



Divorce and Remarriage

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Introduction

Many people go through a divorce, and only half of them filed for that divorce. Of course, the parties may have mutually agreed upon divorce, but generally one party must initiate the court action by filing papers with the court. Terminating a marriage results in profound changes for the spouses and the children, if any.

Jesus explained divorce and remarriage very carefully. He did so, in part, by answering the questions of His enemies, the Pharisees. They were very religious men who invalidated the Word of God for the sake of their traditions. They thought they were learning the ways of God, but instead they were only learning and teaching the traditions of men, handed down to them by their forefathers. Instead of studying the text of the Bible, they focused upon human interpretations of the Bible. Jesus reproved them for ignoring the Word of God delivered to them in the Old Testament. Jesus indicated that they could not understand His words because they were unwilling to do the will of God. In fact, although they claimed to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, they never knew God and so rejected Jesus when He appeared in the flesh. Thankfully, a few Pharisees believed in Jesus, but the majority of them did not. Even so, Jesus spoke with them often and answered many of their questions. They often tried to trap Him with their questions, but He used their evil questions to teach the truths of God. The Pharisees generally taught that Moses commanded divorce. In contrast Jesus, explained clearly that God never wants a divorce.

Jesus taught that God instituted marriage at the creation of man and woman. Because God joined one man to one woman specifically created to help the man, no man should separate what God has joined together. Jesus used creation to begin His teaching on divorce. He did not contradict the Old Testament, He expounded the Old Testament. He did, however, flatly contradict the traditions of the religious leaders of His day. Having laid down that basic theology of marriage based upon an inseparable union formed by God Himself, so that the two become one flesh, Jesus then

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showed that God never commanded divorce, but permitted it because of hard, sinful hearts. The Pharisees and others distorted that permission into a command to divorce. In all cases of divorce, the person filing suit to start the divorce has a hard heart of unforgiveness.

Paul continued to build upon the teachings of Jesus. The Holy Spirit moved Paul to reveal further guidance about divorce and remarriage. He covered the topic in detail, and dealt with widows, unmarried people, husbands, wives, children, believers and unbelievers. Paul did not contradict Jesus, but provided clear insight into how the same basic principles of remarriage and divorce apply in various contexts.

I have tried to focus this work upon the Bible, the inspired Word of God. I have included specific verses and tried to illumine the teaching of God, and organize the material into specific answers to various questions. People often have many questions about divorce. The Bible alone provides the answers, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, can help us know the truth. Jesus promised that Word of God would sanctify our lives. We may look to the Bible to instruct us about remarriage after divorce. As always, examine everything in this work carefully and hold fast the good.

I bid you [peace with God](#).

January 4, 2017

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1

Marriage Basics

As God, Jesus hates divorce.¹ During His ministry in the flesh, Jesus taught about God's design for marriage and the issues involved in divorce. In Matthew 19:1-9 (Page 1534) Jesus provided basic teaching about divorce and remarriage. We will look first at that passage, and then compare 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 (Pages 1788-1789) for further instruction. So, let us begin our study with Matthew 19.

1 See Malachi 2:14-16 (Page 1496). God spoke to Israel about its sinful behavior using the symbolism of marriage. God declared to Israel: you have dealt treacherously (“בגדתה”) with the “wife of your youth,” even though she is “your companion” (“חברתך”) and your wife by covenant (“אשת בריתך”). God used the marriage covenant, created by God in Genesis, to demonstrate that Israel had dealt treacherously, as an adulterer deals with the wife of his youth. In response, God disregarded the sacrifices of His people Israel. Though they would weep, groan and mourn, they still dealt treacherously and God disregarded their offerings.

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Part One

Lawful Divorce?

Many people today want to know if they can get divorced. They want to know if they can get divorced with God's approval. Jesus faced the same questions. As Jesus walked through Israel, He talked with many religious people, including the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very religious in the sense that they laid great burdens upon people, but were hypocrites because they would never touch the burdens themselves. They studied the Law of Moses, but never believed in the God of Moses, although they thought they knew the God of Moses. Jesus was the God of Moses. As a group, the Pharisees despised Jesus and did not recognize Him or honor Him as God.

In Matthew 19:1-9 (Page 1534) Jesus answered the questions of the Pharisees as they tested Him regarding divorce. They always opposed Jesus and sought grounds for convicting him under their traditional interpretations of the Old Testament Law. This passage provides very clear insight into God's view of divorce and remarriage. Jesus taught with authority on all subjects, and He proclaimed the origins of marriage, the sanctity of marriage, and the consequences of divorce. He also confronted the improper teachings of the Pharisees and their corrupt views of marriage and divorce. The questions and answers guide us through the passage. Matthew made a deliberate choice, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to record the teachings of Jesus Christ as they occurred within the context of public discussions, with specific responses to challenging questions. Jesus patiently taught everyone who would listen to Him with a willingness to do the will of God. Yet, some people in the crowds would

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hear, but not understand, just as Isaiah prophesied. The Pharisees started with a question to Jesus.

1.1 Question One: Can a Man Divorce His Wife for Any Reason at All?

“Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’”

Matthew 19:3, Page 1534

The first questions from the Pharisees concerned whether a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. The Pharisees were testing Jesus.² The Pharisees questioned Jesus specifically about the Old Testament Law of Moses. The questions in this passage make all the

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- 2 The Greek word for testing (“πειράζοντες”—present active participle, masculine nominative plural, indicates they came for the purpose of testing him) means that opponents of Jesus sought to trap Him by His words. They presented a question to Jesus, for the sole purpose of seeking a basis to accuse Him of error under the Law of Moses, which they studied often. This same Greek word, in the same form, also occurs in other passages. In Matthew 16:1 (Page 1529), for example, the Pharisees and Sadducees sought a sign from heaven, testing Jesus. Likewise, in Mark 8:11 (Page 1572) the Pharisees came and argued with Jesus, again seeking a sign from heaven. In a similar passage about divorce, Mark 10:1 (Page 1577), the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, testing him again. See also Luke 11:16 (Page 1621) where some people in a crowd sought a sign from heaven because Jesus cast out a demon and so they were testing him.

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difference. Any interpretation of this passage that does not account for their questions misses the point of the passage about divorce and remarriage. So, the first question is quite simple: can a man divorce his wife for any reason at all? Notice that the Pharisees seemed to assume that God approved divorce, at least in some instances. They employed the phrase “for any reason” because of their traditional teachings concerning divorce. In their traditions, God commanded divorce in some cases, although Jesus contradicted their entire practice and teaching regarding divorce and remarriage. In doing so, Jesus asked: “have you not read . . . ?” Jesus meant that they should be familiar with the truths of the Old Testament and forget about their traditions. In other words, the Pharisees did not question divorce itself, but rather what reasons allow for and demand a divorce?

1.2 Answer: God Created Them Male and Female.

“And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,’”

Matthew 19:4, Page 1534

Notice how Jesus loved to answer a question: He quoted the Bible as His answer. Notice too the small phrase: “Have you not read.” By this simple phrase, Jesus was showing the Pharisees that they should have read and understood the meaning of the Old Testament passage Jesus cited to answer their question. The Pharisees knew their traditions, but they did not know the Bible. They claimed their traditions were correct interpretations

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of the Bible, but Jesus denied that their traditions were correct. As the Pharisees sought to test Jesus, so Jesus used the opportunity to provide careful teaching to everyone, including everyone who would read this passage later (like us). Jesus cited Genesis 1:27 (Page 2) to lay the foundation for His answer.³ Jesus went back to the creation of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, as described in Genesis 1:27 (Page 2). Based upon the fact that God made humans as “male” and “female,” Jesus relied upon the difference and purpose in the creation of humans. Jesus built His answer upon the facts of creation. By citing the words “male” and “female,” Jesus intended to convey that God created humans as male and female (separate genders). They were different in appearance and function. They were heterosexual. He intentionally created two sexes, not just one. They form a mating pair, and a life pair. God intended one gender to be in a relationship with the other gender, as we will see in the next verse. The special relationship God created for a male and female was “marriage.” Again, let me emphasize that Jesus used God’s plan of creation to start His teaching about divorce and remarriage. According to Jesus, you cannot understand marriage without first understanding the creation of humans as male and female in Genesis.

3 In Hebrew, God emphasized that He created man (“אָדָם-תָּבָא”), using the generic term for human, and then specified that He made both male and female humans in His image (“בְּצֶלְמִי”).

1.3 Answer: God Joins a Man to His Wife in Marriage.

“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?”

Matthew 19:5, Page 1534

Jesus built upon the divine plan of male and female creation. He again quoted the Old Testament, citing Genesis 2:24 (Page 4). Jesus meant that the rules for marriage, divorce and remarriage rest upon the creation of male and female. They go all the way back to Genesis. Based upon creation, Jesus highlighted several aspects of marriage. First, Jesus taught that marriage involves separation. Second, the man separates from his mother and father to be joined⁴ to his wife. Third, having been joined together, the husband and wife become one flesh.

So, to summarize, Jesus taught that God created marriage in the Garden of Eden, by making humans as males and females, each in the image of God. Not only did God craft males to be different physically from females, but He designed males and females for Him to join together to make one flesh. God designed and created male and females, then joined

4 The Greek phrase here for “to be joined” (“κολληθήσεται”—notice the passive voice, indicating by implication that God (not man) joins husband and wife) indicates that God has a divine plan for a male and female to join together in a permanent bond forged by God. Compare the Hebrew term for joined (“קָבַד”), referring again to God joining the male and female.

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them together in marriage. Males and females fit perfectly together when God joins them together in marriage. They become one flesh.

1.4 Answer: God Said They Are No Longer Two, But One Flesh.

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

Matthew 19:5, Page 1534

Jesus continued to build upon the theological foundation of marriage. God created one male for God to join to one female in marriage, so that the two humans would become one flesh. Jesus emphasized that God joins people in marriage, so that each person enjoys a fleshly unity with the other person. In a New Testament sense, consider that at the moment Jesus saved you by faith alone, your body became the temple of the Holy Spirit, where He lives inside your body.⁵ While the Holy Spirit dwells within the

- 5 In 1 Corinthians 6:15 (Page 1788), the Holy Spirit wrote: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!” In this verse, Jesus taught us that our physical bodies have spiritual qualities called “members.” So, as a believer, I am a member of the Body of Christ. Just like I am joined to Christ by faith, I can become a member of a prostitute if I have sex with a prostitute. I should always remember that by faith I am a member of the Body of Christ, and belong solely to Christ. Notice that God wants us to know about the spiritual aspects of sex and how we become members of sinful people when we have sex with them. As a believer, I must

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individual believer, in another sense the Holy Spirit now indwells the couple (corporate unity) joined by God in marriage. Consider the consequences described by Paul that even a believer becomes one flesh with a harlot when they have sex.⁶ So, let us take a look also at this concept of “join” as used in the New Testament. First, we should learn that God revealed a complete, final union with the term “joined together.”⁷ Second, we see that God created marriage as the only means for one male to be

remain conscious that the very presence of our holy God lives within me, all day, every day, to the glory of God.

- 6 In 1 Corinthians 6:16 (Page 1788) Paul warned: “Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” Clearly then Paul does not refer to the offspring as one flesh produced by the sexual union, but rather something spiritual happens to the believer when he has sex with a prostitute. God created a special relationship for sex. He named that special relationship marriage. When you ignore God’s plan that sexual activity joins two people as one flesh, then you endanger your spiritual walk with God. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 (Page 1788) Paul described the spiritual joy of having a spiritual union with Christ Jesus, not in a sexual sense, but in the sense of being spiritually joined with Him.
- 7 The Greek term for “joined together” (“συνέζευξεν”—aorist, active, indicative) only occurs here and in the parallel passage in Mark 10:9, (Page 1577) on marriage and divorce. Notice in the Mark 10:9 (Page 1577) passage, Jesus answered the first question found in Matthew 19:3 (Page 1534). Jesus did not focus upon the second question in Matthew 19:7 (Page 1534) concerning the Mosaic Law and divorce. Jesus, however, preempted that question by His response to the first question in Mark 10:5 (Page 1577): “Because of your hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment.” Notice that Jesus always

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joined to one female. Third, this sexual union producing one flesh also occurs by having sex with a prostitute. Therefore, we see that our fleshly sexual unions have direct spiritual consequences in our lives. The Bible refutes any notion that sex can be frequent and casual, with many partners. God designed marriage to be the sole bond producing one holy flesh before God. Sex outside marriage pollutes the believer by becoming one flesh with an immoral person. Immorality always damages spirituality.

taught that the serious sin of hardness of heart always underlies divorce for any reason. Often, the believer continues to bear a grudge against an unfaithful spouse, that results in bitterness and smoldering anger. When that smoke and bitterness accumulate, without confession and spiritual forgiveness, the desire for divorce arises from the hard heart. Therefore, Jesus linked that problem of unforgiveness and divorce to the spiritual hardness of heart. According to Jesus, no one seeks a divorce unless they have a hard heart. Not every hard heart arises from infidelity. In some cases, the spouse simply may have lost interest in the marriage, found someone else, or longed for money another spouse would provide. Many reasons may account for the hardness of heart. But all of those reasons display the same attitude toward the marriage bond God used to join the man and the woman. The hardness of heart finds its specific target in disdaining the work of God in creating and sustaining the marriage. In some cases, the infidelity of the first spouse produces a more profound and long-lasting sin of bitterness and hardness of heart in the other spouse, who was wronged by infidelity. Sexual sin has profound effects in the marriage, and may lead to such unforgiveness in the spouse that he/she files for divorce. Yet, by filing for divorce, that spouse yields to sin flowing from a hard heart. Consider Matthew 6:14-15 (Page 1509): “For if you forgive others, then your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Furthermore, remember Matthew 18:21-22 (Page 1533): “Then Peter came and said

1.5 Answer: What God Has Joined Together, Let No Man Separate.

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

Matthew 19:5, Page 1534

Jesus taught that marriage changes a man and woman into one flesh. Jesus answered the question of divorce. Because God has joined a male and female in marriage, they now have become one flesh. We know that God spoke of a sexual union here, as you can see in 1 Corinthians 6:17 (Page 1788). In that passage, Jesus spoke about a man becoming one flesh with a prostitute. A spiritual union results from sexual activity, even with a prostitute. You may intend to have only sex, but God revealed that a spiritual union also takes place through sex. In Matthew 19: 6 (Page 1534), Jesus described this sexual union as one flesh. God created this union in Genesis, as we saw above. Jesus then spoke about the implication. If God joined a male and female in marriage, resulting in a sexual and spiritual union, then no man should separate God’s work of joining the male and

to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”

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female together. In fact, we should rejoice over God's plan for forming a strong, spiritual and sexual bond between one male and one female for life.⁸

Now, let us focus upon the notion that man may separate what God has joined together. Let us take this matter in parts. First, we have seen that God joins a male and a female in a sexual and spiritual union He called marriage. Second, God has taken all the initiative. He "joined" the male with the female. This term for "joined" has special significance in this passage.⁹ This term "joined" pinpointed God's special activity. God joined one male to one female in marriage. Notice the heavy emphasis upon God doing all the work. He once and for all times joined one male and one female. So, the contrast could not be brighter when Jesus commanded all men never to separate what God has joined together.¹⁰ Notice that God

8 Of course, we know that in heaven, we shall be like the angels, who are neither married nor given in marriage. See Luke 21:34-36 (Page 1644).

9 The Greek term for "joined" ("συνέζευξεν") occurs in the aorist tense. The aorist tense highlights the totality, finality, and completeness of the term "joined." The subject of the verb is "God." The verb also stands in the active voice, meaning that God, not a human, joined the male and female in marriage. Finally, we should also observe the indicative mood. The indicative mood speaks of actual reality. So, Jesus taught that God, not man, completely and finally joined a male and female together, and they absolutely exist henceforth as one flesh.

10 In the Greek text, Jesus phrased it so that you could translate it: "man shall not separate." The technical details here matter. Just as God joined, so a "man" ("ἄνθρωπος"--notice the singular) shall not separate. This negative term "no" ("μὴ") indicated that under no circumstances (with the subjunctive verb) should the man separate what God joined together. Jesus could have used the other word for

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joins one male and one female in marriage, but man separates what God has joined together. Jesus contrasted the blessed activity of God joining a male and female in marriage, with the sinful activity of man in separating what God has joined together. In essence, God joins and man separates. God never intended any form of divorce, for any reason, ever. God never separates what He has joined together. We will see Jesus expand upon that basic premise in the next verses.

To summarize, Jesus did not permit divorce for any reason. He commanded man not to separate a man and a woman God had joined in marriage. Jesus based His command upon creation of man and woman, and God's purpose in joining one man to one woman in marriage so that they became one flesh.

no (“οὐκ”) normally used with the indicative mood, but instead he used the normal “no” used with the subjunctive mood. In this context, however, Jesus apparently taught that “no” here means under no circumstances, no possibility of man separating. Jesus also emphasized the action of separation (“χωρίζετω”). This verb indicates moving apart, separating, divorcing. This same root word occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:15 (Page 1788): “Yet, if the unbelieving one leaves (“χωρίζεται”), let him leave (“χωρίζεσθω”); the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.” This same root word helps us understand both passages, because both passages speak about divorce as “separating” or “leaving.” The New American Standard translators did not use the same English words, but the Greek text helps you understand the close relationship between the act of “man separates,” just as the “unbeliever leaves,” but actually separates from the spouse in the sense of “divorce” in Matthew 19:6 (Page 1534).

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Jesus next responded to the second question of the Pharisees. Jesus gave a very thorough answer stating that God never intended divorce, but only permitted it based upon the hardness of heart in certain sinful spouses. God intended that the marriage of one man to one woman results in those two people becoming one flesh in marriage. Jesus also taught that this union had spiritual dimensions and consequences. No man should separate by divorce what God had joined together in marriage. All marriage has spiritual roots in God's activity in human lives, joining them together for life and blessing together.

2

Divorce

Jesus not only laid the foundation for understanding marriage as the spiritual and creative work of God, He also countered the traditions of men concerning divorce. Like today, many teachers have distorted the Word of God to promote or even command divorce under certain circumstances. In all cases, Jesus called all divorce sinful.

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Part Two

Sinful Divorce

Jesus had answered the Pharisees' first question by proving that God did not permit divorce for any reason at all. Jesus implied that all divorce is sinful in God's eyes. This answer prompted the Pharisees to confront Jesus with a further question about divorce, this time based upon their view of the Law of Moses.

2.1.Question: Why Did Moses Command Divorce?

“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY?’”

Matthew 19:7, Page 1534

The Pharisees did not like the first answer to their general question regarding divorce. So, they now turn to quoting the Bible. They claim subtly that Jesus was contradicting Moses on divorce. According to the Pharisees, Moses commanded divorce. They cited Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). In that passage, Moses provided instruction about a man divorcing his wife

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because he found indecency in the wife.¹¹ Symbolically, it spoke of the wife's shameful or sexually disgraceful act. Notice the little word "then" in Matthew 19:7 (Page 1534).¹² The Pharisees also claimed that Moses gave the "command" to divorce indecent wives.¹³ When people distort the words of the Bible, then they do so to their own harm. In this case, the Pharisees distorted the teaching of Moses by substituting their own traditional explanations for what Moses meant.¹⁴

- 11 The Hebrew term for "indecency" ("עֲרוּת דָּבָר") literally means a repulsive thing, referring normally to nakedness (consider the story of Ham looking upon the nakedness of his father in Genesis 9:22 (Page 13); see also Leviticus 18:1-17 (Page 191-192) for the general prohibitions about uncovering the nakedness of certain individuals, speaking of indecent sexual activity). We may glean from the other uses of the term that the "indecency" includes improper sexual relations outside the marriage.
- 12 The Greek word for "then" ("οὐν") functions to link this question to the previous answer of Jesus. In this passage, you cannot understand the teaching of Jesus, except you first understand the questions posed by the Pharisees. The Pharisees ground a particular axe here about divorce. Jesus used the questions from the Pharisees to elucidate His commands regarding divorce and remarriage.
- 13 The Greek word for "command" ("ἐνετείλατο") chosen by the Pharisees missed the context of Deuteronomy 23:1-4. In that passage, Moses did issue a command, but it concerned "indecency," and also the remarriage of the divorced woman. The first husband was prohibited from remarrying the woman he once divorced, if she had married another man after the divorce. Jesus explained the background to this passage in Deuteronomy in the next verse.

- 14 See Mark 7:1-13 (Pages 1570-1571).

“He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.’”

Matthew 19:7, Page 1534

2.2 Answer: Moses Permitted Divorce, But Never Commanded Divorce

The Pharisees understood that Jesus had just told them that God never permits divorce for any reason. So, they asked Jesus a new question about the Law of Moses. According the Pharisees, Moses commanded divorce. So, they then cited the Bible back to Jesus, except the Pharisees did not quote the Bible accurately nor understand the truth of the Bible. First, Jesus answered that the Mosaic Law permitted¹⁵ divorce. Notice that Jesus here distinguished between: (1) what God commands to avoid sin; and (2) what God allows because of sin. In this case, God allowed the people of Israel to divorce because they had a hard, sinful heart. God understood the hard, sinful heart of the people of Israel, just like people today, and provided a law about divorce and remarriage. The only reason God permitted divorce was because of the sinful hearts of the people of Israel. God always called divorce sinful. God never commanded divorce, but allowed hard-hearted sinners to divorce. Divorce has always been sinful in God’s eyes. If you are contemplating filing for divorce,¹⁶ or if you have already filed for divorce without much forethought, you must recognize that

¹⁵ The Greek term for “permitted” (“ἐπέτρεψεν”) means to allow, permit, let. Think concession to sinfulness here with this word.

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your hard, unforgiving heart underlies your decision to divorce.¹⁷ So, in every case, without exception, filing for divorce will always be a sinful act, according to the Lord Jesus Christ. At times in our lives we make serious spiritual mistakes. Filing for divorce may be the biggest mistake in your life as a believer, but not necessarily in every case. Jesus did not accept the popular religious teaching of His day about divorce. Whereas the Pharisees questioned Jesus assuming divorce was commanded by God, they misunderstood the essential nature of marriage and so arrived at the wrong conclusion about divorce. Without God leading us to understand the Bible, we cannot apply the great truths of God properly.

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- 16 By the phrase “filing for divorce,” I want to emphasize the act of initiating the divorce in court and it includes seeking a final judgment of dissolution of marriage. In other words, the phrase “filing for divorce” focuses upon the person filing papers in court to seek a “divorce” as a civil action in court, as the United States of America legal systems recognize the civil law process. I intend to distinguish the spouse filing paperwork in court for divorce from the other spouse who did not start the divorce by filing paperwork in court.
 - 17 Every group of elders in a local assembly should carefully consider imposing church discipline upon every believer who files for divorce. Hardness of heart threatens to destroy the marriage and imperil the welfare of the children of the marriage. The principles of Galatians 6:1-5 (Page 1826) and Matthew 8:15-20 (Page 1533), should be applied to help the believer refrain from seeking or completing the divorce. Furthermore, the elders should minister to the suffering couple the Word of God regarding repentance (2 Corinthians 7:5-13 (Page 1811) and forgiveness (Luke 17:1-4 (Page 1634) and Luke 15:11-32 (Page 1635).

2.1 Answer: Hardness of Heart Always Motivates Divorce

Jesus linked “hardness of heart” with the sinful desire to divorce. Jesus always knows the hearts of people, and how sin devastates the heart. It changes the heart for the worse. In this case, Jesus spoke about the “hardness of heart” involved in every divorce.¹⁸ This spiritual “hardness” or “stiffness” refers to a sinful quality of the heart, unwilling to repent of one’s sinful response to the evil actions of the spouse. Notice that when one spouse sins, particularly with immorality, the hurt and anguish sinks into the innocent spouse’s heart, and may begin to fester in unforgiveness. Until the innocent spouse now repents, and forgives the immoral spouse, the innocent spouse lives with a hard heart, that may prompt filing for divorce. The sin of immorality does not destroy a marriage, but rather the hard-heart of unforgiveness lies behind divorce.

Today, I hear many pastors “command” divorce. They teach that you must “get out of the marriage.” This false teaching completely misses the points Jesus made about divorce. Despite the popular teachings today that allow divorce for many reasons, Jesus provided a very clear answer that man should not separate what God has joined together in marriage. One of the most frequently cited passages, allegedly allowing sinless divorce, is Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534), regarding immorality. According to the false

¹⁸ The Greek phrase “hardness of heart” (“τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν”) emphasizes the particular “hardness of heart” at issue in divorce with the definite article. The root word for “hardness” illustrates the sinful stubbornness of the unrepentant heart (Romans 2:5 (Page 1760)). In a similar sense, the “stiff-necked” (“Σκληροτράχηλοι”) and uncircumcised of heart are always resisting the Holy Spirit and follow the sinful patterns of their fathers.

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teaching that God “commands” divorce, some people teach that “immorality” in the marriage frees the believer from the marriage and allows them to remarry. We shall see how Jesus handled that matter in the next verse.

3

Remarriage

God intended for believers to know His will even after a divorce. Only one party filed for the divorce, and so the other party does not bear the direct, sinful burden of hard-hearted divorce. I do not mean to imply that the non-filing spouse is always innocent of all sin, and may also have a hard heart, but they did not commit the sin of filing for divorce. Of course people may argue that the one spouse drove the other to divorce, but such arguments cannot stand because they tend to shift blame away from the sin of filing for divorce. No matter how much people try to move blame to other people, ultimately, we must each give an account to God of our own actions. We cannot blame other people for our own sin.

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Part Three

Adultery after Divorce

Jesus has shown that all divorce begins with a sinful heart. The sinful heart has become hard, so hard that it no longer allows God's forgiveness to operate in his/her heart. Now, Jesus adds further teaching about the problem of immorality in the marriage.

3.1 Adultery Can Follow Divorce

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

Matthew 19:9, Page 1534

Many people cannot imagine that adultery can really follow divorce.¹⁹ Those folks believe that if you are now divorced, then you cannot

¹⁹ The Greek root term for “adultery” occurs in many contexts. For example, Romans 7:3 (Page 1767) shows that a woman who “is joined” (“γένηται”) to another man after the death of her husband does not become an “adulteress” (“μοιχαλίδα”). Notice too that Jesus taught she was free from the law of divorce in that verse. Likewise, see Matthew 12:39 (Page 1521); Matthew 16:34 (Page 1529) (sign of Jonah the Prophet). In 2 Peter 2:14 (Page 1902), Peter described false prophets as “having eyes full of adultery (“μοιχαλίδος”) that never

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commit adultery, because adultery assumes you are still married. Yet, Jesus said adultery can follow divorce. Here is how it happens.

“It was said, “WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 5:31-32, Page 1508

Adultery normally applies to sexual sin in an ongoing marriage. Jesus discussed a case where a woman can commit sin after divorce, and her husband made her commit adultery. So, was the divorce not really a divorce in the eyes of Jesus because the woman can still be a party to adultery? Jesus taught that adultery can follow divorce, and based His teaching upon the Old testament law of divorce and remarriage. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus elaborated upon the Old Testament Law concerning the certificate of divorce. That Old Testament background information remains crucial to understanding the New Testament message. In Matthew 5:31-32 (Page 1508) Jesus taught that the husband who divorces his wife makes²⁰

cease from sin.” In that context, both spiritual and sexual sin appear at issue. In James 4:4 (Page 1891) we learn that friendship with the world makes us “adulteresses” (“μοιχαλίδες”). Similarly, in Mark 8:38 (Page 1574) Jesus spoke of everyone who is ashamed of Him and His words is part of an adulterous (“μοιχαλίδι”) and sinful generation.

- 20 The Greek term here for “makes” (“ποιεῖ”—present active indicative) indicates the husband is responsible for her adultery. The Greek syntax here (“ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι”) has the present active indicative followed by the aorist passive infinitive (“μοιχευθῆναι”),

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his wife commit adultery, unless she has already committed sexual immorality during the marriage.

Before we explore the teaching of Jesus further, we should understand the Old Testament Law concerning the certificate of divorce. Jesus started in the Old Testament, and then provided further revelation. Based upon Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325), regarding the certificate of divorce, Jesus first declared that everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery.²¹ Jesus never contradicted the Old Testament, but explained the Old Testament. Please recall that Deuteronomy 24 dealt with

apparently implying the result of the divorce throws the Innocent Spouse into the pool abounding with “adultery.” In essence, the Innocent Spouse has adultery put upon her (aorist passive voice—implying completed, total action in this case—passive voice probably indicates she had this problem foisted upon her), because her husband filed for divorce. As seen in 1 Corinthians 7, when some of the unmarried burn with passion, immorality becomes a problem, and it is better for them to marry. Consider Matthew 5:32 (Page 1508) in this context.

- 21 God permitted a certificate of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). God provided guidance about divorcing over indecency. Please recall that Jesus called all such divorce hard-hearted and sinful. Jesus explained further that such certificates of divorce rested upon “unchastity” in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). If no unchastity is present, and the husband divorced the wife, then he caused her to commit adultery. Consider the example of the Herods in Mark 6:14-29, Pages 1568-1569). King Herod married Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother. John the Baptist condemned such actions based upon the Old Testament Law regarding divorce properly interpreted. King Herod imprisoned John the Baptist for his rebuke. Herodias bore such a grudge against John the Baptist for his rebuke that she had him beheaded.

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the certificate of divorce. The husband issued the certificate of divorce, put it in the hand of the wife, and sent her way. The wife then went and married another man. If the new husband also issued her a certificate of divorce, or if the second husband died, then the wife could not return to her former husband. In both of those cases, the husband found “some indecency” in his wife. When Jesus described the problem with the wife, Mark chose the Greek word “unchastity”.²² The entire Deuteronomy passage turns upon

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- 22 We should also consider the problem of “immorality” that occurred a long time ago in a marriage. What is a long time? In answering that question, we must consider the teaching of Jesus in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). Jesus used the word “defiled” (“הַטְּמָאָה”) there to describe the woman who had been divorced, married by a new husband, and then the new husband died; in that case, the wife cannot remarry the first husband because she is “defiled,” in the sense of taking her would be an abomination (“כִּי-תוֹעֵבָה”). We may learn here that sex with another man renders a woman unclean in reference to having sex with her previous husband. The law here prohibited the first husband from remarrying that woman because such action would be an abomination, even if her new husband had died. I am not suggesting that we follow this pattern of Old Testament law, but I observe that sex with another person, even in marriage after divorce, causes ceremonial uncleanness in the Old Testament. The more basic point is that taking a person back has serious sexual and spiritual consequences. By taking back, I mean having sex with that person again. Remember that having sex with a prostitute causes you to be joined with her. So, joining these two concepts together (no remarriage and sex with a prostitute), I suggest that if a spouse takes an immoral spouse back and has sex with that spouse, or even continues the marriage after the immorality, then the exception of “immorality” in the teaching of Jesus in the Matthew 19:8 (Page 1534) no longer applies. If you learn of the immorality, and have a hard-heart, then you commit Hard-Hearted Divorce by filing for divorce.

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the finding of “unchastity.” Jesus covered the explicit case where the husband gave her a certificate of divorce, but the wife was not guilty of “unchastity,” and so the husband caused her to commit adultery. Notice that this phrase regarding “unchastity” related to the basis for giving the certificate of divorce described in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). If a husband divorced his unchaste wife, and gave her a certificate of divorce, he still divorced her because of his hard, unforgiving heart and so sinned. So, I do not agree that “unchastity” provides a permissible basis for divorce. On the contrary, nothing in Matthew 5:31-32 (Page 1508) conflicts with teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19: 1-9 (Page 1534) or Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Page 325). All divorce emerges from a hard heart, and it is always sinful.

According to Jesus, in Matthew 19:8 (Page 1534), if a man divorces his wife, because he has a hard heart, and his wife has not committed “immorality” during the marriage, then he commits adultery when he marries another woman. So, in effect, the man began the divorce with a hard, sinful heart—let us call that Hard-Hearted Sin (divorce itself). If the man marries another woman after committing Hard-Hearted Sin, he now commits adultery by marrying another woman—let us call that Adultery Sin (remarriage after divorce without preceding sexual immorality). The only

You may avoid Adultery Sin because your spouse was immoral. But if you take the spouse back, continue the marriage or have sex with that spouse again, then you have become one flesh with that spouse again and so the exception of “immorality” no longer applies. I do not teach this concept with great assurance, but it makes the most sense to me in light of the entire group of passages on divorce and remarriage. So, how long is a long time? The test is fairly simple: did you have sex with your spouse after you knew about the immorality, or did you continue the marriage after you knew about the immorality? If you answer yes to either question, then apparently you took the spouse back and so can be guilty also of Adultery Sin, if you first commit Hard-Hearted sin and file for divorce. So, any sin of immorality does not linger in the marriage, except by unforgiveness and a hard heart.

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way a man committing Hard-Hearted Sin can remarry without adding Adultery Sin will be if the wife committed “immorality” during the marriage. Notice that the man is still guilty of Hard-Hearted Sin because of the divorce in the first place. Can the man committing Hard-Hearted Sin remarry without committing Adultery Sin? Yes, under only one circumstance. A man may avoid Adultery Sin if the wife has committed “immorality” during the marriage. But, the man still commits Hard-Hearted Sin by divorcing his wife. Notice that Jesus has consistently focused upon only the person filing for divorce, not the party being divorced.

Jesus taught two important points in the Matthew 19 passage regarding the continuity of marriage. First, God joined the man and woman together for a permanent bond. Second, apparently man can “separate” what God joined together, because Jesus warned against the same and then provided further teaching on divorce and remarriage. So, we see that “sexual immorality” during the marriage does not justify a divorce, but God permitted a man to give a certificate of divorce because of hardness of heart. Sinful people gave certificates of divorce and refused to honor God’s union of man and woman. They insisted upon having a hard, unforgiving heart toward the spouse engaging in sexual immorality. It also apparently severs the marital bond, at least from the limited standpoint of allowing the Hard-Hearted Spouse who filed for divorce to remarry, because of the spouse’s sexual immorality.

Now let us look at the word “immorality” used in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534).²³ Notice that in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534) Jesus distinguished the

23 The Greek term for “immorality” (“πορνεία”) covers several sexual sins. For example, the same word occurs in 1 Corinthians 5:1 (Pages 1786-1787) to describe the fact that a man has his father’s wife. The word also describes the acts of a harlot in Revelation 19:2 (Page 1936). The word also appears in conjunction with “impurity” (“τῆ

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sin of “immorality” from the sin of “adultery.”²⁴ Jesus clearly intended some difference between the term “immorality” and “adultery,” because two different terms are used in the Greek text. Some commentators have limited the term “immorality” to mean sexual activity before marriage, citing the example of Joseph seeking to “divorce” Mary when he discovered she was pregnant.²⁵ Yet, when you compare the Pharisees’ questions with the idea that “fornication” only covers pre-marital sex, it does not seem to

ἀκαθαρσίᾳ”) and “sensuality” (“ἀσελγείᾳ”) in 2 Corinthians 12:21 (Page 1818).

- 24 The Greek term for “adultery” (“μοιχᾶται”) means to be unfaithful sexually in a marriage context, but it also describes the spiritual sin of breaking a marriage covenant with God by seeking idols (see Jeremiah 5:7 (Page 1196), where God says that the sons of Israel have forsaken God and committed adultery as they “trooped” to the harlot’s house by swearing by those who are not gods. See also Ezekiel 23:37 (Page 1335) and Hosea 4:13 (Page 1416)).
- 25 Some commentators have argued that the story of Joseph and Mary must mean that the word “immorality” (“πορνείᾳ”) must be limited in meaning to sexual activity before marriage, in the sense of fornication. In essence, they argue that Matthew called Joseph a “righteous” man, even as Joseph contemplated “divorcing” (“ἀπολῦσαι”) Mary before they were formally married. Matthew used the same word for “divorced” in Matthew 1:19 (Page 1502) and Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534). So, to avoid any inconsistency between the acts of Joseph, a righteous man, and the teachings of Jesus later in Matthew and the other Gospels, these commentators argue that “immorality” should be limited to just “fornication” before marriage. One significant problem is that their argument lacks clear textual support. The word “immorality” never occurs with Mary and Joseph, and they only prove that Joseph was justified in putting Mary away before marriage, if she had committed immorality. In the normal

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fit the context. So, it seems better to recognize that the term “immorality” has a broad meaning here, indicating that Jesus included all forms of sexual activity with someone other than the spouse. Based in part upon 1 Corinthians 6:18 (Page 1788), we see that the “immoral” man sins against his own body.²⁶ So, we observe that “immorality” includes sexual bodily sins of different kinds, in contrast to the term “adultery” which means sexual infidelity while married, but specifically seems to indicate sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse.

course of events, Mary’s pregnancy before marriage certainly indicated to chaste and righteous Joseph that Mary had premarital sex with someone else. He was mistaken, however. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and she conceived supernaturally (Matthew 2:18 (Page 1502). The advocates of the “fornication” view intend to limit the meaning of the term “immorality” in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534) to just premarital sexual activity. In their view, the only marriages subject to divorce without sin would be those people only engaged, but not formally married. But, that meaning does not fit with the context of formally married people seeking divorce, which we see in Matthew 19. Otherwise, to adopt that limited view of “immorality,” all the divorces Jesus has in mind in Matthew 19 were those “divorces” before the couples were actually married, or sexual acts committed before marriage. In the alternative, following the logic of this view, Jesus meant that you could divorce any time during the marriage if you could show that your spouse had been guilty of pre-marital infidelity. But then the example of Joseph would not apply, because Joseph sought to put Mary away before they were married, not after they were married as is the case Jesus discussed. Such limitations do not fit with the question of the Pharisees who had in mind that any man could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever. The proof for limiting the term “immorality” in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534) to mean only “fornication” (referring to premarital acts) does not appear convincing, but is very interesting.

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Notice also that Jesus covered the case of the man who married a divorced woman. Jesus explained that whoever marries “the divorced woman” commits adultery. The question arises whether the phrase “the divorced woman” refers to: (a) the chaste woman whom her husband divorced; or (b) a woman who divorced herself (she filed for divorce) from her husband. The best answer seems to be that Jesus referred to the woman who divorced her husband also commits adultery.²⁷ Depending upon the

26 In 1 Corinthians 6:18 (Page 1788) the term “immoral man” (“πορνεύων”—present active participle, indicating, perhaps, continuous present action) suggests a close connection to bodily acts of a sexual nature.

27 The Greek term here for adultery (“μοιχᾶται”—present middle indicative—shows that adultery can be self-inflicted, middle voice, and so it further bolsters the argument that the preceding participle “divorced” (“ἀπολελυμένην”) may best be translated as middle voice (instead of passive voice), indicating the wife filed for divorce in this last clause. If translated as passive voice, it would not indicate who took the action of filing for divorce, and, that would also be a completely acceptable translation. Also, this same term “committing adultery” (“μοιχᾶται”) occurs in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534) and Mark 10:11-12 (Page 1577), and in each case it indicated that the spouse who files for divorce commits adultery by marrying another person. In Matthew 15:19 (Page 1528) Jesus placed the source of adulteries in the heart, from which come evil thoughts; compare Mark 7:22 (Page 1570), (“μοιχεῖται” and the list of sins there). Likewise, in Luke 16:18 (Page 1633), Jesus declared that everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery (“μοιχεύει”—present active indicative) and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery (“μοιχεύει”). In this usage, the “divorced” person appears to be still married to the original spouse, because she/he can commit adultery with others, even after the “divorce.” In Romans

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translation of the ambiguous Greek forms and structure in the original text of the verse, a very strong case can be made here that Jesus revealed that the husband who divorces his wife, except for the cause of her sexual immorality, bears spiritual responsibility for the adultery. Likewise, if a man marries a woman who divorced her husband, he now commits adultery.

2:22 (Page 1761), the term for adultery (“μοιχεύειν”) occurs in the construction “ὁ λέγων μὴ μοιχεύειν μοιχεύεις;” this construction shows the use of the infinitive coupled with μὴ to describe a forbidden sexual act. Likewise, in James 2:11 (Page 1889), the command not to commit adultery (“Μὴ μοιχεύσης”—aorist active subjunctive—all-encompassing command to abstain from adultery), relates directly to the charge that you do commit adultery (“μοιχεύεις”) by sinful divorce and remarriage; see also the very similar construction “do not commit adultery” (“Μὴ μοιχεύσης”) directed to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:19 (Page 1578) and Luke 18:20 (Pages 1636-1637). Compare the similar command in Matthew 5:27 (Page 1507): “You shall not commit adultery” (“Οὐ μοιχεύσεις”—same construction in Matthew 19:18 (Page 1535); Romans 13:9 (Page 1776)). In John 8:4 (Page 1670) accusers bring a woman caught in the very act of adultery (“μοιχευομένη”—present passive participle. The passive voice here indicates that she was a part of the sin, but the other actor remains unidentified). In Revelation 2:22 (Page 1916) we read the Lord will throw Jezebel upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery (“τοὺς μοιχεύοντας”—present active participle) with her, into great tribulation. In Luke 8:11 (Page 1636) the Pharisee praised God he was not like adulterers (“μοιχοί”); similarly, the same Greek term “μοιχοί” is used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 (Page 1788) to describe different people who would not inherit the kingdom of God. Thanks be to Jesus Christ that “such were some of you,” but now those “adulterers” have been washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus

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We must examine more closely the phrase “whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32 (Page 1508)).²⁸ I am always skeptical of an explanation of any verse that seems to turn the meaning completely opposite. So, I sought careful proof that Jesus had not intended: “every divorced spouse, whether innocent or not, cannot remarry, because if that spouse remarries, then the person who marries that divorced spouse commits adultery.” First, I began my study by noting that

Christ and in the Spirit of our God. This verse provides strong support for permissible remarriage after divorce that occurred before salvation. Based upon 1 Corinthians 6:11 (Page 1788), believers who committed adultery before salvation are no longer “adulterers,” because of the phrase “such were some of you” (“καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε”—imperfect active indicative, showing a continuous past state of adultery, now changed by the wonderful activity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in their lives). Therefore, if you divorced or remarried improperly before salvation, you are no longer an “adulterer” because salvation has changed you. Finally, in Hebrews 13:4 (Page 1886), the judgment of God awaits all people who commit sexual immorality (“πόρνους”) and adulterers (“μοιχοὺς”)—notice the simple nouns to describe these people, as opposed to the participles in the other passages.

- 28 In the Greek text, the phrase “whoever” (“καὶ ὅς ἐάν”) only occurs here and in Matthew 12:39 (Page 1521) and Matthew 18:5 (Page 1532), and seems always part of a conditional clause with a subjunctive verb. Not only does this instance indicate that the phrase may stand independently of the first part of the verse, it also suggests something that is likely to happen in the future. Furthermore, this entire last phrase apparently stands independently from the woman in the first part of the verse. No definite article describes the “divorced woman” and so the relationship to the woman divorced in the first part of the verse cannot be pressed with certainty to mean the

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the Greek text has certain ambiguities here. The word “divorced” in the phrase “a divorced woman” occurs in an ambiguous form in the Greek text.²⁹ It may mean “who was divorced,” in which case we do not know who filed for divorce—the wife or the husband. But the word “divorced” in that same phrase may mean “she divorced herself” from her husband. In that case, we know the wife filed for divorce. Second, I thought about the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:1-9 (Page 1634) where He developed the doctrine of marriage and divorce in greater detail. There, He taught that filing for divorce was always sinful, because it issued from a hard, unforgiving heart. So, in Matthew 5:31-32 (Page 1508) it seems unlikely that Jesus would teach that the innocent spouse would not be allowed to remarry, even though she had done nothing wrong.³⁰ Therefore, I believe

same woman.

- 29 In the Greek text, the term for “divorced” (“ἀπολελυμένην”) may be in the middle voice or the passive voice. It may also be a deponent. But, taking the entire context into consideration, and the larger teaching already developed in Matthew 19:1-9 (Page 1534), it seems best to take it as middle voice, with the sense that the wife took the action to divorce herself.
- 30 We must also consider the possibility that the phrase “divorced woman” refers specifically to the woman at issue in the same verse, namely, the woman divorced by her husband (he filed suit by giving her the certificate of divorce). Two cases arise there. First, the husband acted according to the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, (Page 325) and gave her a certificate of divorce because he found indecency in her, and she was indeed guilty of indecency. In that case, the woman would not be free to remarry and whoever married her would be guilty of adultery. Second, the husband gave her a certificate of divorce, claiming some indecency in her, but, in fact, she was not

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Jesus taught that if the wife filed for divorce, anyone who subsequently marries her commits adultery. That interpretation fits well with all the passages, rests upon correct grammar and syntax in the original, and does no obvious violence to the context.

So, in conclusion, Jesus taught that all divorce is sinful, because the person seeking a divorce has a hard, unforgiving heart toward the spouse. We will call that sinful act of filing for divorce Hard-Hearted Sin. We also saw that Hard-Hearted Sin can be compounded by Adultery Sin, where the husband filing for divorce marries another person. The only way to avoid Adultery Sin is to show that the wife committed “immorality” while married. Remember, Hard-Hearted Sin still remains, because the husband had a hard heart in seeking a divorce. If you file for divorce, Jesus taught that you have a hard, unforgiving heart—no exceptions, no excuses. You sin against God by filing for divorce. Not many people will like that answer from Jesus, but please take the time to study the passage for yourself and draw your own conclusions from the Bible, being led personally by the Holy Spirit into all truth. All sins can be forgiven by God, but willfully sinning by filing for divorce will only lead to discipline from God.³¹ Well, can the innocent spouse remarry?

guilty of any indecency, despite his claims and his delivery of a certificate of divorce. In this case, Jesus may be emphasizing that by failing to comply with the law of the certificate of divorce, he causes her to commit adultery, perhaps because she has not been lawfully divorced. Again, I do not find the second case to reconcile well with Matthew 19:1-9 (Page 1534), although the first case would harmonize.

- 31 Hebrews 12:9-11 (Pages 1884-1885)—all discipline seems sorrowful for the moment. Godly sorrow in turn leads to repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (Page 1811).

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Part Four

The Innocent Spouse

In 1 Corinthians, Paul provided more details regarding proper marital relationships. As we saw with Jesus teaching on divorce, Paul did not promote divorce. Paul, however, dealt with several specific instances of desertion, and also spoke to general marriage issues. We will now focus primarily upon the divorce issues.

In 1 Corinthians 7:2 (Page 1788) Paul taught that a man may avoid the snare of immorality by having his own wife, and the same for a woman.³² We also observe that Paul treated the sexual desires the same for men and women, and both of them should marry to avoid immorality.

“But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.”

1 Corinthians 7:2, Page 1788

Notice that the problem with “immorality” confronts the lives of all single believers. Not every believer may suffer from consuming passions, but every believer needs to know about immorality. Some believers, like Paul himself, have the gift of “self-control” which helps them overcome the

32 Paul used the term “immorality” (“πορνείας”) and that is the same root word used in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534). Because of the problem with “immorality,” God provides for a man to have a wife.

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temptation of sexual sin.³³ Paul also had important words for the unmarried. We will look at this category of people further on in this study, but the term “unmarried” will provide specific guidance on remarriage.

Paul used himself as an example of staying single, relying upon the gift of self-control bestowed by God upon him. Paul recognized, however, that not everyone possessed such a gift, and also understood what it means to burn with passion.³⁴ While the unmarried and widows may remain single

33 In 1 Corinthians 7:5-7 (Page 1789) Paul described the gift that allowed him to avoid immorality, but he made it plain that not everyone possessed that special gift of “self-control” (“ἀκραισία”). Notice too that Satan uses this lack of self-control to tempt believers, especially in the marriage of believers. So, following Paul’s teaching, we see that even in marriage, the lack of “self-control” may be a problem when one spouse deprives the other spouse of sex. As Paul taught, only believers married to each other should have sex, and in that context of a believer’s marriage, “self-control” can still be an issue. Satan tempts married believers when they are deprived of sex. So the remedy will always be mutuality in sexuality. As Paul described in 1 Corinthians 7:4 (Pages 1788-1789), each spouse controls the sexual activity of the other spouse. In other words, if you perceive that your spouse hungers for sex, then have sex. If you deprive the other spouse of sex, then do it only by agreement and then only for a time (“καίρῳ”) to devote yourselves to prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5 (Page 1789)). So, any spouse who uses sex as a weapon or power play in a marriage clearly violates the Word of God.

34 In 1 Corinthians 7:9 (Page 1789) the Greek phrase “burn with passion” (“πυροῦσθαι”—present passive infinitive) literally references the burning. Because of the context, the translators added the word “passion.” Based upon 1 Corinthians 7:5 (Page 1789), we see that Satan seeks to use this lack of “self-control” in believers to inflame their passions for sex to promote immorality in the lives of believers.

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and live in God's blessing, so also they may remarry if they do not have self-control. Paul specifically recognized that marriage provides God's blessing upon those who burn with passion so that they may burn with desire for their God-given spouse. Having now encountered the term "unmarried," let us look at the concept as it is used in 1 Corinthians 7.

In 1 Corinthians 7:8 (Page 1789) Paul distinguished the term "unmarried" from the term "widows."³⁵ In both cases, Paul directed them to remain single as he was, or else get married, if they lack the spiritual quality of self-control.³⁶ While other verses indicate that "self-control" may be

35 The Greek terms here are "the unmarried" ("τοῖς ἀγάμοις") and "the widows" ("ταῖς χήραις"). In Romans 7:1-3 (Pages 1766-1767) Paul explained that the law caused a woman to be bound in marriage to her husband as long as he lived. But, upon his death, the wife was now a widow, and no longer bound to her husband. In 1 Timothy 5:1-16 (Page 1857-1588), Paul outlined the principles for caring for widows. In 1 Timothy 5:14, Paul specifically commanded younger widows "to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no cause for reproach, for some have already turned aside to follow Satan." Paul understood the "sensual desires" ("καταστρηνιάσωσιν") in disregard of Christ many widows experienced. The cure for such desires was marriage, just as he prescribed for the "unmarried."

36 The Greek term for "self control" ("ἐγκρατεύονται") found in 1 Corinthians 7:9 (Page 1789) means elsewhere a spiritual quality produced by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23 (Page 1825) and part of a chain of qualities which render God's servant prepared for fruitful service for the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6 (Page 1900). Paul described this same quality while on trial before Felix (Acts 24:25 (Page 1749)). Likewise, the competitor in the games must exercise

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developed in a variety of ways in our spiritual lives as one fruit of the Holy Spirit, Paul refers in this passage to a special gift of “self-control.”³⁷ So, what does the term “unmarried” mean in this chapter? Specifically, does the term “unmarried” include divorced people?

“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 Page 1789

In 1 Corinthians 7:10 (Page 1789) Paul taught that the wife not “should not leave” her husband.³⁸ In 1 Corinthians 7:11 (Page 1789) following the

self-control in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25 (Page 1793)). Elders also must possess this quality (Titus 1:8 (Page 1865)).

- 37 The Greek phrase here for “gift of God” (“χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ”) relates the gift of control over the sexual desire present in both the married (1 Corinthians 7:3-6 (Pages 1788-1789)) and the unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7-9 (Page 1789)). The gift of self-control apparently relates also the quality of self control produced through spiritual growth. See footnote 36 above. Paul specifically mentioned that not all believers have this gift of God called “self control” over their sexual desires. Yet, all believers can resist giving in to sinful sexual desires (1 Corinthians 10:13 (Page 1793)).
- 38 The Greek phrase here is “should not leave” (“μὴ χωρισθῆναι”). The same term “leave” occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:11 (Page 1789) to describe the woman who leaves (“χωρισθῆ”) her husband.

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same train of thought, Paul described that woman who “left” her husband as an “unmarried” woman.³⁹ Moreover, also in 1 Corinthians 7:11 (Page 1789) Paul commanded a man not to divorce his wife, apparently just like the wife should not divorce or leave her husband. Paul brought mutuality to divorce and remarriage. One gender does not have special rights to divorce and remarry. Both wives and husbands must not divorce their spouses. In 1 Corinthians 7:11 (Page 1789) the term “leave” means to “divorce.”⁴⁰ So, Paul wrote that he himself was not giving instruction, but the Lord,⁴¹ that “the

39 The Greek term for “unmarried” (“ἄγαμος”) therefore includes divorced people, based upon 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (Page 1789).

40 The Greek term for “does leave” (“χωρισθῇ”) here must mean divorce, because of Paul’s words in the same verse “the husband should not divorce (“ἀφιέναι”) his wife.” The behavior of the wife in leaving seems the same as the behavior of the husband in divorcing, both in the same verse. You may recall that Jesus used the term “divorce” (“ἀπολύση”) in Matthew 19:9 (Page 1634). We see a variety of words used in these passages to describe divorce, but while a closer study of those terms would be nice, it is beyond the scope of this study.

41 This distinction between what Paul wrote here and what the Lord Jesus said has been twisted by many commentators. In this instance, when Paul attributed the teaching concerning divorce to the Lord Jesus, he only meant that the Lord Jesus had explicitly taught on divorce. In other instances, Paul relied upon the Holy Spirit working within him to provide the words Paul wrote. In all cases, Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (Page 1864) and 2 Peter 1:20-21 (Page 1901). When I write that Paul taught, I mean that Paul taught under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so Paul was speaking for God in all his epistles contained in the Bible. They were inspired the moment that his pen hit the paper, if not in his mind before the pen moved. Paul also used the phrase “I think I have the Spirit of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7:39 (Pages 1790-1791)).

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wife should not leave her husband.” Paul never encouraged anyone to file for divorce, but exactly followed the Lord Jesus’ teaching that only the Hard-Hearted Spouse files for divorce and so sins against God (Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534)). Jesus never provided any exception to the no divorce rule. So, in 1 Corinthians 7:11 (Page 1789) Paul described the woman who had “divorced” her husband as “unmarried.” Therefore, we see that a woman who divorced her husband now may be described as part of the group Paul labeled “unmarried.” Therefore, we know that the group “unmarried” includes divorced people. Within the group of divorced people, we have two general groups. First, the group that filed for divorce we will call the Hard-Hearted Spouse group. Second, we have the Innocent Spouse group. The latter group are the people who did not file for divorce, but their spouse divorced them. So, we see in Matthew 19 that the Hard-Hearted Spouse group have sinned against God by filing for divorce. As we look at 1 Corinthians 7, we learn that Paul’s general teaching that the “unmarried” in 1 Corinthians 7:8 should remarry to avoid burning passion and immorality, applies to the Innocent Spouse group, and nothing in Matthew 19 prohibits the Innocent Spouse from remarrying. If the unmarried, Innocent Spouse lacks the gift of “self-control,” then that Innocent Spouse may remarry to avoid burning with passion and immorality. The Hard-Hearted Spouse sinned by filing for divorce, and may compound their Hard-Hearted Sin by adding Adultery Sin (“except for immorality”) as described above.

Therefore, because many believers lack of the gift of “self-control,” Paul taught that it is better for the Innocent Spouse Group to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:9 (Page 1789)). So, the Innocent Spouse, deprived now of his/her sexual mate, will be “unmarried.” As an “unmarried” believer, the problems of “burning with passion” and temptation from Satan allow the Innocent Spouse to remarry, provided the Innocent Spouse finds another

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believer.⁴² What about the Hard-Hearted Spouse that filed for divorce? Can that Hard-Hearted Spouse remarry? Now we will look at some verses in 1 Corinthians 7 and compare them with Matthew 19.

1 Corinthians 7:10 provides more information for the Hard-Hearted Spouse who files for divorce. Remember, please, that the person who files for divorce is the Hard-Hearted Spouse (with no exceptions), and the other spouse is the Innocent Spouse. I do not mean that the Innocent Spouse has done nothing wrong, but by filing for divorce, the Hard-Hearted Spouse has broken God's commandment not to divorce, as we observed above in our study of Matthew 19. So, what about the Hard-hearted Spouse who wants to remarry? What does God say about that option? Well, in 1 Corinthians 7:10, we see that the woman who leaves (leaves=divorces as described above) her husband must remain unmarried. Again, no exceptions are given here. If a hard-hearted woman insists upon divorce, then Paul orders her to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. Consider the woman who simply dislikes her husband and has grown tired of him. If she knew that God commanded her not to divorce her husband, then she would not be as eager to divorce him. Furthermore, if she also knew that God commanded her to remain single after divorce (at least until her husband dies (Romans 7:1-2 (Pages 1766-1767))), or else be reconciled, then she would not be eager to divorce him. I never suggest creating doctrine from our experience, but I do believe in applying doctrine gleaned from Scripture alone to our experience. Likewise, if your spouse has been unfaithful sexually to you, you still will be the Hard-Hearted Spouse if you file for divorce. Furthermore, you would have to remain single for the rest of your life, or else be reconciled to your spouse. As we move forward in this study, we also

42 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (Page 1810) provides clear reasons why a believer should never marry an unbeliever: (a) no partnership with unbelievers (v. 14); (b) no fellowship with unbelievers (v. 14); (c) no harmony with unbelievers (v. 15); (d) nothing in common with unbelievers (v.15); (e) no agreement with unbelievers (v.15).

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need to review God's teaching about marriages between believers and unbelievers. They provide more divine insight into divorce and remarriage. God loves us and wants us to know all about happy lives in marriage.

Part Five

The Unbelieving Spouse

The Lord Jesus not only created marriage, but He also intended for every believer to enjoy marriage, unless He had given that believer the gift of sexual self-control. In our world today, some people have been married multiple times. In other cases, people have never been married and had multiple children with multiple mates. Some people married before they became believers. Others became believers after marriage. Still other believers married, divorced, and then became believers.

Jesus recognized many different circumstances related to divorce and remarriage, including the case of the unbelieving spouse married to a believer. For example, if you married before you became a believer and you filed for divorce, Jesus provided guidance for that situation. Jesus gave very clear answers to every believer married to an unbeliever. When it comes to a current marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, Jesus did not distinguish between: (a) before I became a believer, I married my present spouse, an unbeliever; and (b) at the time I married, I was a believer, and I married an unbeliever; and (c) I am now a believer and I am now married to an unbeliever. Jesus focused upon what a believer should do regarding marriage to an unbeliever. If an unbeliever wants to divorce the believer, then what should the believer do? Do the same rules

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of marriage outlined above apply to an unbeliever? We will see how God applies the same basic commands to a believer married to an unbeliever and notice special provisions for believing spouses married to unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians, Paul provided clear teaching regarding marital relationships involving unbelievers.

“But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.”

1 Corinthians 7:12 Page 1789

In 1 Corinthians 7:12 (Page 1789) Paul began to address the issue of a believer married to an unbeliever. First, Paul commanded believers to remain with their unbelieving spouses. This command fits perfectly with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels not to divorce for any reason.⁴³ Notice that the unbelieving spouse, in this case the wife, consents to live with her believing husband.⁴⁴ So, just because you were saved while married to an unbeliever, you should not seek a divorce just because your spouse is an unbeliever.⁴⁵ In 1 Corinthians 7:13 (Page 1789) Paul applied the same

43 The Greek term for “divorce” (“ἀφίετω”) is the same root term Paul used for “divorce” in the previous verse.

44 The Greek term for “consents” (“συνευδοκεῖ”) literally means same good thoughts, or agrees.

45 This passage stands in contrast to 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (Page 1810), where Paul urges a believer to remain separate from an unbeliever, and to “COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE.” There, Paul commanded believers to avoid all bonds with unbelievers, especially to avoid being romantically involved with them.

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teaching to a woman married to an unbelieving husband, again showing that the marriage commands do not make distinctions between males and females, but God applied them without regard to gender.⁴⁶

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.”

1 Corinthians 7:14 Page 1789

In Corinthians 7:14 (Page 1789) Paul next revealed the theology behind God’s plan for a believer to remain married to an unbelieving spouse who wants to remain married to the believing spouse. First, the believing spouse has a sanctifying influence upon the unbeliever.⁴⁷ The believing spouse will have daily opportunities to bring God’s light of salvation to the unbelieving spouse. Second, the believing mother or believing father will provide sanctifying guidance to the children of the marriage. In essence, they will be washed in the gracious love and teaching

46 Do not misunderstand. God prohibits marriage between two males and likewise between two females. God always intended for one male to marry one female.

47 The Greek word for “sanctifying” (“ἡγιάσται”—note the perfect passive indicative) means here that the believing wife has a continuing influence upon the unbeliever. Many wives, by their continual, faithful testimony, have seen their unbelieving husbands come to know the saving power of faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection (1 Peter 3:1-6 (Page 1896)). Paul nowhere taught that salvation can be imputed from one spouse to another, or from parent to child. Each person must receive the gift of eternal life by faith alone.

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of the believing spouse. Compare Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (Page 297). Furthermore, the believing spouse will have far less daily contact with the children after a divorce imposing a rotating residential responsibility (rotating overnight visits with each spouse) for the children. The believing spouse will be spending time away from the children, and so the believing spouse may have less time to be a sanctifying influence upon the children.⁴⁸

“Yet, if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”

1 Corinthians 7:15 Page 1789

In 1 Corinthians 7:15 (Page 1789) Paul described the case of the unbelieving spouse who “leaves” the believing spouse.⁴⁹ As we learned above in 1 Corinthians 7:10 (Page 1789), the term “leaves” means “divorce”

⁴⁸ Some commentators wrongly suppose that the children are automatically saved by the influence of the believing spouse. Some commentators even teach that the believing parent can remove or limit the effects of original sin in the children of the marriage, but nothing in any of these verses speaks of original sin. Scripture never contradicts itself, because God wrote Scripture, and God cannot contradict Himself, because He always tells the truth (John 17:17 (Page 1690); Titus 1:2 (Page 1865)). Scripture universally provides that salvation comes by faith alone, and it must be your own faith (Romans 10:9-10 (Page 1772)), and not the faith of others. So, in this verse, we have the sanctifying influence of the believing parent shining God’s light of salvation upon the children, and also training them daily in the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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in this context. Therefore, if the unbelieving spouse divorces the believing spouse, the believing spouse is not under bondage.⁵⁰ What does the term “bondage” mean in this context? Does it mean the believing spouse divorced by the unbelieving spouse may remarry after the unbeliever files for divorce and obtains the final judgment of divorce?

Paul described the believer divorced by the unbelieving spouse as not under “bondage” in such cases. The best way to understand the term or

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- 49 The Greek term here for “leaves” (“χωρίζεται”) means to depart, but in this context, we see that it also means to divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10).
- 50 The Greek term for “bondage” (“δεδούλωται”) here means to live under the marriage bond. The same word is used in the same form only in 2 Peter 2:19 (Page 1902), where it speaks of the slavery of corruption suffered by false prophets. A better comparison of the use of the same concept of “bondage” occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:39 (Page 1790), where Paul wrote that a woman is “bound” (“δέδεταί”) to her husband as long as he lives. But once he dies, then she is “free” (“ἐλευθέρα”) to remarry. Compare Romans 7:2 (Page 1766), where Paul spoke of the woman as “bound” (“δέδεταί”) by the law to her husband so long as her husband lives. But when the husband dies, the wife is “released” from the law. In a parallel sense, the term for “released” (“κατήργηται”) means to abolish, to destroy, or to replace one thing with another, such as light removes darkness. Just as the woman is no longer bound to her husband after death, so also salvation releases us from the bondage of sin. Compare the use of a similar term for “bondage” (“δεδουλωμένοι”) in Galatians 4:3 (Page 1823) where it indicates that people were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world, but freed when Christ appeared bringing salvation and adoption into the family of God, now crying “Abba! Father! In this same sense, something that once held one in bondage now has been removed.

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concept of “bondage” is to look at the same author’s use of the same or similar idea. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 (Page 1790), we read that Paul said that a wife is “bound” to her husband as long as he lives. The key idea here is that “bondage” in that verse indicates a marriage bond that endures for the life of the other spouse. But once the spouse dies, then the living spouse is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. So, we see the idea of being bound means unable to remarry, but once the spouse dies, then the bondage has been lifted, and the widow is free to remarry. Please recall that Paul distinguished the “unmarried” and the “widows” in 1 Corinthians 7:8 (Page 1789), apparently identifying the means by which some people become single, respectively, through: (a) divorce or never married; and (b) death of the spouse. Therefore, we see that Paul used “bondage” in this context in the sense of being bound to the spouse in marriage. As we follow Paul’s teaching, we observe that “bondage” referred to the inability to remarry in this larger context of the chapter. Therefore, we may conclude that “bondage” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 (Page 1789) means bound to a marriage and unable to remarry. Now, we may apply these doctrines and learn that if an unbeliever divorces a believer, then the believing spouse may remarry because they are not under bondage. As a final note, Paul also teaches us that the believer has been called to peace. This phrase helps the believer have peace from God about the difficult decision to remarry. Speaking through Paul, Jesus provided comfort to some contemplating remarriage. Jesus implied that He Himself will help that believer divorced by the unbeliever to find a new believing spouse and pour His blessing upon that new marriage. In conclusion, the believer who has been divorced by the unbeliever is free to remarry, but the believer must only marry another believer (“in the Lord”).

4

Conclusion and Summary

Jesus not only laid the foundation for understanding marriage as the spiritual and creative work of God, He also countered the traditions of men concerning divorce. Like today, many teachers have distorted the Word of God to promote or even command divorce under certain circumstances. In all cases, Jesus called all divorce sinful. For the Innocent Spouse and desertion by an unbelieving spouse who files for divorce, those believers may remarry with God's blessing.

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Part Six

Summary

After reviewing the Word of God, we now may summarize the teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage. Please keep in mind that God focuses most on who filed for divorce and obtained the final judgment of divorce.

1. **God's Plan of Marriage**. God created man, woman, and marriage. No person should separate the man and woman God has joined together in marriage—no exceptions (Matthew 19:1-9 ((Page 1534))).

2. **Hard-Hearted Divorce**. Every person who files for divorce has a hard heart and sins by filing for divorce—no exceptions (Matthew 19:8 ((Page 1534))).

3. **Adultery after Divorce**. Every person who files for divorce always has a hard heart—no exceptions. Every person filing for divorce adds a further sin if he/she divorces for any reason other than the other spouse recently committed immorality during the marriage (remember what “recently” means above—you have not taken the immoral spouse back into the marriage (Matthew 19:9 ((Page 1534))).

3.1 **Immorality**. Every spouse who divorces the other spouse for any reason other than the immorality of the other spouse causes that innocent spouse to commit adultery (Matthew 5:32 ((Page 1508))).

3.2 **New Spouse**. Every person who marries a person who divorced his/her spouse commits adultery (Matthew 5:32 ((Page 1508))).

4. **Remarriage**. Some people may remarry with God's blessing.

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4.1 **Innocent Spouse**. If your spouse has divorced you for any reason other than your immorality, you may remarry with God's blessing because you are now unmarried, and you should marry rather than burn with passion; if you have the gift of self-control, then you do not need to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:9 ((Page 789))).

4.2 **Hard-Hearted Spouse**. If your spouse did not commit immorality during the marriage, and yet you still divorced your spouse, then you may not remarry with God's blessing (Matthew 5:32 (Page 1508); Matthew 19:9 (Page 1534))).

4.3 **Divorce for the Purpose of Remarriage**. Every person who divorces his/her spouse and marries another person commits adultery (Matthew 5:32 ((Page 1534))).

5. **Unbelievers and Divorce**. Believers happen to be married to unbelievers because of many circumstances. In all those circumstances, Jesus applies the same commands described above.

5.1 **Remain Married to the Unbeliever**. Every believer married now to an unbeliever must not divorce the unbeliever so that the believing spouse may be a sanctifying and saving influence upon the unbelieving spouse and the children of the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-16 ((Page 1789))).

5.2 **The Unbeliever Divorces the Believer**. If the unbelieving spouse divorces the believing spouse, then the believing spouse may remarry and enjoy the peace of God (1 Corinthians 7:15 ((Page 1789))).

I understand the exegesis described above does not match the mainstream teaching, on many points, in the church today regarding divorce and remarriage. I only care what the Word of God teaches, not what men teach. Every believer must make their own decisions about faith after careful study of the Word of God. Please do adopt any view in this study, until you have studied the Word of God for yourself. No matter where you stand

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today inside or outside of marriage, the Lord Jesus Christ loves you and intends for you to have an abundant life in Him. God also promised us that no one is Christ will ever face condemnation (Romans 8:1 (Page 1768). God is not mocked, and each believer will be reap what we sow, leading each believer to eternal life (Galatians 6:7-8 (Page 1826). Yet, when we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30 (Page 1831) and we will experience the faithful and appropriate discipline of God (Hebrew 12:8-11 (Pages 1884-1885)). In Christ, however, we are more than conquerors in all things, and by His grace we shall triumph through all distress as we look for “the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:13-14, Page 1867)).

I urge you to have [peace with God](#).