

MARRIAGE,
DIVORCE
AND
REMARriage

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International Ministries

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Concerning the often misunderstood subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage, we are only going to briefly expound on what we believe to be taught in the Scriptures. One of our major aims in formulating this teaching has been to present Biblical truth in such a way that people may be delivered from whatever bondage they may be in, regarding this area. As truth is accepted and acted upon, it brings freedom (John 8:32). And the application of truth to this controversial area of marriage, divorce and remarriage is certainly greatly needed in the Body of Christ today.

In this age and time, the bond of marriage has been, sad to say, under heavy attack by man's enemy, Satan, even in the Body of Christ. Divorce is presented as the easy way out of a "hard to work through" situation. Children, responsibilities and living by your word are often abandoned in favour of people's emotions which are built on sand. Even the counsel that Christians seek can often come from humanistic psychology, which represents the world's way of dealing with issues, rather than the truths that only God can provide.

As a consequence, Christians are often fed worldly solutions and humanistic strategies to help them deal with problems which only the wisdom of the Word of God and the grace and empowerment of the Holy Spirit can enable them to solve. Sin is not addressed as such. There are now only "no fault" divorces where the guilty party is treated the same as the innocent one. Morality is not even considered so that the morally wrong are not made to feel "condemned" - all in the name of progress and ease of management.

***“. . . Divorce is presented as the easy way
out of a “hard to work through” situation.
..”***

In the secular world, the bond of marriage is being attacked by Satan through intellectuals who advocate sexual freedom and open marriages where adultery is practised. Some so-called “experts” on “meaningful relationships” even advise troubled couples to experiment with other people’s husbands and wives, to “enrich” their marriages. Homosexuality is also being aggressively thrust into our lives as a valid alternative lifestyle, and the right for homosexual couples to marry and raise children has been legitimised through law. All of this “enlightened development” would serve to destroy the sanctity of marriage, and as a result, the integrity and stability of the greatest institution known to man - the family.

With the family unit under siege, the basic and most important human structure, Satan is seeking, with great subtlety, to destroy the core upon which our society is built. Consider firstly that the source of strength in human society is the couple who swear bonds of allegiance and fidelity, “till death us do part,” covenanting together to forsake all others. Upon this foundation, and its stable strong roots, a new generation can be raised to productivity and strength. Without this basis, nearly every form of heartache and social disintegration can eventuate. Marriage is God-given, His plan for human society - and the home is the place where His principles and commandments are, first and foremost, to be instilled. To erode this foundation is to give Satan a new tool by which he can kill, steal and destroy, not only the unsaved but those in the Church as well (John 10:10).

The Church must guard against submitting to relentless, worldly pressure and departing from God’s Word, especially in this area. Divorce is not uncommon, even among its ministers, and it is the ministers who set the example and the pattern for the Church to follow.

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Lord give us Spirit-led Ministers who teach, preach and move in the power of Your Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5), for strength in the Church is based on UNITY, not unity with man but unity with the Spirit of Truth. This includes unity that prevails in marriages within the Church - unity based on God’s Word rather than the flesh.

This unity involves seeking God and His Word for direction in all matters, and submitting to the Lord as the true Head of the union. Isaiah tells us *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways”* (Isaiah 55:8). Our ways and thoughts are not His, and if we follow direction that comes from our own ideas and thoughts, we will be led by the flesh. Seeking the unity of the Spirit in our marriage involves prayer and submitting to God’s order - where the husband is the earthly head of the union, for there cannot be two bosses (Ephesians 5:22-24). While married couples are equal in God’s eyes, husband and wife have different roles, and the husband, “in the Lord” and so “with the Lord,” has the God-ordained responsibility of leadership.

BASIC SCRIPTURAL GUIDELINES

God states that He hates unjust divorce - or “*putting away*” (Malachi 2:16). The book of the Prophet Malachi presents a dialogue between God and an ungrateful, unfaithful people. Included is the following account of Israel’s sin in regard to divorce.

Malachi 2:10-17 records the violation of the institution of marriage by the people of Israel, and the Lord’s response to this problem. As in the days of Ezra, the Hebrew men had been marrying foreign wives who worshipped foreign gods. By this means, Satan was attempting to pull Israel back into idolatry. However their guilt was greater because in order to marry younger foreign women, each of these men was divorcing the Hebrew “*wife of his youth.*” In this way they were dealing “*treacherously*” with those they were covenanted to in marriage, and the Lord was confronting them via

the Prophet to face and then abandon this wicked behaviour. Inferred here too is the fading of beauty with the passing of the years, prompting the treacherous unions with younger foreign wives, a practice forbidden by the Law of Moses.

MALACHI 2:13 And this have you done again (as in the days of Ezra), covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out (this speaks of divorced wives petitioning the Lord for justice), insomuch that He regards not the offering any more, or receives it with good will at your hand (the guilt of the husbands could not be satisfied by their sacrifices).

MALACHI 2:14 Yet you (the guilty) say, “Wherefore?” (“Why will the Lord not accept my sacrifices?”) Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously (the Lord knows their sin): yet is she your companion, and the wife of your covenant (the marriage vow).

MALACHI 2:15 And did not He make one (one wife for Adam)? Yet had He the residue of the Spirit (this was God’s holy order). And wherefore one? That He might seek a godly seed (refers to Abraham’s marriage to Sarah, to produce the Godly seed - Isaac). Therefore take heed to your spirit (its corruption), and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

MALACHI 2:16 For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away (unjust divorce): for one covers violence with his garment, says the Lord of Hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously (with your marriage partner).

The word “garment” (Malachi 2:16) refers to the cultural practice in Old Testament times of spreading a garment over a woman to claim her as a wife. This was what Ruth asked Boaz to do as her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:9. See also Deuteronomy 22:30; Ezekiel 6:8). Therefore to cover violence with one’s garment is to be unfaithful to one’s marriage covenant and the sanctity of the

marriage bed. So the Lord was condemning marital infidelity, leading to separation and unjust divorce.

Another version reads:

MALACHI 2:16 For the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “I hate divorce and marital separation, . . . Therefore keep a watch upon your spirit [that it may be controlled by My Spirit] that you deal not treacherously and faithlessly [with your marriage mate]. ” (Amp.)

Jesus answered the Pharisees, in this way, in regard to divorce.

MATTHEW 19:1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, He departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts (borders) of Judaea beyond Jordan;

MATTHEW 19:2 And great multitudes followed Him; and He healed them there.

MATTHEW 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting (trying to trap) Him, and saying unto Him, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every (or any) cause?” (This was the question of the day in Israel at that time.)

MATTHEW 19:4 And He answered and said unto them, “Have you not read, that He Who made them at the beginning made them male and female,

MATTHEW 19:5 And said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and the two shall be one flesh’? (God instituted marriage)

MATTHEW 19:6 Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

MATTHEW 19:7 *They say unto Him, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement (a Certificate of Divorce [Deuteronomy 24:1-2]), and to put her away?”*

MATTHEW 19:8 *He said unto them, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

MATTHEW 19:9 *And I say unto you, whosoever 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.”*

Controversy raged in Jesus’ day between two schools of thought in regard to divorce, based on the teachings of the Rabbinical Schools of Hillel and Shammai. Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever (including not preparing his meals the way he liked or meeting someone he liked better!). Thus we see the term “*for every cause*” in Matthew 19:3. Shammai taught that a man could only divorce his wife for adultery. Therefore the question posed by the Pharisees was an attempt to snare Jesus, and to discredit His teaching.

“. . .Marriage is God-given, His plan for human society . . .the source of strength in human society is the couple, male and female, who swear bonds of allegiance and fidelity, “till death us do part,” covenanting together to forsake all others. . .”

God’s original pattern and perfect will was one wife and one husband, to be united together in a monogamous marriage covenant (constituting a new unit called a family). Jesus reinforced this, as did many writers of the Old and New Testaments. As we have seen, in the Old Testament, God did allow divorce. We understand from the

words of Jesus, however, contained in Matthew 19:4-9, that divorce under the New Covenant was to be undertaken only under very stringent guidelines, for Jesus was speaking here to the Church in advance. We will investigate what Jesus meant, and the repercussions of His statement in Matthew 19:9, as we proceed.

Note: Under the stringent New Testament guidelines for divorce, God will bless the innocent party who instigates divorce proceedings on Godly grounds; and in some cases, divorce proceedings themselves can be approved by God when they are undertaken according to scriptural guidelines. Thus divorce, in these cases, in itself is not sin. This can be contrasted to divorce which is undertaken on unscriptural grounds. Divorce of this nature does constitute sin, being a violation of the sacred marriage covenant. Notice that the Lord Himself gave faithless Israel (the Northern Kingdom) “*a bill of divorce*” and sent her away because of her adulterous behaviour (fornication) (Jeremiah 3:6-8). This was neither unjust nor unrighteous, but a Godly, and therefore righteous action on God’s part.

Also note: In the Old Testament, God also allowed polygamy, the practice of a man having more than one wife. A man could, in this instance, have many wives and not be considered adulterous, e.g. Jacob. This was certainly not God’s original and perfect order, for in the beginning He created Adam and Eve, the parents of the human race, and established the pattern of one husband and one wife as the foundation of Godly human social structure. The New Testament order is certainly that of one husband being joined through the sacred bond of marriage to one wife.

***“ . . . God’s original pattern and perfect will
was one wife and one husband, to be
united together in a monogamous
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unit called a family). . . ”***

WHAT IS MARRIAGE ?

This question has been well addressed by other writers. To cover it, we have taken an extract from Kevin Conner's book, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage," pgs. 133, 134.

"A. Marriage by The State

Many people prefer to have their marriage ceremony conducted by a Civil Marriage Celebrant, a representative of the state. This is done legally before the Civil Marriage Celebrant and before proper witnesses.

Because marriage is a Divine institution for all mankind, whether Believers or unbelievers, a state marriage is accepted as scriptural and valid. Marriage is in harmony with the Word of God regardless of the spiritual state of the man or woman being married. There are many happily married couples even though they are not Christians.

B. Marriage by The Church

Most people in Western society prefer to be married by a marriage celebrant in a church building. Here the church authority performs the wedding ceremony religiously - the spiritual and devotional part of the service - and legally - the legal signing of the marriage register and papers, after the legal vows have been made, and before witnesses. Many are married in a church setting even though they are not Christians.

Whether the marriage ceremony is done by state or church, the marriage is accepted on the legal basis. The couple are legally married before witnesses and have made their vows and signed the marriage contract. The marriage is biblical and legal, even though it may not be a Christian wedding. It is still valid in the sight of God and man."¹

***“. . . Marriage is in harmony with the
Word of God regardless of the spiritual***

***state of the man or woman being
married. . .”***

A further extract from Kevin Conner’s book, “Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage,” pgs. 10, 11.

“What then is marriage? Marriage is the contractual, binding, covenant commitment to live together in a relationship recognized morally by God and society, enacted verbally, validated legally and consummated physically.

Marriage is God’s design for relationship between opposite sexes. Marriage is a commitment or a cleaving that binds two people together in a special relationship of love and mutual sharing. Marriage is blessed, sanctified and exalted by God. Marriage is a permanent situation. God never intended divorce. Marriage was to be an unbroken covenant of love for life.” ²

Kevin Conner then quotes from an official Assemblies of God statement regarding marriage and divorce.

“The Assemblies of God in Australia National Conference provided the following statement on Marriage and Divorce as it affects the church and individual Believers (revised 1981 and amended in accordance with the diction of the General Conferences, Adelaide, 1989 and Sydney 1991)

SECTION A. MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage is a lifelong, monogamous relationship both permanent and exclusive. Vows, and coition together, constitute the essential elements in a marriage. These two vital elements, based on love and loyalty, faithfulness and responsibility, constitute marriage which Scripture declares is, in principle, permanent.

The pattern upon which God built society was the marriage of one man and one woman. This followed a general procedure in that, during various ceremonies, according to the customs of the people, a public covenant was made. This was followed later by a private

committal of the persons in physical union. Malachi 2:11-14 expresses the first (covenant) aspect of marriage. Genesis 2:24-25 expresses the second (committal). Here the security and shelter of one's homes is left and a new relationship is established - a new unit of society begins. 'To cleave' is 'to cling or adhere,' and suggests strength and permanency. Marriage is, therefore, leaving behind the old and starting anew.

Whilst the idea of having children is a factor in marriage, and the avoidance of temptations of unattached affections is another, the major factor is the love and increasing enjoyment of the company and mutual interest and fellowship of two people, which leads to the point where physical life can only have full meaning and expression in continuing in the presence of each other, and making the relationship permanent and full.

Love is selective and increasingly engages one's attention to the person loved; others thus being excluded. It affects the whole personality - one's spirit, manner, emotions, and conduct, especially where it is reciprocated. Love flows from the heart, but it is not above reason. It carefully and intelligently guides to a single and lasting choice. They become one flesh. Not the fusing into one physical being or the absolute adoption of each other's thought life, for, in these husband and wife remain distinct, and it is these facts that make them attractive to one another. Flesh describes man in his relationship with the entire world. When Jesus became flesh, He partook of human nature with its earthly dependence. It is in this area that husband and wife are united and find their firmest expression of physical life, personal commitment and lasting companionship. They 'know' one another and have an appreciation of each other hitherto unknown.

***“...Marriage is a commitment or a
cleaving that binds two people together in
a special relationship of love and mutual
sharing. . .”***

The bond of marriage is more than outward observance of the covenant publicly entered into. The heart is the place where such

standards are to be kept, for 'as a man thinks in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23:7 with Matthew 5:28).

*The woman also has a peculiar responsibility in the guardianship of the marriage relationship. She is the one in whom life is conceived, and through her the social unit, the family, is established. It is therefore for her, as well as her husband, to conduct herself, her conversation, adornment and dress, in a manner that will guard the union from intrusion and divorce.*³

(underlines added)

Having established the Biblical definitions and parameters of marriage, let us now consider what God's Word tells us about divorce.

DIVORCE

Within the Church there are different schools of thought in relation to divorce. In this teaching we will not attempt to deal with this diversity, but rather to teach what we, and others, believe to be the truth concerning this area.

Let us return to what the Master said on the subject of divorce.

MATTHEW 19:9 "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marries she who is put away does commit adultery."

"except for fornication"

What is fornication? It is important to determine exactly what this word means, it being the only legitimate ground, on Jesus' authority, for scriptural divorce.

The Greek word "porneia," translated as "*fornication*" in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, is a general term which speaks of "illicit sexual intercourse." (See also, for example, Acts 15:20,29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:18; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.)

The word fornication actually has several meanings in scripture. Firstly it refers to a whole range of illicit sexual practices including

incest, perversion and homosexuality (1 Corinthians 5:1). Secondly it refers to repeated adultery, with no desire to repent. Thirdly it is used as a symbolic reference to idolatry, the worship of false gods - spiritual adultery (Revelation 17:1-2,4).

When Jesus was setting forth these grounds for divorce, it was the second definition of the word which He was mostly referring to, i.e. repeated unrepentant adultery. To give an example, the Bible speaks, by deduction, of David as being an adulterer (his relationship with Bathsheba was not a calculated or predatory conquest - just something which he fell into). However it brands Esau as a fornicator (one who is an habitual adulterer [Hebrews 12:16]). Thus all fornicators are adulterers, but not all adulterers are fornicators.

“ . . In relation to marriage, fornication refers to a person who commits repeated acts of adultery, being unrepentant and desirous of continuing. . . ”

The Christian wife or husband who discovers that their spouse is involved in an extramarital affair would be thoroughly traumatized by this knowledge. Nevertheless, this alone would not constitute grounds for divorce. The guilty party may be thoroughly convicted of their sin and in deep sorrow, repent, determining never again to defile his or her marriage, knowing the hurt they have caused and the damage that has been done. Under God's laws, and by the grace and power of God (for most would need God to strengthen them in this area), the wronged spouse should then come to a position where they can forgive their partner and attempt to reconcile the fractured marriage relationship.

In order for this to take place there would need to be proper Christian counselling so that, with God's help, the couple could work on restoring their marriage. Trust would have been broken, and the violation of the marriage covenant would have produced much hurt and heartache. There would be no overnight solution. It could take a significant amount of time to heal the wounds of the innocent party and to strengthen the moral backbone of the repentant sinner - so that

trust and love again would have their place and proper expression in this marriage.

However, if the guilty partner wished to continue their illicit affair, or indeed had been involved in, and was desirous of continuing to practise perverted sexual activity (the first definition of “fornication”), then this would constitute grounds for divorce. Therefore in relation to marriage, fornication refers not to a person who commits adultery and then repents sincerely, but to a person who commits repeated acts of adultery, being unrepentant and desirous of continuing. This constitutes grounds for the Christian to divorce their marriage partner. Another translation of Matthew 19:9 would be as follows: “Whosoever shall divorce his wife, except it be for repeated unrepentant sexual sin, and shall marry another, commits adultery . . .”

Some think that fornication is sexual promiscuity between single people. If this were the case, how then could it be grounds for divorce between married couples, i.e. “*except it be for fornication*”?

It should also be noted that Jesus is not giving a command here to divorce, but rather, He is giving grounds for divorce, the only grounds which give a Christian the right to divorce. However one should always try, in the power of God, and through much prayer, to bring one’s guilty partner to repentance - for “*I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel*” (Malachi 2:16).

Furthermore, “*except . . . for fornication*” being the only cause whereby divorce can, in God’s eyes, be legally undertaken, this leaves “*whosoever shall put away his wife* (or her husband) *and shall marry another,*” living in a state of adultery. The subsequent marriages of those not scripturally divorced and therefore not scripturally remarried will be adulterous ones.

What is adultery? Adultery is sexual union between people who are not legally married to each other. Some in the Church think that no matter what the reason, if a Christian has been divorced and remarried, then they are living in adultery. Well, what does God’s Word say about this issue? As we have said, in scripture Jesus gives the Christian only one way out of marriage with a former Christian partner, only one legal set of grounds for divorce. This is, as we have said, fornication (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9). The innocent party who divorces the guilty one, is, in this case, free to remarry under God’s

laws. So the innocent party who has obtained a legitimate divorce, according to scripture, is free to remarry, and any ensuing marriage will not be an adulterous one.

Scripture cites another case where a Christian can obtain a legitimate divorce. This time it is Paul speaking:

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

1 CORINTHIANS 7:15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace.

Paul is writing in this case about a different marital situation, that where a Christian is unequally yoked to an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:1-16). Paul speaks of the sanctity of such a marriage, and forbids the Christian to separate from a non-believing partner on this basis. However, if the non-believing partner should choose to desert the believing partner (and usually this occurs because of their Christian commitment), then in what position does this leave the Christian? We are, to reiterate, not dealing here with a situation involving two Christians. Here Paul is speaking about desertion because of marital conflict (and not sexual sin) concerning mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians. He clearly says that if the unbelieving partner will not remain with the Believer, the believing one is to let them depart. The Believer is then *“not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace”* (1 Corinthians 7:15).

The word “bondage” here comes from the Greek word “doulou” which means “to enslave.” So the Believer whose unbelieving wife or husband has willfully deserted them is no longer subservient or bound to the marriage. He or she is then free to remarry, for he or she is no longer “under bondage” to the marriage. This is in stark contrast to the situation where Believers marry. This is due to the fact that Christians come under more stringent spiritual laws because of the power that is available to help them do what is right - the power of the Holy Spirit. This power is available to

Christians and if we do not avail ourselves of it, it is our own fault or responsibility.

Thus to whom much is given, of them will much be required (Luke 12:48), and this principle clearly applies to Christian marriage.

We have therefore established from Jesus' words that two Christians who marry, do so for life. Except if one commits fornication (in the process becoming unsaved), there are no scriptural and thus Godly grounds for divorce. Jesus' words therefore stand as a warning for Christians that marriage is a very serious step, and should be entered into only after due consideration, prayer and the seeking of the Lord's direction. This does not mean the Lord will tell individuals who to marry, for this remains each person's choice. However He can indicate if there are problems in relation to commitment, timing or other matters. The Word of God tells us that we should not be unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14). This principle applies not only to marriage to unbelievers, it means we should seek a marriage partner who is teachable concerning the things of God, and comes from a similar doctrinal position. The Word also tells us we will know a person's commitment by their fruits (Matthew 7:20; 2:33). The quality of these may, of course, be best recognized over a period of time, as people respond to life's various pressures.

“ . . . Jesus' words therefore stand as a warning for Christians that marriage is a very serious step, and should be entered into only after due consideration, prayer and the seeking of the Lord's direction. . . ”

So let the Word of God guide you in the choice of your life's partner, and always seek the leading of the Spirit in regard to this choice. Those who marry hastily, without having due respect for the teachings of the Word of God or the leading of the Spirit, do so at their own peril. They risk heartache, sorrow, and the loss of spiritual freedom and joy. Marriage can be a source of great earthly blessing and fulfillment. It can also, at worst, become “hell on earth,” a prison without walls lasting a lifetime. Apart from the decision to receive

salvation, this decision is one of the most important people can make during their earthly walk. Christians need to make it wisely, seeking to please the Lord at every point, determining to be led by God and His Word, and so to avoid the pitfalls of the flesh - human reasoning, human emotions and human imaginings (Isaiah 55:8-9; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

LEGITIMATE SCRIPTURAL DIVORCE FREES THE CHRISTIAN TO REMARRY

MATTHEW 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away (divorce) his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry she who is divorced (unscripturally) commits adultery.

We have said that “porneia” or “*fornication*” constitutes the only legitimate grounds for a Christian to divorce a former Christian partner. If a Christian divorces another without scriptural grounds and subsequently remarries, this second marriage will be adulterous. Furthermore, if the other party of the first marriage subsequently remarries, he or she will also be adulterous in God’s eyes. This is because the first marriage bond has not been completely dissolved, and the two parties have not been released from its obligations.

Note: Death will always release people from the marriage bond, widowers and widows being completely free to remarry (Romans 7:2-4).

In relation to legitimate scriptural divorce, and the issue of subsequent remarriage, Kevin Conner (“Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage” pg. 96) quotes Ken Chant in his book, “Divorce and Remarriage,” pg. 23.

*“When a divorce was lawful, Moses said the woman could go and **“become the wife of another man”** (Deuteronomy 24:2). I take it that Christ accepted this rule. In other words, the exception stated by Christ (**“for any cause other than porneia”**) is applicable not only to divorce but also **re-marriage**. Thus Henry Alford argues that the structure of the Greek text in Matthew 19:9 requires the reading, **“He who marries a woman thus divorced** (that is, for a cause other than unchastity) **commits adultery.**”*

*In other words, when a Christian has divorced a spouse on lawful grounds (that is, because of **porneia**), that Christian is free to remarry, but not otherwise.*

*The Jews of Christ's day held the unanimous opinion that the Scriptures allowed re-marriage after a lawful divorce. They squabbled about what constituted a lawful divorce, **but they never doubted that Moses allowed a couple to re-marry after their marriage had been legitimately dissolved.** On that point there was no quarrel.*

Christ appears to have approved that principle, except for placing a definite limitation on what constitutes a lawful divorce. Subject only to this restriction, the Lord apparently agreed that a divorced couple were free to re-marry.” (Author’s Emphasis) ⁴

Kevin Conner (pgs. 96 and 97) then quotes Derek Prince from his book, “Divorce and Remarriage” pgs. 135-137:

*“In bringing this chapter to its conclusion we quote from one other recognized ministry, Derek Prince. In **“Divorce and Remarriage”** (pp.135-137) Derek Prince has this to say concerning the subject.*

*“Thus, both the Law and the gospel come to the same conclusion concerning **porneia**: it releases the innocent party from his or her obligations.*

Under the Law, Moses says that if a man divorces his wife legally and sends her away, she is free to become “the wife of another man” (Deuteronomy 24:1-2). Obviously Moses is not condoning adultery. In Deuteronomy 24:3-4, Moses says that if the woman’s second husband divorces her or dies, her first husband is not allowed to marry her again. By calling the man to whom she was previously married the “first” husband, Moses indicates clearly that the first marriage had been legally terminated.

In the New Testament Paul says “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you should marry, you have not sinned . . .” (1 Corinthians 7:27-28, NASB). This indicates that a person who is (Scripturally) released from a marriage partner and later remarries

has not sinned. No stigma of guilt or inferiority, therefore, should follow a person who obtains a divorce on legitimate, Scriptural grounds and later exercises his or her right to remarry. Such a person is not a “second-class Christian.”

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*On the human level, the issue of divorce is normally resolved in a court of law, either religious or secular. Beyond all such human decisions, however, lie Divine principles of justice that never vary. One such principle runs throughout the entire Bible: **the innocent must never be treated as guilty, nor the guilty as innocent.**”⁵*

Kevin Conner continues on in regard to this subject of the innocent and the guilty:

“Derek Prince then quotes Scriptures from Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15 and Isaiah 5:22-23. There the Lord speaks of the responsibility of judges to acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty. The reverse is detestable to the Lord. The principle applies to the issue of divorce and remarriage. The innocent should not be penalized, nor the guilty justified. Biblical and Divine justice should be applied in each and every case.”⁶

(underlines added)

THE GUILTY AND THE INNOCENT - BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

Let's look at this issue of the guilty and the innocent, and see how this principle can be applied scripturally to the termination of a marriage.

DEUTERONOMY 24:1 When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favour in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a Bill of Divorcement (Certificate of Divorce) and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

DEUTERONOMY 24:2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife (she is free to remarry).

Note: The word “*uncleanness*” relates to some form of shameful or disgraceful behaviour. There were greatly varying views in Jesus’ day as to what this entailed, and what could then constitute legal grounds for divorce. Nevertheless, we see from these verses that divorce and remarriage were allowable.

Let us see that contained in these scriptures is the Divine principle which upholds the standard of God’s justice, namely that only the innocent, rather than the guilty, can dissolve the spiritual bond in marriage through what is termed “*a Bill of Divorcement.*” We see this term again in Jeremiah 3:8 where it is recorded that God gave faithless Israel, the Northern Kingdom, “*a Bill of Divorcement*” because of her continuing adultery. It must be the innocent party, according to scriptural guidelines, who, in God’s eyes, breaks this bond. Thus the wife who exhibits shameful or disgraceful behaviour could be divorced by her husband.

“. . . One such principle runs throughout the entire Bible: the innocent must never be treated as guilty, nor the guilty as innocent. . . ”

Obviously divorce and remarriage were permitted in the Old Testament, and in the Old Testament the right to divorce was also a

right to remarry. A properly initiated divorce constituted a complete termination of the marriage contract - physically (law of the land) and spiritually (in God's eyes). Hence the two who were one in God's eyes, speaking in terms of the marriage, would then revert back to two.

In Old Testament times, the Bill of Divorcement dissolved both the physical contract and the spiritual bond (for the people were type-patterns of Christians). Today, for Christians, divorce through the law of the land is needed to terminate the physical contract. If the guilty party has divorced the innocent, the spiritual bond which remains can be dissolved by faith in the prayer that is prayed over a Bill of Divorcement.

Moses allowed divorce because of their "*hardness of heart*" (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5). God permitted this because people in Old Testament times were unregenerated. This meant not only that they were not able to avail themselves of the Spirit's empowerment to help them do what was right, they also had no access to the vastly increased amounts of spiritual truth which were to become available in New Testament times. Now, however, in this age of full grace, where regeneration is experienced by all who have made Jesus Lord, "*hardness of heart*" divorces, which allow for man's fallen nature and sinful state, are not scriptural. There are no grounds for two Christians to divorce, and two Christians should do all that is in their power, with God's help, if they are experiencing relationship problems, to reconcile their marriage. If they are unable to do this and cannot live together, the only option available to them, as Christians, is to live apart and never remarry.

However if a former Christian commits fornication then divorces the innocent party according to the law of the land, to properly terminate the marriage bond (the spiritual bond which remains), the innocent party, as we have stated, should write out and pray over a Certificate of Divorce or "Bill of Divorcement" (Deuteronomy 24:1). This is best done, if it concerns one who is new in the faith or who lacks faith, in the company of a mature Christian. The writing of the Certificate of Divorce gives proper spiritual focus on which the prayer of faith can then be based. The answer to the problem of ongoing spiritual ties is not a document, but faith in the accompanying prayer. It is faith which allows God's power to sever the ties, not the document itself.

The document has no legal legitimacy but spiritually will enable the focusing of one's faith which will result in the severing of the marriage tie (the spiritual bond between the couple), thus upholding God's law of perfect justice. Remember the scriptural principle involved here is that the innocent should never be treated as the guilty, nor the guilty as the innocent. It is the innocent who prays over the Certificate of Divorce.

***“...the Divine principle which upholds
the standard of God's justice, namely that
only the innocent, rather than the guilty,
can dissolve the spiritual bond in
marriage through what is termed “a Bill
of Divorcement. . .”***

The Bible tells us, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9). Jesus is talking here to the Church in advance. He is speaking from the vantage point of the covenantal position of the new birth, given all the advantages that Christians possess, advantages that are available to them so that they can walk in victory. He is saying that Christians cannot divorce and indeed that man cannot properly terminate a Christian marriage. Furthermore, in the case of a former Christian who commits fornication, the marriage tie can only be broken spiritually if the innocent party divorces the guilty one. If the guilty party divorces the innocent one according to the law of the land, the marriage tie can only be severed, spiritually and properly, by the innocent party also putting into effect a Bill of Divorcement. This is because Christians come under weightier spiritual laws than the unsaved, and need to conduct themselves according to God's laws. In other words, to whom much has been given, of them will much be required (Luke 12:48). Thus Christians who have been divorced unscripturally and remarry, will be living, spiritually, in a state of adultery. And even those who have experienced a “porneia” divorce (one based on fornication) will still retain spiritual ties to their former marriage partner, and thus will be living, on remarriage, in adultery, unless the innocent has divorced the guilty.

Note: When two unsaved people divorce, because they are sinners, they are both positionally guilty in regard to righteousness. Therefore, spiritually speaking, there is no innocent or guilty party involved. Concerning their actions, however, guilt and innocence exist in relation to moral guilt, and they come under whatever laws of the land are binding in this regard. But when an unsaved person divorces another unsaved person, the spiritual ties are severed. If they then remarry, there is no adultery involved.

CHILDREN AND HEALING - BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

We have established that there are only two grounds given in the Word of God whereby a Christian can consider divorce with the prospect of a subsequent marriage being sinless, and therefore approved of by God. These are for the reason of fornication (unrepentant adultery), and the reason of desertion by a non-believing spouse. In either case, however, even though the situation is clear cut, spiritual ties will remain between the Believer and their former spouse if the guilty has divorced the innocent. In both cases, for spiritual ties to the marriage partner to be broken, the innocent party must divorce the guilty. If this has not occurred legally, that is, if the guilty party has divorced the innocent via the courts of law, the Christian partner can break spiritual ties if they put into effect through the prayer of faith, a Bill of Divorcement. As we have said, for these kinds of ties to be cut, the marriage must be terminated by the innocent party.

One of the effects of spiritual ties remaining in place will be that the Christian parent who has been divorced will find it hard to appropriate healing for their children if the other parent opposes Divine healing and prayer in that regard.

Note: This applies of course to children under the age of responsibility. When children come to this age, they become responsible for believing for their own healing.

There is a spiritual principle that God gives both parents equal responsibility and therefore authority concerning their children. Thus consent by both parties is needed for a prayer of faith to be effective. Parents do not own their children but rather, have custody of them, and God expects parents to do what is right by their children. In the case of healing for children, when one believes and

another either doubts or simply rejects God's Word in that area of prayer, God cannot bring deliverance into that situation. In order for prayer to get past stage one, either both parents need to accept God's Word in that area, or one can pray effectively as long as the other is not opposed. This is because, in a spiritual (legal) sense, God still sees them as one in this area.

When parents divorce and spiritual ties remain intact, the issue of equal accountability and therefore authority, remains.

“...God gives both parents equal responsibility and therefore authority concerning their children. Thus consent by both parties is needed for a prayer of faith to be effective. . .”

When spiritual ties remain intact between divorced parents, the prayer of the believing one will not normally be effective if there is opposition from the other parent in regard to the prayer, directly or indirectly. The effect of the Bill of Divorcement will be to sever the spiritual tie between the parents so that either one can pray on behalf of their child. Once the tie is cut, the parents are no longer jointly accountable. One can oppose the Word and the power of God but this will have no effect on the prayer of the believing parent.

The underlying spiritual principle involved here is that what God has joined together, no man-made law can undo. Christians place themselves under God's laws of righteousness and therefore have greater accountability to Him to live at a higher standard. When the non-Christians divorce, the spiritual ties of that marriage are automatically cut. When a Christian divorces, more is required to cut the spiritual ties which come into being through the marriage. As we know, this is a spiritual problem which has natural repercussions. The issue involved is that of allowing God access to our lives as Christians, rather than frustrating the grace which He would freely bestow.

The problem of spiritual ties can also influence the offspring of the subsequent marriage, for healing can be harder to obtain if parents are living in a state of adultery caused by an adulterous

remarriage. And who knows what other blessings, individually and as a family, will be blocked until the past is dealt with correctly.

The Bill of Divorcement should be written out, and signed by the innocent party. In its most basic form it needs to contain a statement saying that the believing (Christian) partner is divorcing their former spouse according to Deuteronomy 24:1. It should then be prayed over in faith by the innocent party. Though a simple procedure, this will satisfy God's law of perfect justice and enable spiritual ties to the former partner to be cut. This will make it possible for the person concerned not only to enter into a subsequent marriage which is scripturally sound, but to enter into this marriage clean from spiritual ties to the past marriage. Also, if one has already remarried, these actions will sever all ties to one's former spouse. As already indicated, if the innocent (Christian) partner initiates a divorce through the courts on Biblical grounds, this would constitute, in itself, a "Bill of Divorcement."

DIVORCE AND THE LAW OF LOVE

Scriptures which place the two words "fornication" and "adultery" together, obviously making a distinction between them, are as follows: Matthew 19:9; 5:32; Mark 7:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9.

To make a distinction between these words is vital, for as a Christian, one can be expected, scripturally, to forgive, with God's empowerment, an act of adultery. However fornication is a different matter, involving continuing unrepentant acts of unfaithfulness to a marriage. A Christian, in these circumstances, is no longer under obligation according to the law of love to forgive (in the context of attempting to restore the marriage) because the guilty partner is not seeking forgiveness. They can divorce in all conscience, according to Jesus' own words.

In the case of fornication, it is then not about forgiveness and restoration, but rather, release without bitterness and hatred. The Christian, operating in love, should accept the choice of the one committing fornication and release them without holding resentment. Though hurt and betrayed, the innocent one, with God's help, can release the guilty party, thus helping the healing of their own heart which has been sorely wounded. Without this release, bondage will result. The person's heart will be imprisoned and there will be no closure. To go into another relationship in this state and with this

type of emotional “baggage” would be foolish and would court disaster.

“. . . In the case of fornication, it is then not about forgiveness and restoration, but rather, release without bitterness and hatred. . . ”

We are dealing here with foundational scriptural principles. The greatest power in the world is love, and the greatest expression of love is forgiveness. God’s principles are unchanging and all embracing. There is not one law for God and another for us. He forgives us and we too are constrained to forgive because of His love for us (Mark 11:25-26; Matthew 18:23-35). This is to operate in the New Testament law of love - in other words, to allow ourselves to be developed by the Holy Spirit so that we can be empowered to forgive.

This principle applies just as much to the marriage relationship as any other relationship, for God is no respecter of persons. To forgive an act of adultery fulfills the law of love. To refuse to come, by the Spirit, to a position of forgiveness, will violate the law of love. The wronged party has the advantage of being able to be empowered, by the Holy Spirit, to act according to the law of love with respect to forgiveness. The guilty party also has the advantage of being able to be empowered to act according to the law of love with respect to repentance, having decided in his or her heart to remain faithful to the marriage and not to violate its boundaries again. Indeed true repentance involves a heart decision to change, and thus to avoid the same sin in the future. However we must be walking according to the teaching of the law of love and the Spirit of Truth if we are to receive His empowerment in either area.

“. . . Indeed true repentance involves a heart decision to change, and thus to avoid the same sin in the future. . . ”

True love compels us to forgive, and this applies to the marriage relationship as well as any other. However if a married person wishes to continue in sexual sin, thus committing “fornication,” a spouse is no longer bound to the marriage and is free to divorce and remarry.

ERRONEOUS TEACHING IN REGARD TO DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Some Christians consider that the only marriage recognized by God is the first one, and they advocate that if people are to please God, they should leave their current spouse and seek to return to their original marriage partner. This would be to heap sin upon sin. The person to whom a person is currently married is recognized by God as the legitimate wife or husband. Repentance and forgiveness will put past sins under the Blood, and the application of the Bill of Divorcement will sever ongoing spiritual ties. If you have been divorced and remarried unscripturally, you need to repent, but also to recognize that your current marriage partner is your legitimate spouse, the one with whom you should dwell, according to scripture, with due consideration, love and honour (Ephesians 5:22-33). The way you have arrived at this point may not have been approved of by God. Nevertheless, your current marriage constitutes a legitimate marriage. Do not dwell on the past, or allow condemnation to afflict you. Rather, seek to live by Godly principles from this time onwards, regardless of what may have eventuated previously. This applies to older Christians and the newly saved alike.

DIVORCE AND LIVING IN ADULTERY

Let us now return to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32:

MATTHEW 5:32 “But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry she who is divorced commits adultery.”

What does this mean for Christians involved in non-scriptural divorce and remarriage, and what can be done about it?

Some people believe that any Christian who divorces another Christian and subsequently remarries is living in adultery. They are therefore no longer a Christian, but have reverted back to being a sinner bound for hell. We would seek to clarify this issue and shed light on what Jesus' words really mean.

Many people are in this position of having been divorced unscripturally, and therefore remarried unscripturally (i.e. two Christians divorce, or the guilty party divorces a Christian). Knowing them by their fruits (Matthew 7:20) we would concede that many such people are still indeed Christians. Therefore a Christian who has remarried, and has not cut the spiritual ties to a former marriage, is living in adultery (Matthew 5:32) because he or she is ignorant of the truth that the innocent must divorce the guilty (according to scripture). Alternatively, they may be ignorant of the Biblical truth that two Christians, scripturally speaking, cannot divorce. However until the spiritual ties to the former marriage are cut (and it is these ties which make the marriage adulterous in the sense of Matthew 5:32), the devil will retain legal ground to spoil such people's inheritance in certain areas. Until these ties are cut, legally the Christian concerned will still be living in adultery.

However even though it is scripturally an "adulterous remarriage" God will still honour the latest marriage because it is a legal marriage according to the law of the land. Therefore the latest marriage is valid. The former marriage is "broken" and no longer a legal marriage according to the law of the land (i.e. through divorce). Scripturally the charge of adultery would still stand but would not in itself damn a soul to hell. But this situation would still need to be dealt with scripturally if God's grace was to flow freely in all things.

“...The former marriage is “broken” and no longer a legal marriage according to the law of the land (i.e. through divorce). Scripturally the charge of adultery would still stand but would not in itself damn a soul to hell. . .”

Take the case of a Christian who has unlawfully divorced a Christian partner years ago, and then remarried. They then find out about the teaching that they were the guilty at the time of the remarriage. By Jesus' words, upon remarriage they began living in a state of adultery, and caused their former spouse, upon remarriage, to do the same (Matthew 5:32). What can they then do? If this Christian who has divorced their Christian partner repents of their sin of ignorance (or indeed their willful sin), they then become "the innocent," their sin having been placed under the Blood of the Lamb which washes away all guilt spiritually. Once this is done, as an innocent party, they can then cut the spiritual tie, for there remains no legal ground for the tie to stay in place. It only takes one innocent party to break the tie and when this is done, the matter is then dealt with and neither party will be living in adultery. So even if you have done the wrong thing in regard to this area, through repentance, your wrong can be forgiven. The cutting of the spiritual tie will then bring release from adultery and every other associated negative influence. This is the good news of our Gospel of freedom and deliverance.

***“. . .The cutting of the spiritual tie will
then bring release from adultery and
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influence. . .”***

REMARRIAGE TO A FORMER SPOUSE

Earlier in this document, mention was made in a quote by Derek Prince of Deuteronomy 24:3-4. In verse 4, Moses forbids a man who has divorced his wife, who subsequently remarries, to remarry her himself (upon the death of her second husband or her divorce from her second husband). This was Mosaic Law. One reason for the command may have been to prevent men divorcing their wives hastily or for trivial reasons. They were required to consider their actions carefully, for once they had divorced their wife

(and she had remarried), she was never again eligible to be their marriage partner. This law would have placed checks on frivolous divorce, thus limiting, in some ways, licence to divorce. Note too that women could not divorce men in Old Testament times. Jesus gave women this status (Mark 10:12). Women therefore had limited rights, and this Mosaic command would have mitigated against them being treated like property within the community, being passed backwards and forwards, etc.

There may have been other reasons for this Mosaic command, for the Old Covenant Saints were not regenerated, and had no access to the entitlements of born-again Believers. Today, in Christ, Believers can become innocent and righteous in Christ, by the grace of God through faith. With this can come empowerment to overcome sin, and conquer all obstacles in Christ. In this position of righteousness, which no Old Testament Saint had, people are no longer shackled by these same restrictions concerning remarriage to a former marriage partner. This is because we have been given access to so much more - forgiveness, grace, empowerment, etc. Therefore, if a Christian has divorced their spouse, then they are, under New Covenant provisions and in God's eyes, free to marry their former spouse again. This may be a small point to many, but it needed to be clarified, being of interest to those who may find themselves in this position, and wanting to do the Lord's will.

BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

As stated, when a Bill of Divorcement is prayed over in faith by the innocent party, spiritual ties to a former marriage partner will be cut. This (in addition to a legal divorce, of course) will dissolve the marriage completely in a spiritual sense, and free the innocent party to remarry without bondage to the past.

To assist in this process, we have included here an example of a Bill of Divorcement, the aim being to help people walk in freedom in Christ. With the resolution of a former marriage, people entering into a new marriage will not then be living in a state of adultery.

The following is an example of a Bill of Divorcement which can be written out, signed and prayed over, in order to cut the spiritual ties by faith.

I,, as an innocent party, divorce my former spouse, according to Matthew 19:3-9 (or 1 Corinthians 7:10-15). We have already been divorced according to the law of the land, but I now fulfill my obligations to God's law by releasing my former spouse from the marriage contract we both entered into. As a result, we are no longer under any obligation to each other, being completely separate and independent of each other. We are no longer husband and wife, being under no further obligation to the marriage contract which has been completely dissolved, in terms of both man's law and God's law.

Therefore I sever any remaining spiritual ties to my former spouse in God's sight this day, in the name of Jesus.

Signed:

Date:

CONCLUSION

From a scriptural viewpoint, we have thus briefly covered the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. This whole subject is much misunderstood within the Body of Christ today, where Christians grab one verse and focus on it, failing to interpret it within context, and also to consider the other teachings of the Word concerning this topic. There are Divine principles which do not change, and these apply to both the Old and the New Covenant. There are also teachings which have changed in accordance with that which has been given to man to help and empower him. True Teachers of the Word are needed to bring enlightenment and to reveal the truths taught by scripture in this area. We have only briefly mentioned here, for your information, some of the false ideas present within the Church regarding this whole area of marriage, divorce and remarriage.

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it within context. . .

Marriage is a Divine institution, given to man by God Himself. It sustains and supports the family unit, the basis upon which our social fabric rests. Satan seeks to attack the holy institution of marriage, and to replace it with perversion and immorality. Those who enter into marriage hastily, or without any knowledge of God's will or principles, can expose themselves unknowingly to the devastation of divorce.

We would not condemn or judge those who have experienced the ravages of divorce, and we would advise more fortunate onlookers to take the view, "There but for the grace of God go I." Nevertheless, we seek to present a balanced overview of this whole subject, and to address the age-old dilemma of Christian divorce and remarriage from the vantage point of God's holy standards, set forth under the spreading arms of His marvellous grace and everlasting mercy.

To study this subject in more detail, we would recommend that you obtain a book written by Kevin J. Conner named "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage."

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please visit:

CROSSROADS INTERNATIONAL
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crossroadsministries.org.au

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- 1 Kevin Conner, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage," pgs. 133, 134.
- 2 Kevin Conner, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage," pgs. 10, 11.
- 3 *Used with acknowledgement - Assemblies of God, Australia*", Connor, Kevin J., Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage.
- 4 Kevin Conner, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage" pg. 96, quotes Ken Chant in his book, "Divorce and Remarriage," pg. 23.
- 5 Kevin Conner (pgs. 96 and 97) quotes Derek Prince from his book, "Divorce and Remarriage" pgs. 135-137.
- 6 Connor, Kevin J., Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage.

*"We have a vision
to see people living
in abundant life
by the power of God
through Jesus Christ"*



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