse their freedom and walk through it prematurely. And undue attention to the exception clause of v. 9 risks losing sight of Jesus’ overall point that divorce is *never desirable*. Married people should always be seeking ways to improve and enhance relations with spouses rather than wondering how they can get out of the commitments they have made. Those who divorce and/or remarry on any grounds must admit failure, repent of the sins that led to the dissolution of their marriage, and vow to remain faithful to any subsequent relationships.”

⁹⁴Blomberg (*Matthew*, 293), Hays (372), and Keener all answer this question in the affirmative. Keener writes: “Assuming that Jesus’ teaching on the subject is a general principle meant to admit exceptions (as Matthew and Paul demonstrate), and acknowledging the probability that his teaching is hyperbolic, we may allow some exceptions not addressed by Matthew or Paul because they were not specifically relevant to the situations these writ-

ers addressed” (*Marries Another*, 105).

⁹⁵G. P. Liaboe, “The Place of Wife Battering in Considering Divorce,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13 (1985) 129-138.

⁹⁶Keener, *Marries Another*, 61.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 63. Cf. also Keener, *Matthew*, 191; “Marriage, Divorce and Adultery,” 714.

⁹⁸Cf. H. Chadwick, “All Things to All Men,” *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55) 267-268; G. Schrenk, s.v. “*parthenos*,” *TDNT* 3:60-61; O. L. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 80; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 101-102, nn. 35-36; Heth, “Matthew’s ‘Eunuch Saying,’” 206-235, 267-286; D. F. Wright, “Sexuality, Sexual Ethics,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 874; Schreiner, 418. Sexual desires improperly channeled are the common factor in Paul’s teaching in both 1 Cor 7:36-38 and in 1 Thess 4:3-8.

⁹⁹Cf. J. K. Elliott, “Paul’s Teaching on Marriage in 1 Corinthians: Some Problems Considered,” *New Testament Studies* 19 (1973) 219-225. Like Fee, I understand the “virgins” in v. 25 as a term “that the Corinthians used in referring to some young betrothed women who along with their fiancés were being pressured by the pneumatics and were not themselves wondering whether to go through with the marriage. Paul’s response is basically from the man’s point of view because it was the cultural norm for men to take the initiative in all such matters. This assumes the influence of

Roman culture since by the time of the early Empire it was common for men to act on their own behalf, without the father acting as *patria potestas* as in earlier days” (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 327). Cf. also J. F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986) ch. 3.

¹⁰⁰ . . . the situation in vv. 27-28 seems to be reflecting a real concern in the community that is finally particularized in vv. 36-38” (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 315).

¹⁰¹Keener, *Marries Another*, ch. 7, “Can Ministers Be Remarried?—1 Timothy 3:2”; S. Page, “Marital Expectations of Church Leaders in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993) 105-120; Keener, “Husband of One Wife,” *AME Zion Quarterly Review* 109 (Jan 1997) 5-24. J. E. Smith focuses on another related issue: Does sexual immorality permanently disqualify one from leadership? He concludes that the Pastoral Epistles’ leadership qualifications are concerned with the current, not the past status of a leader’s character, that fallen leaders can be restored *if* both their life and their reputation inside and outside (cf. Rom 2:24) the church can be rehabilitated, but that this may be very difficult (“Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?” *Bibliotheca sacra* 151 [1994] 455-480).

¹⁰²Most readers of my work on this subject did not know that I have always applied my no remarriage view in almost the same way as a diligent proponent of the majority view.

¹⁰³Hays, 372.

¹⁰⁴I would like to thank my colleague, Ted Dorman, for reading this article in an earlier draft and offering helpful editorial suggestions.