

# **MATTHEW 19: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE**

**By Brian Terrell Haines**

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## **Introduction**

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

*2 Timothy 2:15*

The purpose of this book is an attempt to pull together the totality of the Biblical teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage. In Scripture, we see that the work of a teacher is to direct another person in Scripture to find answers to the difficult questions of life. Philip directed the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 to identify Jesus as the Christ. Paul directed the Roman Jews in Acts 28 to find the same answer. Jesus often asked that great question "have you not read", to bring to recollection the words of the Scriptures. In each case these men made the Bible the ultimate teacher.

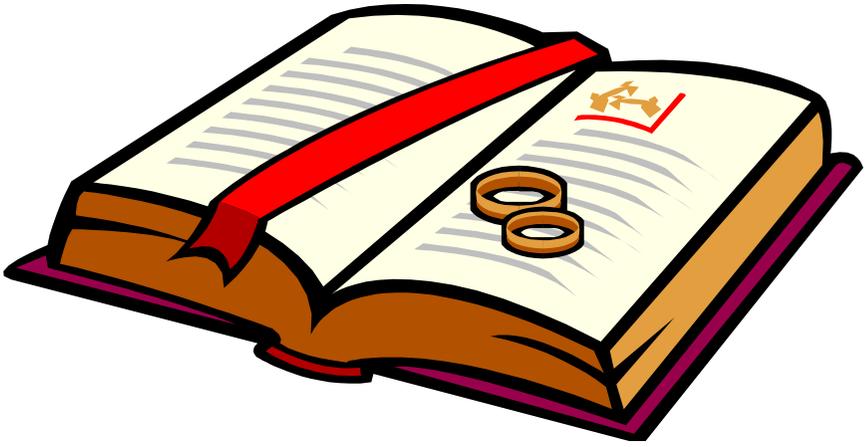
It is far too easy to make a misstep in teaching on difficult subjects. We may easily omit a pertinent point, and thereby present a totally wrong perspective on the meaning of Scripture. We can easily misidentify the point of Scripture, and misconstrue the true meaning. Both of these errors are possible by merely handling the word of Truth without the diligence it demands. Beyond this, there is the more common problem of intentional misdirection. Reading into the text a pre-conceived notion is a guarantee for failure. The intentional misdirection or misstatement of Scripture, even for so called benevolent purposes, is quite common.

With such opportunity to be misled, it is up to the Bible student to be attentive to the Scriptures first, and that the use of a directive tool such as this one a distant second. You must be diligent to show yourself approved. This demands that you exercise effort in knowing the Word of Truth for the purpose of receiving that stamp of approval from the Heavenly Father. You must be a workman who will not be ashamed of the work you have done in this task; you will be queried all through life as to this and many more topics, and your great fear ought to be that of being shamed by the lack of accurate understanding. You must be able to rightly divide the Truth from fiction and falsehood. You must be able to divide it from the error that is so easily proffered in this world. You must divide the Word of Truth itself, to discern the application of different covenants, commands and examples.

With this understanding you are prepared to use ANY material to aid your study of the Bible. Do not take the things of this book to be inspired; their purpose is merely to direct your thoughts in the study of that exclusively inspired treasure that has been given from God to mankind.

Brian Terrell Haines





## 1. The Covenant of Marriage

*And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'*

*Matthew 19:4*

In Matthew, the apostle Matthew, that analytical minded accountant, under the direction of the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21), recorded two teachings by Jesus that were both identified as "hard sayings" by the apostles. The second teaching, on wealth, was received in such a way as to cause the primary hearer to walk away sorrowful, and to cause the Apostles to wonder just who could be saved (Matthew 19:25). That first teaching, on marriage, divorce and remarriage, is the subject of this study. It too caused the apostles consternation (Matthew 19:10), because it too demanded sacrifices that many are unprepared to offer God.

*Matthew 19:3-12 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of*

*heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."*

Revisiting the text, we see that this teaching (indeed both teachings in Matthew 19) begins with a question: is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? The wording of this question is significant outside of the Scripture, because there was already a great debate going on about the meaning of the divorce certificate of Moses. Specifically, two major schools of rabbinical thought each offered an interpretation of the divorce law given by Moses in Deuteronomy 24 (cf. Boles *Matthew Commentary, Gowers Manners & Customs*).

1. Hillel School – Divorce commenced by a man for any reason
2. Shammai School – Divorce commenced only for fornication<sup>1</sup>

Fundamentally, these two schools represented the two views of the Law of Moses. Both rabbis taught in Jerusalem during the lifetime of Jesus; Shammai would die approximately 30AD. It is one of the few times where Jesus is brought into the debate of the hour. However, Jesus is not casting His support with one party or another, but is stating the mind of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli), tractate Gittin, 90a.

Jesus' teaching on marriage first takes us back to the creation of man as the authoritative place on marriage. If we too return to that point in history, we can find some important points about marriage.

### **What is the Purpose of Marriage?**

*Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*

In Genesis 2, it is recorded that God looked at our ancestor Adam, and made that divine observation: "it is not good that a man should be alone". Let us not be tempted to merely see here the emotional value of a partnership, or the problem of loneliness. This was an observation that spoke to the spiritual need of man for someone to bear the burden of the human existence, and provide that enablement to "help meet" the burden of existence. Other Scriptures point to this important point:

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?*

We can even see that part of the great importance of the church of Christ is that support group to help one another get to heaven. Clearly, life is a team sport. We are judged by how we compete in teamwork with our fellow athletes (Matthew 25:31-46). It is no surprise that God's first observation after the creation of man was that our spiritual life would depend on partnerships that enabled us to serve God. Thus, the first purpose of marriage is spiritual enablement.

The second purpose of marriage is found in the same passage.

*Genesis 2:21-24 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

The sexual relationship of a man and a woman is established here by the expression "they shall become one flesh. We can be certain of this by Paul's use of the same expression in I Corinthians 6:16: "*Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh.'*" It is noteworthy that the concept of

sexual procreation is not yet established in the Bible with the sexual union. While the sexual union is of course the means by which the human population (indeed all animal life) moves, it seems that, in both passages mentioned, the primary point of the sexual relationship in marriage is one of intimacy and consummation.

Thus God's purpose for human sexuality was established in that time before sin. It makes it clear that this physical intimacy is not sinful or shameful, but divinely instituted. Thus we can understand why Paul preached "*let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*" (1 Corinthians 7:3). We may even make the connection that if the idolatry of the nation of Israel was identified as an adultery against God (Jeremiah 3:8-9; Ezekiel 23:5; Hosea 3:1), then the act of worship is comparable to the intimacy of marriage.

### **The Parties of Marriage**

Returning to Jesus' statement in Matthew 19, Jesus clearly defines the parties of marriage. He states that it is one man, one woman, and God. God's presence in creating marriage makes Him a necessary part of the marriage process. We are told this elsewhere:

*Malachi 2:14a Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth...*

*Song of Solomon 8:6 Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as  
a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death;  
Jealousy is cruel as Sheol; the flashes thereof are flashes  
of fire, a very flame of Jehovah. (ASV)*

The American Standard Version captures the identity of the flame as being the very presence of Jehovah God, which seems to be the most accurate meaning of the passage; (marital) love is divinely instituted, and it is deadly to take it lightly. As stated in Matthew 19, consider now how marriage is NOT defined:

1. It is NOT defined by men, government, or paper
2. It is NOT defined as two men, two women, etc
3. It is NOT defined as one man and many women

Specifically, Jesus made it clear man has NO RIGHT to define marriage. It is a divine institution, and therefore only God can create (or dissolve) marriage. These points may seem redundant now, but they will become of great importance as we consider views towards marriage today.

### **The Marriage Covenant**

The creation of marriage needs to be understood from the legal concept, one which reflects both a man and a woman, as well as God and His people. This is the idea of the covenant relationship.

*Malachi 2:14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*

In Malachi, God vented His anger on the people of Judah for their disregard of the marriage relationship. There God clearly defines marriage as a covenant. This is an important term in Scripture. It is sometimes translated "Testament", and as such we understand that the Old and New Testaments are in fact the Old and New Covenants as well.

*2 Corinthians 3:14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.*

*Hebrews 8:13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

What is a covenant? We are first introduced to the term in Genesis 6 (although the idea is in fact given to us in Genesis 2) when God is speaking to Noah before the flood.

*Genesis 6:18 "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark-you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.*

In the American legal system, the covenant is most often found in association with property. If you live in a home that is part of a homeowner's association (HOA), your home is likely attached to a covenant. That covenant is not something that you can simply ignore; when you purchased your home, you did so agreeing to that covenant. When you sell your home, that covenant continues to the next person in that home. It exists as long as the HOA exists, and the house stands. If you break this covenant, you are subject to penalties for violation. At the same time, that covenant ensures the value of your home by forcing your neighbors to be like minded in care for their homes.

A divine covenant has similar properties. In the most basic sense, a covenant is an oath. In the Old Testament, covenant oaths were made between God and man, between God and men, and between men. Terms such as "Covenant of Salt" (Numbers 18:19, II Chronicles 13:5) were used

to indicate that the oath was unbreakable<sup>2</sup>. Historians use the term Suzerain covenant to describe a covenant between a lord and a vassal in the Levant. Such a term well describes God's covenants with men; that of a Lord and vassals. It is describe by Paul as being something that, once confirmed, cannot be annulled or added to by anyone.

*Galatians 3:15 Brethren, I speak in the manner of men:  
though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed,  
no one annuls or adds to it.*

Another point to the covenant is that it is either to the fulfillment of the covenant, or to the life of at least one of the parties. In Romans 7:1-3 Paul states that the marriage covenant is one that ends only at death. We see elsewhere that a covenant was meant to last until the completion of the covenant purpose. Since we have said that a marriage's purpose is to spiritually support one another, we conclude then that a marriage covenant is fulfilled at death.

A covenant can be broken down into two parts: a law, command or rule, and a promise, or contract. We need to understand this, because here is the great misunderstanding of the current view on marriage.

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<sup>2</sup> Covenant of Salt may refer to a practice of making a covenant by an exchange of particles of salt between parties; thus, to annul the oath, one would need to reach into the other man's salt container and retrieve his grains, an impossible act.

Marriage is not merely a contract, but instead it is a covenant, with both an element of contract and an element of law.

*Hebrews 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

In our legal system, we define a contract simply as a *promise*<sup>3</sup>. Thus, we might understand that the writer of Hebrews is saying that a covenant is in part built or established by a contract. We also need to understand that a covenant is built on law. Consider that the Ten Commandments, the very embodiment of the idea of law, are themselves called the stone of covenant, kept in the ark of the covenant.

*Exodus 34:28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.*

*Deuteronomy 4:13 "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten*

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<sup>3</sup> Barron's Law Dictionary, 3rd Edition

*Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.*

Again, it is not the case that the Ten Commandments were the entirety of the covenant; remember that the Hebrew writer said that a covenant was also build on promises? Thus, we deduce that a covenant then is built both on Law and Promises. That the ark of the covenant was so named gives us the truth of this idea; for within that ark were contained not only the law, but also, in a fashion, the promises, that is, God's protection and care for Israel.

*Hebrews 9:4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;*

If we take this Scriptural idea of covenant and walk through the Bible, we can find the covenant concept engaged again and again. We find the pattern of a law and promise with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, and with the children of Israel. We also find that the idea of a covenant insists that, until the death of the testator, the covenant remains in place.

*Hebrews 9:16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*

Consider the following breakdown:

<b>Covenant Party</b>	<b>Law/ Command</b>	<b>Promise/ Reward</b>	<b>What Ended It</b>
ADAM Genesis 2:16	Do not eat of the tree	Eternal life in paradise	Romans 7:4
NOAH Genesis 6:18	Build the ark	Preservation and promise	Romans 7:4
ABRAHAM Genesis 17:2	Leave home, Sacrifice	Land Promise Seed Promise	Romans 7:4
MOSES Exodus 19:5	Law of Moses	Promised Land	Romans 7:4
CHRIST Hebrews 8:6-8	Law of Christ	Eternal life in paradise	I Corinthians 15:24

We need to understand this idea of covenants, since the Bible has said that marriage is a covenant that follows similar patterns and rules. We already knew this, seeing that God would call His relationship with Israel a marriage, and the church is called the Bride of Christ. In fact, Paul uses marriage to explain why it was that Christ, God in the Flesh, needed to die in order to remove the preceding covenants.

*Romans 7:1-3 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a*

*husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*

God's primary covenant with mankind was with Adam. All subsequent covenants, until Christ, were under that covenant. Thus, it was necessary that God would die, as the innocent party to the covenant with man through Adam, so that a new covenant could be established with all mankind universally once more.

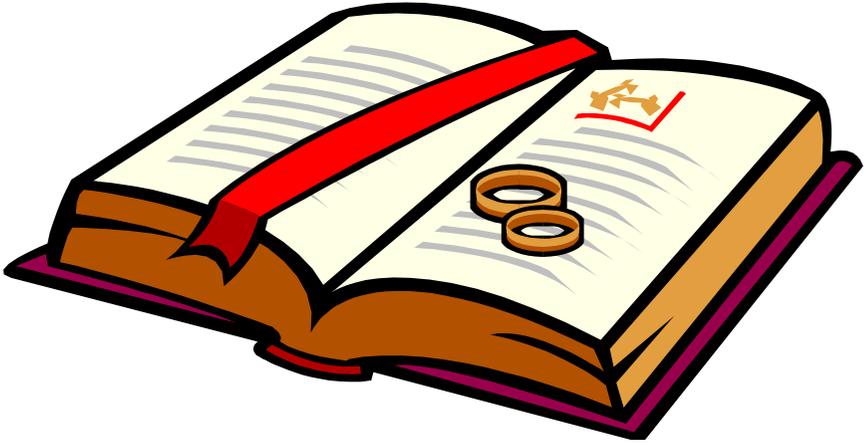
*Galatians 3:17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.*

*1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

*1 Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

Thus it becomes clear, by the nature of covenants, that the only way that God could be both just and merciful was to die in form, that a new covenant could legally be established. This is a monumentally important fact for us to consider. This will establish for us the significance of the aspects of the marriage covenant, particularly the laws of marriage and the promises of marriage.





## 2. The Laws of Marriage

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*

*Colossians 3:18-19*

We have established the great significance in the idea that marriage is a covenant. To review, we have determined that according to Scripture, a covenant is an unbreakable, unchangeable oath that exists for the life of the parties involved. We have also said that a covenant is built on two foundations: Law and Contract, or Law and Promise. Our first examination will be to the Law of the Marriage Covenant.

A law is simply a commandment or rule. We said that the law of the covenant of Adam was not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Noah's law was to build the ark. Abraham's covenant law was to leave his father's home and homeland, and later, to offer up his son Isaac to God. God's covenant with Israel had the Law of Moses. Finally, in Christ, we have the

Law of Christ, the Royal Law. If marriage is indeed a covenant, then it has a law. What is that law?

We begin by seeing that, implicit to that law, is the sexual union. As we already have seen, marriage was created in part to satisfy the needs of intimacy of a man and a woman. God would later clarify this in the New Testament, telling us that it is a violation of that implicit law to deny intimacy to one another.

*1 Corinthians 7:3-5 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

The husband and the wife are the two parties who subject themselves to law in this relationship. This law is not found in them prior to the oath of marriage, but comes upon them when God creates the marriage.

## **The Law of the Husband**

God's law for a husband in marriage is found repeatedly in both the Old and New Testament. However, it is particularly made clear in the New Testament. Let us consider these commandments to the man:

*Colossians 3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*

*Ephesians 5:25-29 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

*1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*

In these commands we see a simple pattern: be like Christ in His relationship with the church. Of course, the pattern may be simple to see, but in execution we find it is quite difficult. It implies that a husband no longer lives to his own desires, but to the needs of his wife.

In Scripture, the word "love" could be defined with the word "sacrifice". We are told repeatedly that the manifestation of God's love was the sacrifice of His Son.

*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

*1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*

This sacrifice of self that is the law of the husband is not one which is dependent on the fulfillment of the law of the wife. Meaning, a husband does not love to the degree his wife has merited such love. Did God love man only when he became loveable? Did Christ sacrifice Himself subsequent to man's worthiness?

*Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

So we see that this love and sacrifice of self, the law of the husband in marriage, is one which does not look to the worthiness of the wife in its offering. That worldly concept is cast out, and the divine expectation is set. The understanding which Peter commands in I Peter 3 could be viewed in this light; an understanding as to the spiritual (as opposed to carnal or worldly) needs of a wife, and a desire to provide and meet them.

As well, Peter subtly tells us that this will be a matter of judgment. When we are told that prayers are hindered by a husband's failure in this law, he is telling us that we stand in a condition where God chooses not to hear us due to sin (Isaiah 59:1-2). We might consider this as though we have married the daughter of God; our divine Father-in-Law watches carefully to the care of a beloved daughter.

### **The Law of the Wife**

The wife too is given a divinely acted out command. It too is one that has itself caste in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Finally, it too is made clear in the New Testament of God.

*Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*

*Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

*1 Peter 3:1-6 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

Once more, a commandment easy to understand, but difficult to carry out. The statement is to submit to the husband in the Lord; this makes clear that the submission offered is done within a spiritual context. A husband does not command, but the wife submits as though it is a command. He cannot demand submission, but she must offer it as the divine gift of marriage. It cannot violate the Law of Christ; she cannot submit to a sinful command or desire.

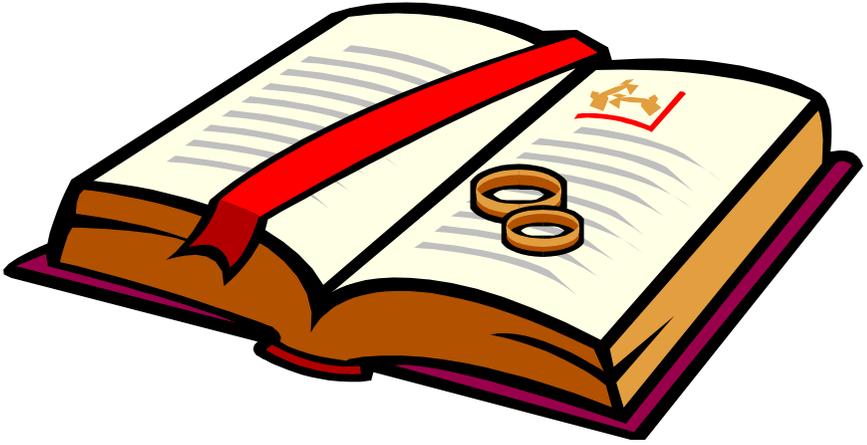
As well, it is placed into a context like that of Christ to the church. In the church, the wishes of Christ are our command. Jesus Himself is an image of submission, humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). To be Christ like is to be submissive. Too, we can presume that if the wife does not live up to the law of the wife, the same euphemism is present; her prayers too will be "hindered". She will be judged by her submissive quality by God, the third part of marriage.

Most importantly, like the law of the husband, the law of the wife to submit is not based on the merit of the spouse. Peter reminds us that this law is present even when our spouse is not a believer. We submit because of Christ, not the husband. Christ is worthy; if we wait for the worthiness of such submission, it will never come.

### **The Law of Marriage**

As a covenant, marriage contains laws both to the husband as well as to the wife. Both will be judged by God for their rendering of the proper affections in this way. Neither has the right to only render such affections

when they are merited. We do so not because our spouse is worthy, but because God, the third party to marriage, is worthy.



### **3. The Promise of Marriage**

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
And obtains favor from the LORD.*

*Proverbs 18:22*

We have established the great significance in the idea that marriage is a covenant. To review, we have determined that according to Scripture, a covenant is an unbreakable, unchangeable oath that exists for the life of the parties involved. We have also said that a covenant is built on two foundations: Law and Contract, or Law and Promise. Our first examination was the Law of the Marriage Covenant. Now we will look to the promise, or reward of the covenant.

We see that when God first created man, He determined that it was not good for him to be alone. This was not merely a reference to the idea of survival, for in the garden, what need of that was there? Too, this

does not reflect the idea of mere social friendship. This instead was an observation that pertains to the spiritual condition of a man.

We can see this reflected in the New Testament commandments pertaining to pastors and deacons.

*1 Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;*

*1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

The first qualification found for elders, as well as deacons, was to be married. We can sense here that the spiritual condition of a man is incomplete in some way without a wife. Not merely that of a friendship, but a friendship that is obligated by God Himself. It is a friendship that cannot be dissolved, regardless of our emotional condition. The spiritual covenant of marriage insists that this partnership must always function; it obligates each party to live for the other. The first promise of marriage is spiritual support.

A second promise of marriage is that of godly offspring. God makes it clear in Malachi His desire in marriage is a relationship much like His own; one of a spouse, and one of a father.

*Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.*

God made man to be the spiritual leader in the home, as reflected earlier in the qualifications of a deacon. This is nothing new; fathers were directed to be the first source of spiritual guidance in the nation of Israel, and in the church of Christ. The partnership of marriage is the place where children are meant to be raised in a right relationship with God.

*Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

We can see in society today that children raised in single parent homes have far more obstacles to overcome. Children in a single parent home are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, poor educational performance, teen pregnancy, and criminality<sup>4</sup>. A second great blessing of marriage is the proper place to bring up children to know the Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, Survey on Child Health, Washington, DC, 1993

Third, there is the unique blessing of the sexual relationship. God has repeatedly stated that marriage was created as the place to satisfy our sexual desire. At the same time, God is insistent that seeking a sexual relationship outside of marriage is abominable.

*Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

To find this Divine design of sexual desire's place in marriage, a person need turn no further than to the inspired book of the Song of Solomon. This text describes the physical attraction that God gave a man to have for a woman. We note that God commands a man to have a carnal desire for his wife; this command means that we cannot imagine that our desires are something beyond our control, or something that waxes or wanes without our direction.

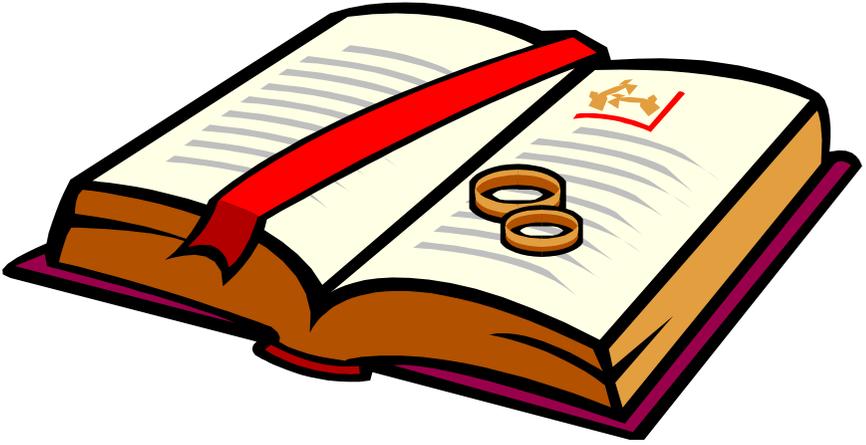
*Proverbs 5:15-19 Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her*

*breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured  
with her love.*

We live in a time where we are told our emotions are infamously out of control. "The hearts wants what the heart wants" is the mantra of the world today. Yet it is simply not so; we have control over our emotions, our desires, and our affections.

It is this sexual relationship that is most specific to marriage. We know that there are some, who either by tragedy or sin must raise children alone. Perhaps even some like righteous Mordecai, who raised his cousin Esther. There is no sin in being a single parent, although there is a great obstacle. We also know how important the relationship of the Christian to the church is, and how many will be called to be single in order to serve Christ. We can find great comfort of companionship and friendship within the household of faith. Yet there is no other venue for the sexual relationship except in marriage. Beyond marriage, it is characterized as adultery, fornication, or homosexuality.





## 4. Divorce

*"For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

*Malachi 2:16*

What is a successful marriage? We have already seen the law and promises that make the covenant of marriage. We ought to then define a successful marriage as one that (1) both parties keep the law of marriage, and (2) where the promises of marriage are received. Signs that a marriage is not successful would then include (1) spiritual disability; (2) disobedience of the law of marriage, and (3) divorce.

Note that we do not use terms like "happy" or "unhappy" to define success in marriage. A number of people might describe their marriage as a happy one, and yet they have both, by not being obedient to the laws of marriage, failed in the purpose of marriage. Perhaps a husband views

pornography, and a wife is content to allow it. Such is not a success in the eyes of God. Remember, marriage is about THREE people: a husband, a wife, and God. Even when two people are happy, if they are not godly, God is not "happy". It is a terrible mistake to define success as happiness.

Conversely, sometimes people are not happy, but their marriage is still successful. If someone is seriously injured, or becomes gravely ill, they may see themselves as unhappy due to circumstances. Yet their marriage may be performing precisely according to the divine model. Job's marriage may not necessarily have been happy, with Job's sickness, the loss of their wealth, and the loss of their children. We see the severe strain come to light in Job 2:9-10. Yet we should not count this as a failed marriage; they clearly were able to continue their relationship despite extreme sorrows according to Job 42:10-17.

We have already made the case that when a husband or a wife fails to live up to the law of marriage, they have sinned against God, against their spouse, and even against themselves (Ephesians 5:28). Yet such things occur often in marriage; most people would acknowledge having missed the mark on the law of marriage. Sometimes missing the mark on the law of marriage, and failing to receive the promises of marriage, leads to an end of marriage: divorce.

## **The Sin in Divorce**

While God permitted divorce under the law of Moses, He made it clear His position on the matter:

*Malachi 2:16 "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

Many times we are asked if divorce is a sin. We need to clearly state that divorce is because of sin, but it is not identified as a sin itself. A wife who puts away her husband for sexual immorality is not sinning, but the divorce is still present because of sin. Some people are a "victim" of divorce rather than a cause.

Divorce is one of the most devastating experiences that a person can live through. We need to remember this when we deal with this subject. Our loved ones who are divorced have gone through a traumatic experience, and need to be comforted as such. In 1967, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe decided to study the way stress impacts our lives<sup>5</sup>. They produced a scale of the most stressful events in life. The first is the death of a spouse, and the second is divorce. It ranked above death of family members, serious illnesses, and being incarcerated. Yet

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<sup>5</sup> "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213-218,

when loved ones experience divorce, our habit is often to quarantine them emotionally.

With the caution in place, let us move to the other extreme and make it clear that we live in a society that has utterly embraced divorce as a reasonable solution to marital difficulties. Most of us are familiar with the statistics of divorce; today our divorce rate is identified as being at 53%. To clarify, this statistic is broken down as meaning 40% of first marriages end in divorce; 60% of second marriages end in divorce, and 70% of third marriages end in divorce<sup>6</sup>. We need to realize that these statistics are present because of the view of divorce our nation has taken.

### **The Redefinition of Marriage**

In 1970, the United States began a fundamental progression to redefine marriage from the biblical definition to a human definition. This redefinition is the primary reason divorce is rampant in our society. It began in the state of California on January 1, 1970<sup>7</sup>. This was the moment when Governor Ronald Reagan, himself a divorcee, signed into law *No Fault Divorce*, the most devastating legislation to marriage in American history. Since that time all fifty states have adopted this doctrine of divorce; New York became the last state to enact it in August 2010.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr049.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Family Law Act of 1969, CCC Sec 4350

The concept behind *No Fault Divorce* is simple: it removes the mutual-consent requirements that had been the foundation of divorce law until that time, and removed the need for a "cause" for divorce. Thus, divorce ceased to be a covenant, and became a contract. This is a radical departure from the divine definition of marriage; without penalty, there is no crises in divorce. Ironically, the legal theory was originally created in the atheistic Soviet Union<sup>8</sup>.

We have seen that marriage is defined by God as a covenant; to redefine it as a contract means that, as a contract, it can be nullified simply by returning both parties to their original condition. We enter into a contract when we buy a radio from the store; we understand that there is no fault if we desire to return the radio because it was not what we expected. Now that marriage is viewed by our country as a contract and not a covenant (as it was prior to this law), ending a marriage is as simple as returning that radio to the store. It need only be a matter of a change of expectation or interest that legally permits divorce.

This redefinition of marriage into a worldly device had an almost immediate impact in the United States. Prior to the enactment of these laws (which were not uniform at first), the averaged divorce rate was around 22%-33%. By 1980, it had moved to the current rates of divorce. We might also note that in that time marriages themselves declined. To be fair, this latter point may reflect our society in general; however, the

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<sup>8</sup> "*No-Fault Divorce: Born in the Soviet Union?*", David Bolas, 14 Family Law Journal 31 (1975)

increased divorce rate is fully the result of a change in law. Divorce became so common place, many believe it is acceptable. More importantly, we must now address those who would come to Christ, yet have been divorced and remarried.

## **Divorce and the Bible**

We have seen God's attitude about divorce. But we have also said that it does not indicate that divorce is itself a sin. We might consider that Paul addressed this in I Corinthians:

*1 Corinthians 7:10-11 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.*

Note the usage of two words here: depart and divorce. The Greek word translated "depart" (*chorizo*) gives a sense of a literal separation, while the word translated "divorce" (or "put away", depending on your translation) (*aphiemi*), refers to the idea of sending someone away. Neither word is a legally specific word, and based on the context, are joined in the same idea in this passage. This must be expressed with care; it is necessary that we later address some wordplay with these terms that

some have engaged in with the intent of nullification of the doctrine of Matthew 19.

This is a unique commandment. Paul makes it clear that the command of God is not to depart (or divorce). Yet then he gives the concession that if it occurs, that the party must either reconcile or remain unmarried. Perhaps this is because Paul realizes that some things are beyond our control. Without a doubt, separation occurs because of sin; however, it may be that it is only the sin of one party. Israel rejected the covenant relationship of God, despite His desire to reconcile. Perhaps a spouse is a danger to the other or to their children; such an evacuation from the immediate area might be prudent. Paul again reiterates this idea a few verses down:

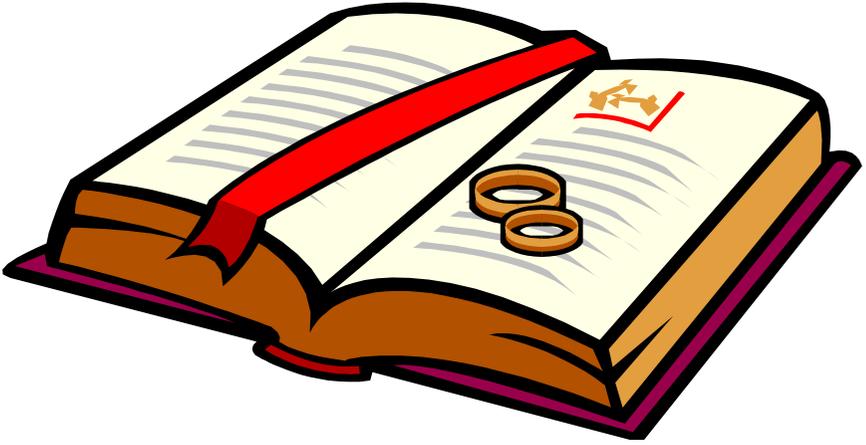
*1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*

What is important to note is that Paul makes it clear that if this is the case, it does not give cause to divorce and remarry. He does not contradict the teaching of Christ in Matthew 19. Instead, he clarifies the specifics of the issue of divorce. Paul is firm to qualify this by having introduced us to the idea that the only recourse after this divorce is either reconciliation or remaining single. If we were in doubt, Paul again restates this idea, making us understand that not only is this the Lord's will, he too

wishes that we understand that divorce is not the answer to most issues, and remarriage is not permitted.

*1 Corinthians 7:12-13 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say:  
If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.*

In summary, we want to make it clear that God hates divorce, but that sometimes it happens. God's hate for divorce is not the same as saying that it is a sin at all times. Remember that God commanded the Israelites to divorce their foreign wives in Ezra 10:1-3. What would the sin be there: to divorce their wives, or to refuse to divorce their wives? Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19 was not focused on divorce, or telling us that divorce is the sin, but instead to focus on one who divorces and remarries.



## 5. Remarriage

*"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery."*

*Luke 16:18*

Now we have arrived at what seemed to the apostles the hardest part of the teaching Jesus presented in Matthew 19.

*Matthew 19:9-10 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."*

We notice that in other Gospel accounts (Mark and Luke) that the exception is not mentioned. We should not be concerned about this; the main point in all three Gospels is to tell us that God does not permit a married person to divorce and remarry. We focus in on the exception, when we ought to be looking at the rule. That only one of the three Gospels speaks to the exception in no way weakens the authority of the exception; if we believe that to be so, we need to re-examine the authority of the Word of God.

From what we have seen so far, it is a good thing for a person to marry. It is meant to aid them in spiritual growth, and to satisfy their needs in the flesh. We have seen it is a bad thing, and often a sin, when people divorce. We have made it clear that if someone is divorced, their options are to either reconcile or to remain single. Now we are addressing the next obvious point: remarriage.

By laying a legal basis for remarriage, Jesus has made it clear why these things are the way they are. In Matthew 19, Jesus will reveal the definition of marriage, the purpose of marriage, and the legal binding of marriage. This will lead us to understand why remarriage is fraudulent in the eyes of God.

*Matthew 19:4-6 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and*

*be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?*

*So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

Here Jesus makes the case that the authority of marriage is in natural law, by taking this back to the creation. Natural law has been in effect since the creation; mankind is subject to it, as is all the creation. God commanded animals to reproduce after their own kind; this is that same law. The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ have not adjudicated it. From the beginning it was meant for a man and woman to be married in a covenant relationship until death. Does man have the authority to cause animals to reproduce after another kind? Despite the great hopes and desires of the evolutionist, we know that the answer is no.

If marriage is such a thing, bound both by the Law of Christ and even the Law of nature, then perhaps we need to understand that Jesus is not suggesting that man *should not* change this law, but that man *cannot* change this law. That if a man and woman are joined in marriage by God, man *cannot* dissolve this covenant. This makes sense in the light of the upcoming point: that a man who seeks to dissolve his marriage and engage in another is not truly remarried, but is instead an adulterer. He may have a slip of paper declaring his marriage ended, but God has not consented. He may have a slip of paper that declares a new marriage instituted, but it is God who creates marriage, not man. He cannot create what God has refused to create.

## **Sanctified Remarriage and the Exception**

What remarriage then will God sanctify? Let us return to the definition of covenant to understand this. We stated that a covenant was an oath that cannot be voided until it is fulfilled; we also saw that it is fulfilled at death. This makes sense since the purpose of marriage is to help meet the needs of this life, at the end of life its purpose has been met. Therefore, the first person that may remarry is one whose spouse has died. Paul reiterated this in Romans 7:1-4; note the use of the term "the law of her husband."

*Romans 7:2-3 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*

Secondly, Jesus taught in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 that there was a second cause: fornication, or sexual immorality. The word used is *Porneia*, rooted in the word for harlotry, it pertains to a physical sexual act, and could be used in describing sexual immorality in general. We need to see that Jesus did NOT say that adultery was the exception, as people

have sometimes said in error. This is an important distinction. Consider that Jesus said that if a man lusts in his heart, he has committed adultery (Matthew 5:28). If Jesus had said that adultery was the exception, by merely looking at another person, a spouse has grounds for divorce and remarriage.

Instead, we need to discern that Jesus was quite specific: only a physical act of fornication (which, by identifying as sexual immorality, gives us the inclusion of homosexual acts, bestiality, pedophilia, etc.) would end the marriage covenant.

Perhaps there are a couple of caveats that ought to be considered here when we discuss the exception that Jesus permitted. We must suggest that, first, this cannot contradict another doctrine of Christ. For example, if a spouse commits fornication and then seeks forgiveness by repentance, would one still be able to put away the guilty party? We must presume that Jesus' teaching on forgiveness would invalidate that exception. We ought to consider this in particular to our own need for forgiveness, and that our spiritual adultery (James 4:4) is forgiven by God.

*Luke 17:3 "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

*Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

Another example of a considered nuance pertains to those who have "denied" their partner the affection due to them. Can they then put away their spouse for the fornication for which they hold some culpability? While there is no "excuse" for sin, it also is worth consideration of the "purpose and intent" of the exception Jesus issued; it was not to "get out of" a marriage, but to give freedom to the one who has been betrayed.

Does the exception apply when the parties are legally divorced? Meaning, if two people "paper" divorce without fornication having occurred, yet later one party does commit fornication, then does the other party have cause for divorce in the eyes of God? This idea (sometimes called "*Mental Divorce*") seems to fall apart if we consider that there can be no exception if the innocent party has not been living in the Law of Marriage. Conversely, if we consider what Jesus taught in Matthew 19 as to what God's right in marriage is (i.e. to exclusively be the one who binds and dissolves), we also know that marriage is not simply dissolved because man issues a paper to say so. The particularly disturbing idea might then arise that the first person to the courthouse is the winner of the divorce, so to speak; if the innocent party does not file first, would it

be appropriate according to Matthew 19 to invalidate their petition for the exception to divorce and remarriage? Obviously not, unless we hold the law of man greater than the Law of Christ.

Finally, we ought to consider that God has not said that remarriage is a sin. He has stated that a remarriage is something that He has joined together, because it has the characteristics of one of the two situations mentioned in Scripture. In fact, we could be so bold as to say God justifies all remarriages, since, as we will see in a moment, a relationship that does not meet these two qualifications is NOT a remarriage, but is simply "papered" adultery. Remember, marriage is what God has joined together, not man.

### **A Remarriage That is Not Marriage**

Jesus was very specific in the language He used in Matthew 19. It was meant to make us understand that, regardless of what we call a relationship, only God has the right to determine if it is a marriage or adultery. That is the key to understand here; God is not saying that it is a remarriage that He calls a sin. Instead, the Creator of Marriage refuses to see the relationship He did not create as marriage, but it is an act of adultery.

We know from Genesis 1 that God created man, and that He did so in the image of Himself. If a scientist in a lab made a robot that looked like a man, and then claimed that he had now created life and created a

man, is it true merely because he has credentials in our society to do so? Hopefully, we would see it as folly. Only God creates life.

With remarriage, is it not the same? The Bible states that God creates marriage. Man joins two people together apart from the sanctified remarriages God creates, and calls it a marriage. Is it so? Maybe we cannot see this in the issue of divorce, but we see it quite clearly in an issue like homosexual marriage. Our society is on the verge of a total acceptance of "gay marriage". Yet does a Christian believe that God joined these two together in marriage? They have the credential given by the government to prove their marriage, but God did not join them. Instead, they are merely in a "papered homosexuality". We may not immediately see that adultery and homosexuality are both sins of sexual immorality, but it is true. We can find this in places like Paul's letter to the Corinthians

*1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Here Paul identified the fornicator, adulterer, and homosexual as each being devoid of salvation by their lifestyle. We understand that God

would call a gay marriage "homosexuality", and reject it as a legitimate marriage. How could we not understand that God *did* call a remarriage "adultery" , and rejected it as a legitimate marriage?

Jesus said that a remarriage of a person who divorced their spouse for a cause other than fornication is not a marriage, but is the condition of adultery. Man can call it whatever he desires; it is God who defines and joins in marriage.

### **The Remedy of an Adulterous Remarriage**

Without question, the entire debate and concern about the teaching of Matthew 19 is the conclusion that Jesus' disciples drew even before Jesus said it. If we are to be forgiven of our sins, it is necessary that we cease from sin. The command of repentance demands that we end actions or inactions that are sinful in the eyes of God. Without repentance we will certainly perish (Luke 13:3-5).

*1 Peter 4:1-3 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts,*

*drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.*

We cannot live in an adulterous relationship; we must put away that relationship we may call marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. We cannot miss the fact that Jesus was saying that it would be a hard thing to do, but that it must be done.

*Matthew 19:11-12 But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."*

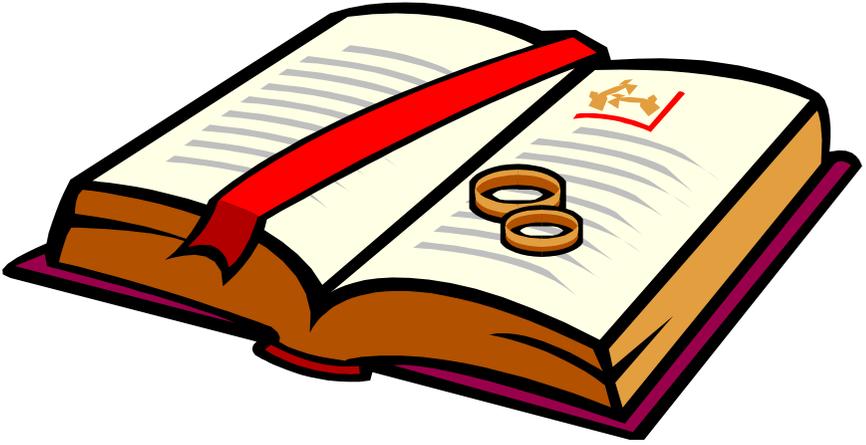
It may be the case that we are not able to reconcile to the one whom our covenant of marriage was first made with; in such a case, one must be a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This is not a matter of "returning the goods," so to speak; this is a matter of a purity of life before God.

Being a Christian sometimes requires us to make hard choices. We are told that for whatever we must sacrifice now, we will be rewarded later. We are told that we will have to make sacrifices for the sake of the

kingdom; this is the sacrifice some will have to make to come to Christ. They can be forgiven of their sins, but they cannot continue in the adulterous marriage.

*Mark 10:29-30 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.*





## **6. Debate on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

*"So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

*Matthew 19:6*

Having presented the main understanding of Matthew 19, we now move on to examine some of the ideas that have arisen to be debated on this topic. From a historical perspective, these debates did not exist in any significance prior to the adoption of the No Fault Divorce laws that were discussed in chapter four. It was in the 1970's and 80's that men began to teach that remarriage was not itself adultery, but merely a one-time sin that could obtain forgiveness without repentance.

Rather than to address the specific teachers of these doctrines, many of whom are no longer living, we will instead address the doctrines themselves, with the intent and purpose of equipping ourselves to the idea of a doctrinal stance that is Biblically based.

There are a number of teachings that seek to invalidate the doctrine of Christ in Matthew 19. They are often contradictory of one another, being based on different theological concepts. The most common doctrines might be summarized as follows:

- *Divorce/Remarriage is forgiven at baptism*
- *Repentance permits remarriage*
- *Matthew 19 is the Old Law*
- *Matthew 19 is for Christians, not alien sinners*
- *A forsaken believer is free to remarry*
- *God does not desire for families to be broken apart*

Let us be clear: these are not merely misunderstandings of the Scriptures, but false doctrines.

### **Is Divorce/Remarriage is Forgiven at Baptism?**

Let us for the purpose of understanding, envision a scenario where a man has married, then put away his wife without the cause of fornication present. He then remarries. Afterwards, he hears the word of God and desires to become a Christian. The question is: does his baptism removed any sin associated with his divorce and remarriage?

To answer this we need to once more return to what Jesus said about divorce and remarriage:

*Matthew 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."*

Let us recall from the previous chapter that Jesus did not say that adultery was the permissive cause, but fornication/a physical act. Jesus broadly defines adultery; we saw that in Matthew 5 He said that lusting after another woman is adultery. We have already established that He is saying that an unauthorized remarriage is adultery.

The important point to understand in all of this is that Jesus is not accusing a man of adultery for divorcing his wife; He is saying that subsequent marriage is not, in the eyes of God, a marriage, but is simply adultery. Thus, the sin is not divorce, but remarriage. That remarriage is an ongoing condition of adultery, based on what Jesus is saying. It was not a onetime act of adultery that he performed at his wedding ceremony; his living condition is a constant state of adultery. If he has been remarried 25 years, then he has been living in adultery 25 years.

So we see the legal basis of the law on marriage; the question is now, does baptism remove this sin? The answer is that baptism removes all sins that we have committed, but it does not remove sins we are still committing or will commit. Paul would address this in Romans 6:1-2;

there he would ask the rhetorical question "may we sin so that grace (forgiveness) might abound?" His clear answer is that we cannot continue in sin once our sins are removed. This is the basis of repentance. The issue in this circumstance is that the man or woman who has remarried in a way that is not seen as such by God, at baptism, has their previous sins removed. However, this does not immediately make their current relationship a marriage. There is nothing that does not define it as adultery, and therefore if he/she proceeds in it, they are still in an adulterous relationship.

Another comparison to this would be to consider a gay marriage. Imagine that two homosexuals have legally married, in the eyes of the law. Perhaps they have even adopted children. The law may legally recognize them as a married couple. However, God does not. He has defined marriage, as Jesus stated in Matthew 19. Thus their relationship is not marriage in His eyes, but homosexuality, much like the divorced and remarried person is not remarried, but in an adulterous relationship.

Now imagine that these same people hear the Gospel and obey it. When they are baptized, they are cleansed of all of their sins. Can they continue in their relationship? The answer is that they cannot. It is not that baptism failed to wash away their sins, but that they are not permitted to continue in a relationship that God has defined as a sin. Must they end their relationship, one that is called a marriage by law? Yes. This same truth applies to the relationship of remarriage, which God calls adultery.

Consider too that this same idea would apply to the polygamous marriage. While not present in our culture, it must have been a common occurrence in ancient times. A man with three wives, coming to Christ, would certainly not be able to keep these wives, despite the fact that he was, in the eyes of the law of man, married to all three. He would have to put away two of these women to meet the model of marriage that God defined, which was one man, one woman, one life.

Ironically, God has spoken far more times on divorce and remarriage than on polygamy. Yet many would rightly sift out this less common command (implied by Matthew 19's definition of marriage) while swallowing the "camel" of accepting those who remarried contrary to God's will.

Baptism removes the sins of our past, but it also announces we will sin no more. This idea is found in the concept of repentance. In fact, we could say that a man who has been remarried and is baptized without the intent of ending his adulterous relationship is a man who has failed to repent before being baptized. When we are baptized, it is understood that we emerge to walk in a new way.

*Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with*

*Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

### **Does Repentance Permit Remarriage?**

Tied by the same string as considering baptism to remove adultery is the idea that we need only repent of our adulterous relationship to be forgiven. This statement is true in its wording, but false in the intent of the speaker. We need to realize that it redefines the word "repent" to mean something quite different.

Repent means to change. It insists on an ending of sinful activity, an about face, and a movement in another direction. In the passage above we saw Paul (Romans 6:1-4) clearly describe repentance as an end of our sinful behavior. The error in applying this to the remarriage circumstance is that it describes repentance as merely the confession of sin, not the cessation of sin. Remember, the sin Jesus identified was living in an adulterous relationship, not a single act of adultery.

*Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

The statement that remarriage could be justified by a confession of sin would mean that the thief might continue in his thievery if he would but

admit that he has sinned. He need not even continue to admit to it; the suggestion is that but his onetime confession, he may continue to steal. If it is the case that one may continue to live in an adulterous relationship as defined by Jesus after confessing their sins, it is the case that Paul mistaught the Ephesians; the thief may continue to steal.

In some ways, this is one of the more prevalent thoughts among brethren who are unwilling to preach or teach the law as recorded in Matthew 19. We would find many liberal brethren stating that God has an ideal for marriage, but we fail to live up to this. Therefore, the grace given through Christ will forgive us if we stumble in marriage. As we see, it redefines "repent" and refuses to acknowledge that God has made it clear that His grace is present *only* when we turn away from sin.

*Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

### **Is Matthew 19 the Old Law?**

Recognizing that the idea that baptism cannot wash away our future intentional sins, some have instead undermined the teaching of Jesus by claiming that the teaching in Matthew 19 is in fact a doctrine of the Old Covenant of Moses, not the New Covenant of Christ. The appeal of this approach is that it seems to have some semblance of logic to it. Jesus was living under the Old Law when He gave this teaching; He made it clear that the Law would be in effect until "all was fulfilled."

*Matthew 5:18 "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."*

Therefore, it is accurate to say that Jesus taught this doctrine while under the Old Law. It would not seem to be a great leap to conclude that this was a teaching of the law of Moses, not the Law of Christ. Yet the discerning Bible student may instantly perceive the error of this logic. In fact, there are multiple flaws in this presentation, as well as some unintended consequences in it that even the teachers of it do not embrace.

First, we must understand that Jesus told His disciples that everything He taught them was the Law of Christ, and upon His resurrection they were to go forth teaching these things.

*Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Jesus did not have the authority to direct them to go forth with a new covenant until after His death, burial, and resurrection. This does not mean He was not teaching them His doctrines. An excellent example of

this is communion. Jesus presented and taught the doctrines of communion prior to His death.

*Mark 14:22-24 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."*

Later, the apostle Paul teaches this doctrine, and prefaces the teaching by relating that it had been received from Christ the night that He was betrayed:

*1 Corinthians 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

Thus we see clearly that a doctrine taught by Jesus prior to His death was the Law of Christ after His resurrection and the Great Commission.

Second, Jesus made it clear that this teaching was one that originated from the beginning. He said as much in qualifying how it superseded the Law of Moses. The Law of Marriage was from the beginning. Hence Paul's use of the term in Romans 7:1-3 draws not to the law of Moses, but one of marriage itself. If marriage were exclusive to the Law of Moses, how could the Gentiles marry or be given in marriage? How were Abraham and Sarah married, and how could Sarah serve as a model of marriage to the Christian (I Peter 3)?

*Matthew 19:8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."*

Jesus makes it clear that a permission for divorce was included in the Law of Moses only because of the hardness of heart of the Jews. Can hardness of heart be a good thing?

*Romans 2:5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

Finally, there are some unintended consequences to removing the Gospels from the New Covenant. We have already mentioned communion; it would be an error to teach that communion was a part of the Law of Christ. What about the teaching on the confrontation of sin in Matthew 18?

### **Is Matthew 19 for Christians, Not (Alien) Sinners?**

This false doctrine is linked to the previous idea of rejecting Matthew 19 for a lack of jurisdiction. In this case, it creates the idea that there is a duality of law in existence even now, one for the alien sinner, and one for the Christian. It supposes that Jesus' teaching is not for the alien sinner, but the Christian. Thus, the alien sinner may divorce and remarry without culpability, but that the Christian is the one who is forbidden to remarry after divorce. The problem to this doctrine is on multiple levels.

First, the concept of sin requires that a law be in place. If the alien sinner is not under law while apart from Christ, in fact, he would not be under sin.

*Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."*

Therefore, for the alien sinner to be under sin, he must also be under law. So the question is, what law? The Law of Moses? That law was exclusive to the Israelites, and was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). What law was before that one? The law of Noah (Genesis 9:1-10)? If we continue back to Adam and Eve, we would say that such is the law apart from Christ. Here is the problem: Jesus said that the law of marriage was a law from the beginning. Therefore, there is no law that exists (the law of Adam, of Noah, of Moses, or of Christ) that did not contain this law. Therefore, this is the oldest law which all men are subject to. If there is no law of marriage outside of Christ, how can an alien sinner marry? The New Testament should testify that not only should the Philippian Jailer and Cornelius have been baptized, but they should have been married too.

Beyond the nonsensical convolutions that this idea creates, we are told that all men are now under the jurisdiction of the Law of Christ. This is conveyed in the right of Christ the Lawgiver to render judgment to all men on the day of judgment.

*Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."*

*Acts 17:31 "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."*

*2 Thessalonians 1:8 (Jesus will return) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

As we see in only a few passages here, Jesus is given the authority to render judgment on all mankind, not just His subjects. Only the lawgiver can judge; thus, it is absolutely implicit that the Law of Christ is one which all men everywhere are subject to obey.

*James 4:11-12 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*

### **Is a Forsaken Believer Free to Remarry?**

Here the debate is taken to a new place. In this statement, a case is made that there is a subsequent teaching made by Paul that nullifies or

clarifies the teaching of Christ in Matthew 19. Specifically, the key passage of use is Paul's discussion with the Corinthians in chapter 7.

*1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*

Many who have adopted this doctrine have of necessity also adopted one of the preceding doctrines of nullification as they apply to Matthew 19. Then the statement made by Paul is rationalized to have this meaning: if an unbelieving spouse departs, we are not obligated to keep the marriage bond. Finally, the identity of an unbeliever is anyone not keeping the marriage bond.

Of course, the first thing we notice is that this is not what Paul said. The word "bondage" is translated from the Greek word *Douloo*; in no place in Scripture is that word ever associated or made to refer to marriage. It is however used repeatedly to identify someone who is owned by sin (Romans 6:18-22).

*2 Peter 2:19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage (Gr. Douloo).*

Secondly, it must be made clear that if Matthew 19 is in effect as Paul writes his letter, he cannot contradict that command, but anything he writes must be seen as subsequent to it. In other words, we see an example that Paul states in Romans 10:9 about salvation and confession.

*Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Does this mean that Jesus' commandment that one must be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16) is now invalidated? Obviously not. Paul means no more to invalidate Jesus' command to be baptized than he does to invalidate Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Third, this teaching ignores the whole context of the passage, particularly Paul's qualifying statement earlier in the chapter. In fact, four times in the chapter Paul restates the commandment not to divorce. As well, Paul clearly states that when divorce occurs, remarriage is not an option. It is deliberately ignorant of the passage's context to suggest Paul seeks to free the married one whose spouse departs from that marriage.

*1 Corinthians 7:11-13 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not*

*believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.*

### **Would God Want Families Broken Apart?**

This last position we identify is fundamentally an emotional plea rather than a Scriptural point. It is rooted in that age old error that has been around since Cain offered his unaccepted sacrifice: to believe that what I care about is what God cares about. In this case, to believe that because I see the results of a remarriage unacceptable to God as being too much to bear, God must as well. Specifically, that God would not teach something that might require a husband and wife, especially those who have children, to put one another away, if their marriage is adulterous in the eyes of the Lord.

There are a couple of things that need to be addressed in this. First, who caused this problem, God or man? We know that there are consequences to sin that are additional to the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). We realize that such consequences may not be avoidable, even with repentance and forgiveness. David was forgiven by God, but his son still died (II Samuel 12:13-14). When Onesimus the runaway slave became a Christian, he had to return to his master (Philemon 10-12). It is a contemptible thing to accuse God of being unjust because we suffer the consequences of our own sins.

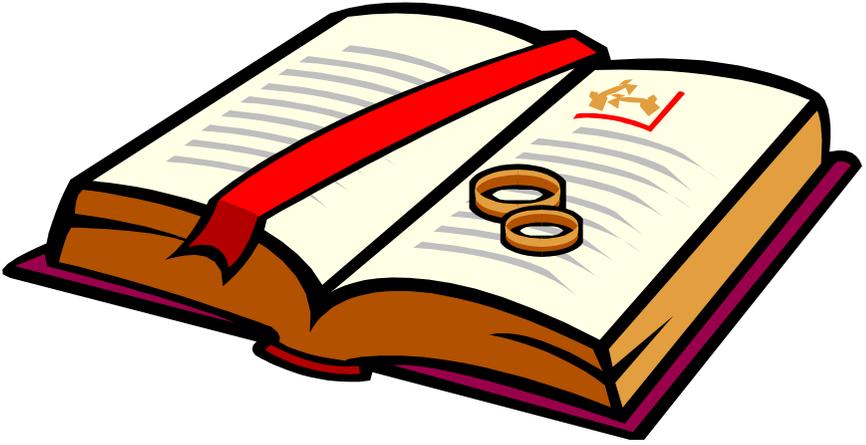
Secondly, has not God done this very thing before? Has He not said, for far less significant reasons, that men should put away wives that they had no authority to marry? Even those with children?

*Ezra 10:3, 44 "Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."..... All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.*

Third, would we take this approach with anyone whose marriage is unacceptable before God? Would we say that the two homosexuals who have legally married and legally adopted children should, because of their affection for each other and the children, remain married? Should the polygamist with three wives keep these wives because they were the mothers of his children? How is it any different? God calls two of these marriages adultery and another homosexuality. God says all three will prevent someone from entering the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps even there is the rub. Would a loving God cast anyone into hell? Many people have become atheists because they cannot conceive of a loving God letting suffering in the world. Yet is any of this God's fault?





## Conclusion

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

*2 Timothy 2:15*

In Matthew 19 Jesus introduced us to a doctrine that goes back to the beginning of the Bible. Jesus was asked about divorce; he stated that the Pharisees could answer questions about divorce if they would just understand the nature of marriage.

- **Marriage is made by God and not men.** Therefore, man cannot join or separate without the consent of God.
- **Marriage goes back to the beginning.** It predates the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. Jesus made it clear that His law would reflect marriages original purpose and intent.
- **Marriage is between a man, a woman, and God.** There is no such creation as polygamy or homosexual marriage.

Churches do not create marriages, nor do they end them.

Governments do not control or dictate the laws of marriage.

- **Marriage is a covenant.** A covenant is an unbreakable, unchangeable oath. This means marriage is not annulable or changeable. It is meant to function until death.

Paul used the marriage of Christ and the church as the pattern we ought to follow. He said that a husband should love his wife as Christ loved the church, and that a wife ought to submit to her husband as the church does to Christ. It is important to see that he made it clear these acts are done because God is worthy, not our spouse. This is the perfect model of marriage.

Sadly, the immorality of our society today has infected marriage to cause us to doubt these truths. It has caused us to consider marriage something we can dispose of if we are not happy with it. When the consequences of these truths reach back, we blame God for being vindictive or unfair. We end with this question: Is God unfair?

*Romans 3:4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."*