

Does God Condone Divorce and Remarriage? (The Exception Clause in Matthew 5:32; 19:9)

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Is an unhappily married person allowed to divorce? Is a divorced person allowed to remarry? For those who are willing to hear and heed God's Word, the Bible does give clear answers to these questions. I believe if a Biblical view of divorce and remarriage were taught in our churches today that marriage would be entered into with greater caution and Christian partners would commit themselves to making their marriage work.

There is an old saying that goes like this: "A man persuaded against his will is of the same opinion still." This study is not designed to manipulate someone into believing a "no divorce" position. It's written with the hope that everyone will reopen their hearts to this delicate and yet very important subject on the permanency of marriage. Properly understanding what Jesus and the Bible teaches on this subject is the only thing that can change one's personal conviction. This is because conviction should be based on the absolute standard of correctly interpreted truth (1 Tim. 2:15) - not feelings and failing marriages.

The subject of divorce and remarriage is a Biblical teaching and like other teachings must be formulated on the basis of sound exegesis and Biblical theology (2 Tim. 2:15). Sound exegesis provides authoritative instruction for this crucial area of life today. We must remember that undebatable truth comes from the revelation of God's Word. Our experience cannot create truth; it should conform to it; certainly it must never compromise it.

Of course, the leading consensus on the teaching of marriage today within the church is that adultery is a legitimate ground for divorce. However, the majority are not always right on a given subject. We should not be impressed with what the majority teach on any given subject but with what God's Word actually says regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. What is important is what Jesus taught regarding this subject.

The Beginning

Matthew 19:8

“He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.”

It we would start at the beginning and correctly understand what Jesus taught regarding marriage, we would not end up condoning divorce. Jesus stated that from the very beginning of creation he created one man for one woman and that marriage was to be permanent. Is there an exception to this rule? The very thought that there is some kind of loophole to dismiss the permanency of marriage that God established in Genesis seems somewhat bizarre.

God gave only one wife to Adam and said that he was to cleave to her (“to be glued together” - Gen. 2:24) and this was God’s design for marriage. The concepts of cleaving and becoming “one-flesh” speaks of the permanence of the marriage relationship through an unbreakable union. This was not merely God’s desire but His design and intent for marriage. Period.

This was not a design that could be undone and dismissed by another future revelation in the Bible. Nor can God’s original purpose be overturned if things don’t go as expected in a marriage. This is not God’s creative decree that can be changed according to the cultural practices of man. From the beginning it was not so! The beginning is the final word on this matter. No later revelation could ever overturn God’s creative decree for marriage any more than evolution can overturn God’s creation of the universe! God created both marriage and the universe in the beginning and trying to destroy either of these teachings is nothing less than disbelief in what God says regarding His creative works and foundational purposes.

The original plan for marriage is that it was for life and no provision was ever given for ending it except by death. This concept was behind the Lord's answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:4-6 when He appeals to Genesis 2:24 as the basis of his teaching that marriage is indissoluble.

Matthew 19:4-6:

“And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

The clarity of what Jesus was teaching from Genesis on the subject of marriage cannot be dismissed any more than His teaching of a literal creation week (Mark 13:19; 19:8; 24:21). Jesus taught that the way God began marriage in the beginning of creation (Matt. 19:8) is the way He intends marriage to be practiced within the human race. It was to be a permanent and unalterable union. Period.

Apparently after the Pharisees had left, the disciples told Jesus: “If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” (Matt. 19:10). The disciples in effect were saying that if a man was stuck with his wife for life, it was better to remain single. This extreme reaction suggests that Jesus' statement did not permit any grounds for divorce and that a marriage was to be permanent, as designed by God in Genesis. Of course, the disciples needed a class on “Marriage 101” to get them to understand the joy and blessing of marriage. Jesus did not intend to slight marriage since God has given marriage to people for their betterment (Gen. 2:18).

The Exception

So what did Jesus mean by the exception clause as it relates to marriage?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:32:

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery (through remarriage): and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

Jesus repeats this same exception in Matthew 19:9: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

It's clear that the "exception clause" is NOT condoning a legitimate divorce and remarriage in God's eyes. This is the primary thesis of this study. Furthermore, we can be sure that the exception clause does NOT refer to adultery and therefore does not present any grounds for divorce and remarriage on this basis. There are several reasons for coming to this conclusion.

First, under the Mosaic Law adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). Therefore, there would be no need for divorce. James Montgomery Boice said this about the exception that Jesus gave: "It cannot refer to adultery because adultery was punishable by death, and in that case there would be no need for a divorce." Boice is correct in this observation. Jesus did not come to undo the Mosaic Law during His earthly ministry (Matt 5:17). Therefore, adultery would still require stoning by death during the earthly ministry of Jesus even though it was not readily practiced by the Jews.

Some have tried to teach that Jesus was actually changing the meaning or understanding of the Mosaic Law at this point. Instead of one experiencing physical death for adultery the marriage itself experiences death by divorce. The death penalty for adultery is somehow magically transferred to the marriage relationship. Instead of the individual experiencing death, the marriage bond dies. Instead of physical death of the adulterer, the Mosaic Law is overturned at this point, and there is now only a death related to the marriage relationship.

Of course, there is absolutely no exegetical evidence for this claim and Jesus would not change the Mosaic Law. Quite the opposite, He always defended the law to the jot and tittle (Matt. 5:18). We will see this when analyzing the true meaning of the exception clause.

Although divorce was not the original Genesis design, some others have suggested that Jesus was now advocating divorce in the case of adultery or sexual immorality, since man now lives in a fallen world of sin. However, Jesus is not approving of the Jewish practice and culture that developed in relation to divorce and remarriage. He is actually denouncing the reckless abandonment from the original marriage design by going back to the permanence of marriage (Gen. 2:24).

Others have taught that Jesus is looking back to the “uncleanness” (“nakedness of a thing” or “a naked matter”) mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1 and is interpreting the unclean act committed by a wife as adultery, which then becomes a ground for divorce. Again, this is an impossible interpretation since adultery was punishable by death under the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, Jesus did not attempt to define the unclean thing in Deuteronomy but take the people back to the original Genesis arrangement.

Whatever the uncleanness was (perhaps the open exposure of her sexual organs or some other kind of deviant sexual misconduct that would demean her dignity and womanhood) we can be sure that it was not adultery. Furthermore, we must remember that Deuteronomy 24 was a regulation of divorce – not God’s approval of divorce. Moses was *legislating* divorce - not *legalizing* it. He was dealing with an existing legal custom already in place and was not commenting on the morality or correctness of these actions. Divorce and remarriage was never looked upon with favor by God and there was a social and moral stigma attached to it (Lev. 21:7; Deut. 24:4).

Moses did not institute the practice of divorce; it already existed. In fact, he never **COMMANDED** the people to issue a divorce document. Divorce is neither condoned or commanded in this passage. The bill of divorcement was only a custom being regulated but divorce was never commanded by Moses.

The Deuteronomy 24 passage provides cases on how to deal with divorce and remarriage in light of the people’s hardness of hearts toward God’s Genesis design. Jesus clearly taught that Moses was not teaching adultery, as the ground for divorce, when looking back to this specific passage (Deut. 24), since He reminded the people that God’s original and ongoing purpose was for the permanency of marriage.

Many have wondered why God did not outlaw divorce and remarriage in the Mosaic Law and terminate all the future fussing over this issue. The answer is found in the words of Jesus. Jesus taught that Moses only permitted divorce because of the hardness of people’s hearts (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:7-8). Jesus wants evangelical Christians to focus on God’s original plan (permanency of marriage) and not on a

concession made because of hard and sinful hearts. The general prohibition against divorce would not be obeyed by the Jewish people and therefore God lays out some guidelines to stop its ramped acceleration among the people.

Remember there is a difference what is *recorded* in the Old Testament Mosaic Law regarding Moses' bill of divorcement and what God actually *requires* (permanence in marriage). Although Christ did not blame Moses for allowing a bill of divorce, he replaced Jewish law with God's ideal state as announced before the fall of man (Matt. 19:4-6). J. Carl Laney correctly observes: "Divorce and remarriage was recognized by the people of Israel, but it did not have the approval of the God of Israel."

In summary, divorce was practiced but not prescribed by God (Mal. 2:16), it was regulated but not condoned by God (Matt. 5:31-32; Deut. 24:1-4; Ezra 10:1-4), and it was illustrated (Jer. 3:8) but not promoted by God. None of these regulatory texts on divorce are given to govern the life of the church today and should never be practiced as any "grounds for divorce" in assembly life today.

Second, it should be observed that the term "fornication" (porneia) that Jesus used in the Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 passages was not the normal word for "adultery" (moicheuo). Therefore, it's improper to read adultery into the exception clause. In fact, it would be rather strange for Jesus to use two different words (fornication and adultery) as referencing the same identical thing in the same verse.

If Matthew really meant that porneia was adultery, he would have used the correct term as he does further on in these same verses (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and also in Matthew 15:19 where "adulteries" and "fornications" are separated. Furthermore, we discover in Matthew 5:27 that adultery includes not just the physical act, but the act of the mind as well. This would mean that one had grounds for divorce even if a spouse thought about having an affair!

Third, whenever this term "fornication" (porneia) is used in a generic way, it does not specifically refer to adultery but different kinds of sexual sins lumped together (1 Cor. 6:13; 2 Cor. 12:21). In fact, it's interesting that Matthew seems to make a distinction between the two words, fornication and adultery in his writing (Matt.

5:32; 15:19), as do other lists in Scripture (Gal. 5:19; Mat. 15:19; Mark 7:22; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb.13:4). Lexical and Biblical evidence does not require the meaning of adultery in the divorce texts unless it can be proven (which it cannot) that the word always means adultery. Everything points to the exception clause as being something *uncommon*, certainly nothing as common as adultery.

Fourth, it's also interesting that the intended Roman readers of Mark's Gospel (Mark 10:11-12) and the Greek-Gentiles readers of Luke's Gospel (Luke 16:18) would not have known of this exception clause that was recorded only in Matthew's Gospel which was primarily for Jewish readers. Therefore, Jesus makes a clear affirmation of the permanency of marriage in all the Gospel records, including Matthew's record.

Mark's and Luke's record does not contain the exception clause because they did not possess the Mosaic Law and would not understand the Jewish exception regarding near kin marriages (the position espoused in this study on the exception clause). Furthermore, the arguments of the two Jewish schools of thought (Hillel-Shammai) would not be familiar to a Gentile audience and these are the teachings that the Pharisees were imposing upon Jesus in this interrogation on divorce (Matt. 19:3).

One thing is certain; the Jewish exception clause which relates to near kin marriages (marriages to relatives) in Matthew's record does not *overturn* Mark's and Luke's record which contain no argument or ground for a legitimate divorce. In fact, Jesus also argues for the permanency of marriage in the Matthew record when He takes the Jewish people back to the beginning and the one-wife arrangement for life.

Matthew 19:5

"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"

Many evangelicals today dismiss the main teaching of Jesus, even in Matthew's record to the Jews, which teaches the permanency of the marriage relationship (no divorce). Surely Jesus would not undo this binding covenant of marriage created in Genesis with a Jewish exception clause in Matthew's Gospel record, which no

others might read, and invalidate His clear claims recorded in both Mark and Luke. No Jewish exception clause would supersede or set aside God's universal arrangement for marriage (Gen. 2:24).

We must learn to interpret the more obscure phrase ("except for porneia") in light of the clear statement in Matthew 19:6 which argues for the permanency of the marriage union. Whatever the exception in Matthew 19:9 refers to, we can be sure that Jesus will be consistent with Himself. Therefore, the exception clause will not contradict His clear command and creative purpose for marriage: "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

So what is the meaning of the word "fornication" in Matthew's account if it cannot exegetically be referencing adultery and overturning God's original design for the permanence of marriage? There are several options or possibilities.

Unlawful Marriage with Gentile Idolaters

Some have suggested that an unlawful marriage of a Jew with a Gentile pagan individual is a viable option regarding the meaning of the "exception clause." The days of Ezra are in the mind of those who espouse this view. Ezra commanded certain Jews to divorce their pagan Gentile wives in order to keep the Jewish line pure and free from idolatry (Ezra 9-10). In light of this, the claim is made that Jesus was teaching that the marriage contract could be annulled when a Jewish man married a Gentile woman who was pagan and idolatrous in her ways.

This view is tied to the distinct Jewishness of Matthew's gospel account and the exception clause and "fornication." However, the weakness of this view is that what took place in the restoration community under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah was a very unique occurrence. The separation from the pagan Gentiles was done in order to insure the continued existence of the nation of Israel and keep the promise of the Redeemer alive (Gen. 3:15). Since Christ was now in the presence of the people, as the promised Messiah, it would seem strange for Him to teach this among the people as a viable option for divorce. Also, the "uncleanness" in a woman, which is mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1 (the backdrop to Jesus'

encounter with the Pharisees) would have to mean idolatry. In this case, the term would take on a figurative meaning of shamefulness instead of its literal meaning which means “nudity.” Of course, one would think a husband would have known whether or not she was a Gentile idolater before he married her.

There is a question of whether or not these marriages during the days of Ezra were actually sanctified in the sight of God. They may not have been legitimate marriages based upon the use of a different word (“put away” = “yasta - Ezra 10:3), which is not the normal or customary word for divorce. Those who embrace the view that “fornication” in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 means “marriages with pagan idolaters” will also conclude that the word “fornication” was used in either a special sense (sexual relations in a marriage with pagan idolaters) or it implies there was no genuine marriage based upon the more specific understanding of the word “fornication” (sex outside the marriage bond). Of course, we must certainly conclude that this example of divorce in Ezra’s day is not designed to provide us with a Biblical pattern for divorce and remarriage. We must look at the clear Biblical teachings to come to a convincing conclusion on this matter.

Something else needs to be considered about the view of a Jew marrying a Gentile person. In the later revelation of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul taught Jesus’ view on divorce and remarriage (1 Cor. 7:39) and commanded the believing partner to not send away their unbelieving partner (1 Cor. 7:10, 12-13). This means that what happened long ago in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah had no bearing on the united teachings of Jesus and Paul. Scripture is its own best interpreter. For these reasons, the pagan marriage view in my opinion is simply not an accurate explanation of the exception clause. However, I believe a much better case could be made for this view than the next view.

Unfaithfulness During the Betrothal

Some suggest that the exception clause (“except it be for fornication”) refers to the betrothal stage of marriage. This is a much more popular view and non-adultery understanding of the exception clause. Jewish contractual marriages during the first century began at the time we today would call the engagement” or betrothal (Ex. 22:16; Deut. 20:7). It was a period that lasted for one year and then the marriage

would be consummated through an official ceremony and sexual union. Betrothal was by a legal contract and it was binding and considered to be an actual marriage in God's eyes (Deut. 20:7; 24:5). If a woman was found to be pregnant during the time of the engagement (betrothal), three questions would be asked: (1) Was it the impatient fiancé? (2) Was it another man after the engagement? (3) Was it another man before the engagement?

If it was the fiancé the marriage would begin immediately. If it were another man *after* the engagement or betrothal, the woman would be guilty of adultery and executed (Deut. 22:23, 24). If it were with another man *before* the actual engagement, she would be guilty of fornication (premarital sex) and Biblical law also mandated that she be executed for this sexual, promiscuous behavior (Deut. 22:13-21).

Of course, the Jews did not always follow the letter of the law, especially in Jesus' day. Therefore, if the betrothed was found unfaithful during the waiting period, a customary lawsuit could be filed and the partner officially divorced instead of experiencing the harsh treatment of the Mosaic Law.

According to the betrothal view, divorce could be permitted during the engagement period but once the marriage was consummated with physical relations, then only death could break the union. As a result, the exception clause ("except it be for fornication") would be limited to the Jewish context and culture of betrothal and have no bearing on modern-day marriage.

Matthew is the only Gospel that provided the real understanding behind the engagement of Joseph and Mary. Matthew 1:18 tells us that while the two were betrothed or engaged, Mary "was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:18). Joseph's initial reaction was to divorce her privately or quietly since he assumed she was unfaithful at one point during the betrothal period.

Joseph thought of the option of divorce since this was the cultural practice of the Jewish people. Had the divorce gone through, Joseph's action would have indicated to the community that Mary had engaged in sex prior to or during the betrothal period. As such, she would have been guilty of actual "fornication" (porneia) which

in this case would refer to having sex prior to a sexually consummated marriage union. It is only the intervention of the heavenly messenger that stopped Joseph from making a perfectly legal decision to put away his wife according to Jewish culture.

Is it possible that this is what Jesus was referencing when speaking of “fornication” (porneia)? Was Jesus speaking of the betrothal waiting period and sexual relations occurring prior to the physical consummation of the marriage? Many of my colleagues in ministry accept this view who find the adultery view unacceptable from a lexical and Biblical standpoint. However, I can’t personally except this betrothal view for several reasons.

First, one of the key problems with the betrothal view and the most obvious objection to this idea is that the Pharisees were not discussing betrothal in marriage. The very passages which Jesus and the Pharisees referred to (Gen. 2:24; Deut. 24:1-4) speak of marriage relationships in which sexual fulfillment had already occurred - not the betrothal period.

Second, Jesus evidently spoke of a sexually consummated marriage in Matthew 19:5-6 (a one-flesh union), but during the betrothal the marriage was not yet consummated from a physical standpoint although it was a legitimate marriage by contract (Ex. 22:16; Deut. 20:7).

Third, the betrothed wife was stoned for adultery (not fornication) if she committed the act *after* the contractual agreement (Deut. 22:23, 24). Since Jesus was speaking about the one-flesh physical union in Matthew 19, the sin of “fornication” (premarital sex before a marriage covenant) was not in His thinking. It would seem that the betrothal view promotes the dissolving of a legal marriage in God’s eyes even though sexual relations was not yet involved. Of course, those who hold the betrothal view see this as a unique situation which is not applicable to present day marriages.

Fourth, betrothal was also practiced by the Greeks and Romans, as well as the Jews. Therefore, Mark and Luke would have included the exception clause for their Gentile audiences, if this was the true understanding of the phrase “except it be for

fornication.” It’s clear that Matthew’s record does not overturn Mark’s and Luke’s record on divorce which leaves out the exception clause and makes a clear statement that divorce and remarriage is not God’s design for marriage.

In light of the above observations, a more satisfactory answer and explanation is possible regarding the exception clause (“except it be for fornication”).

Ungodly Near Kin Marriages

It’s more likely that the Jewish setting of Matthew’s gospel account uses the term “fornication” (porneia) in a *specialized sense* as in other instances (1 Cor. 5:1; Acts 15:20, 29), which only the Jews would fully understand. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience that would be very familiar with what this word “fornication” (porneia) was referencing. Historically and during Jesus’ day this referred to incest among relatives, committing sexual immorality with near kin, or relatives (Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:21). It was marriage within prohibited family relationships.

In the Mosaic legislation sexual relations with close relatives were forbidden (Lev 18:6-18; Deut. 22:30; 27:20, 22-23). These prohibitions were related not only to literal blood lines but also to blood relationships created through marriage (a brother's or uncle's wife).

It would seem that a similar type of “one flesh” relationship and unity (a mystical, spiritual and physical tie) is created with one another and is already experienced within the bonds of kinship or family. The birth of children illustrates this “one flesh” union in that the children partake of the flesh of both the father and mother, which are together inseparable. This is a very beautiful illustration. Marriage between two partners establishes kinship relationships with a new family.

We can no more break the kinship marriage relationship than we can blood-family relationships. In some sense there is a spiritual bond that occurs between a family because of this one flesh union. Therefore, to marry somebody within a family relationship would not constitute a real marriage, since there was a “one flesh” tie or connection already existing within the family unit.

The Bible teaches that when a man leaves his father and mother he is leaving the previous family bond in order to form a new tie and “one flesh” union outside the original family or near kin unit (Gen. 2:24). However, when one remains within the bounds of the same family tie, through legal marriage, this could never *recreate* a new family tie and constitute a legitimate marriage union, since the flesh-bond has been previously created within the family line.

Apparently in the “exception clause” Jesus was making the provision to dissolve these near kin Jewish marriages, since it could not create a newly formed one-flesh union. This is because a similar spiritual, mystical and physical union was already established within the present family unit and relationship. Therefore, Jesus gave the Jews the right to legally divorce a person who was a near kin or relative, since under Jewish Law (and the moral law of God!) these relationships were forbidden as unclean, and since they were not considered a new one-flesh marriage relationship established in God’s eyes.

Leviticus 18:6 commands: “None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover *their* nakedness: I *am* the LORD.” This “near kin” marriages which created incest among relatives is a very probable interpretation of the exception clause that Jesus gave since adultery cannot be what Jesus was referencing. The exception clause apparently related to these unlawful unions within Jewish family lines and therefore gives no license to justify divorce for sexual immorality (adultery or sexual unfaithfulness in a legitimate marriage).

There are several reasons we should adopt this view. First, the setting seems to lend itself to the interpretation of near kin marriages. Jesus was being interrogated by the Pharisees from Perea (Matt. 19:1-3) which was under the jurisdiction of Herod. You will remember that Herod married his niece or sister-in-law (Matt. 14:3-4) and John the Baptist was killed for speaking out against the divorce and incestuous relationship several years earlier (Matt. 14:1-8). The Pharisees wanted the same fate for Jesus! In other words, the Pharisees wanted Jesus to speak out against Herod for divorcing his wife and entering into this illegal and forbidden near-kin relationship under the Mosaic Law. They hoped to end the earthly ministry of Jesus just like John the Baptist’s ministry came to an abrupt end.

Tom Constable remarked: “Here the Pharisees asked Him what divorces were legitimate. Perhaps they hoped Jesus would oppose Herod as John had done and would suffer a similar fate. The Machaerus fortress where Herod Antipas had imprisoned and beheaded John was nearby, east of the north part of the Dead Sea. Undoubtedly the Pharisees hoped Jesus would say something that they could use against Him.”

Second, in Jewish thinking, the phrase “except it be for fornication” would have been understood as being connected to the Levitical laws about near kin marriages (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:21). The Jewish audience would be very familiar about these Mosaic regulations.

Third, marriage within the prohibited family relationships of Leviticus was apparently a live issue that was even looked down upon by the later church (1 Cor. 5:1). The continuance of these practices by Gentiles would be immoral and have a serious offense to the Jews (Acts 15:29). There would be no question in the Jewish mind regarding these illegal marriages and the illicit sexual intercourse being condemned by Jesus.

Fourth, incestuous marriages were rather popular among the political leaders of Palestine in the first century. The Herod of Jesus’ day married his niece (Herodias) which was the former wife of his half-brother (Matt. 14:3-4). Josephus records how Archelaus, who ruled Judea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6, also entered into an incestuous relationship when marrying the former wife (Glaphyra) of his brother. The later Herod Agrippa 11 (A.D 50-100) was also involved in an incestuous relationship with his sister Berniece. The point is this. Marriages to near kin or relatives was a timely and hot issue among Jews and Jewish leaders.

It’s also very clear that the Pharisees were “tempting him” (Matthew 19:3) to speak out against Herod’s divorce and also see if Jesus would stand up for what the Mosaic Law taught about near kin marriages (the sinful remarriage of Herod). They were obviously trying to put Jesus to the test and see if He would defend the Old Testament Scriptures about near kin marriages (fornication - porneia) and use these Scriptures to speak out against Herod’s illegal incestuous marriage with his niece, the former wife of his brother Philip. Again, their plan was to get Jesus killed. Of

course, this would ultimately cause Jesus to bypass the cross and God's redemptive plan.

Fifth, it's interesting that in 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul uses the word "porneia" in connection with an incestuous marriage relationship that a man had with his mother-in-law. This is a clear violation of Leviticus 18 which is God's unchanging moral law.

Sixth, James also used the word "porneia" when speaking at the Jerusalem council and was referring to the incestuous marriage situation under Old Testament Law (Acts 15:20, 29). It was commanded that the Gentiles, who lived without the Law, should refuse to practice any kind of marriages with near kin relatives, since this was God's moral law. They were to steer away from the practice of marrying distant relatives, which would involve the sexual act of "fornication" (incest) due to intermarriage within family ties.

These directives given to Gentiles believers were not "gray areas" of liberty but moral and pagan issues that the newly converted Gentile believers must correct in their lives. Pagans sacrificed meat to idols (1 Cor. 10:20), strangled animals in a cruel manner, and then ate the animal meat raw and drank the animal's blood. They also committed fornication among near kin relatives. All of these were heathen and immoral practices condemned by God's unchanging moral code.

This means that "fornication" (porneia) was an actual sin that must be avoided and not be tolerated by either party (Jew or Gentile). In any event, the parallels between things sacrificed to idols (Lev. 17:8-9), things strangled (Lev. 17:13-14), blood (Lev. 17:10-12), and porneia (fornication committed within near kin marriages – Lev. 18:6-18) all fit into the same Old Testament Jewish setting. So, it's very clear that Acts 15:20 and 29 is another instance where "fornication" is used as a reference to illegal near kin marriages and the sexual incest that occurs between relatives. The lexical evidence that "fornication" speaks of unique incestuous relations with family members is strong and convincing.

Strong's Concordance gives this information: "porneia (por-ni'-ah); from NT:4203; harlotry (including adultery and **incest**); figuratively, idolatry."

Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament reads:

“In 1 Cor. 5 Paul addresses what he considers a terrible case of sexual immorality: A man had sexual relations with his father's wife, i.e., with his stepmother. Exegetes speak of "wild marriage with the escaped or divorced wife of the still-living father" (H. Lietzmann, 1 Cor [HNT, 51969] or of illegitimate concubines, whether the father has died or the wife was divorced (J. Weiss, 1 Cor [KEK, 91977]. Paul himself offers no further specifics. Hence *porneia* here does not mean "adultery," but rather (disgraceful) sexual immorality. OT law forbade sexual relations with one's stepmother (Lev 18:8; Deut. 27:20 put it under a curse; both parties are condemned to death in Lev 20:11; cf. 18:29). Marriage to one's stepmother was forbidden in Roman law as well” (from Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament © 1990 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. All rights reserved.)

AMG's Complete Word Study Dictionary (Spiros Zodhiatos):

“Specifically of adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9); of incest (1 Cor. 5:1). *Porneía* may also refer to marriages within the degrees prohibited by the Law of Moses and generally to all such intercourse as prohibited in that Law (cf. Lev. 18; 20:10ff.).”

Seventh, Jewish literature is in support of the incestuous marriage view. Joseph Fitzmeyer appeals to the Qumran scrolls in presenting evidence that there is first-century Palestinian support for this interpretation of *porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 (“The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some Palestinian Evidence,” *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, pp. 213-21). This interpretation also has literary support in the later writings of Judaism. The scholar F.F. Bruce admittedly points out: “But fornication could bear a more technical sense of marital union within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity or affinity laid down by the Hebrew ‘law of holiness’ (Leviticus 18:6-18).”

In summary, Jesus described near kin marriages (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and in this case there was no marriage that ever existed. Therefore, the word “fornication” in the exception clause is appropriate for a sin between two people who were not married in God's eyes. Since this was true, Jesus was teaching that the legal contract could be dissolved without violating a true union between a man and woman. In summary, the phrase “saving for the cause fornication” and “except it be for

fornication” was referring to a unique Jewish setting of near kin relatives who married but whose marriage was condemned by God.

Herod, John the Baptist, and Jesus

For the sake of grasping the entire issue that was taking place during Jesus’ day and putting the “exception clause” in the proper context and flow of the historical record, let’s reiterate and reconfirm what we have learned. Herod divorced his wife, married his niece, the former wife of his brother Philip (Matt. 14:3-4), and what did John the Baptist say in Matthew 14:4, “It is not lawful for thee to have her.” What Jewish Law did Herod violate?

Leviticus 18:6

“None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 20:21

“And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.”

John the Baptist condemned Herod Antipas for not only divorcing his wife but also for marrying another woman (his sister-in-law) in violation of Leviticus, 18:16 and 20:21. Jesus was being tempted and interrogated by the Pharisees in Perea (Matt. 19:1-3; Mark 10:1) which was the territory under the jurisdiction of Herod. The Pharisees were obviously trying to put Jesus to the test and see if He would defend the Old Testament Scriptures about near kin marriages (porneia) and use these Scriptures to speak out against Herod’s illegal incestuous marriage with his niece, the former wife of his brother Philip 1 (Matt. 14:3-4).

Apparently these Jewish religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus and get Him to say something against the marriage of Herod, so that He might get into trouble with this leader and the local authorities. Maybe Jesus would meet the same fate as John the Baptist. John had lost his head over this issue of speaking out against the near kin marriage of Herod with his niece (Matt. 14:1-8).

What would Jesus do? Instead of outwardly condemning this marriage like John did (“It is not lawful”), Jesus tactfully avoided a full-blown confrontation with Herod, since it was not in God’s timing for Jesus to die, and since He had to die on the cross for our redemption. So what did Jesus do? He simply stated that all divorce and remarriage is wrong except in the case of fornication (porneia) - the unlawful marriage or near kin relationships. This was one way to tactfully condemn Herod for his incestuous and unlawful relationship, under Jewish Law, without causing a confrontation with Him directly and a premature ending of His earthly ministry.

Jesus did not back down from telling the truth. He called Herod a fox during His earthly ministry (Luke 13:32) and the fox had sinned by marrying his sister-in-law. This was an immoral act that was expressly forbidden under Jewish Law. It was “fornication” (porneia) or the incestuous sexual immorality that occurs between relatives. It’s very clear that Jesus used the situation at hand to answer the Pharisees and they fully comprehended the significance of Jesus’ words regarding the term fornication (incest between relatives).

We have therefore seen that the much-disputed word “porneia” (fornication) among evangelical circles today should not be interpreted as adultery but as incest. This fits the Jewish setting of Matthew’s gospel, the flow of the context, the Pharisees intent to trap Jesus, and Jesus’ near-kin “fornication” answer by referencing God’s moral code. The lexical evidence, contextual evidence, and historical evidence all point to the near kin understanding of the word “fornication” in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

The Two Schools on Marriage

The Hillel-Shammai debate (two schools of Jewish thought during the 1st century) were also in the minds of the Pharisees when they asked the Lord if a Jew could divorce his wife for any cause (Matt 19:3). The school of Hillel (the liberal teaching) interpreted the passage of Deuteronomy 24:1 much more lenient by reading the passage as "uncleanness, or anything else" (even burning a meal!).

Naturally, this interpretation like the modern evangelical view today was more popular than the stricter school of Shammai (conservative teaching), which allowed

divorce only for some immodesty, shamelessness, lewdness, and perhaps adultery. A third school was the Essene view which forbid divorce but also discouraged marriage. However, the two major schools of thought were in the Pharisees minds.

Let's reiterate something one more time. By asking Jesus to take sides on this question ("What is the meaning of Deut. 24:1?), the Pharisees were "tempting him" (Matt. 19:3) to also speak out against Herod's *divorce* and remarriage, as John the Baptist did, and get Jesus into trouble with the governor of Galilee. The temptation was to ignore the Jewish law of "near kin" marriages out of fear of the repercussions that would come from King Herod. In ignoring this Jewish law, Jesus would violate the Law of Moses and would therefore destroy His credentials as the Messiah.

Not only was incest a lively debate during Jesus's day, the entire subject of divorce and remarriage was also a very controversial issue within the Jewish nation. It's clear that the Pharisees were also trying to trap Jesus with the difficult question, "What are the grounds for divorce and remarriage?" It was certainly a trap for whatever answer Jesus gave some of the Jewish people would be infuriated and turn away from Him. Worse yet, Jesus may lose His head like John the Baptist did!

The Pharisees hoped to lessen Christ's popularity with some of the people depending on which school of thought they followed. However, the Lord's response did not deal with the particulars of Deuteronomy 24, the meaning of "uncleanness," or any of the Jewish schools of thought, but rather with God's original intention for the permanency of marriage ("in the beginning it was not so" - Matt. 19:8). In short, Jesus concludes that both schools of thought were wrong! Marriage is for life.

Jesus bypasses the argument by saying that the Pharisees are discussing the wrong part of Moses' writings. Rather than asking what is permitted, they should ask what God wanted in the first place. Instead of worrying about the minimum standard of godliness, the Pharisees should strive for the maximum, with a focus on God's original purpose rather than legal loopholes.

Jesus did not side with the Pharisees, rabbis, or any of the schools of thought in His day which ignored the Mosaic Law penalty for adultery and followed the culturally relevant practice of divorce for many causes. Instead, Jesus went back to the

beginning and declared the permanency of marriage (Matt. 19:8). What Jesus says (“But I say unto you” - Matt. 5:32) goes beyond what Hillel, Shammai, the Talmud, and Mishnah say about divorce. What “I say” (Jesus says!) is a higher authority than your personal view on divorce or what some divorce manual says about this subject. Jesus says marriage is for life and remarriage constitutes the act of adultery.

The Pharisees were preoccupied and obsessed with establishing grounds for divorce but Jesus was concerned about the indissolubility of marriage. Therefore, we see how Jesus masterfully sidestepped their plot to get Him in trouble with Herod and with those who would disagree with Him on the subject of divorce. Jesus spoke of the permanency of marriage and dodged a bullet. Jesus taught there was no ground for divorce for any genuine marriage relationship (what God considers a marriage) but there was ground for a legal divorce for an illegitimate near kin marriage which were marriages forbidden under God’s moral code.

Illegitimate Marriages

We have seen in this study that the exception clause is NOT an exception to what Jesus clearly taught about the permanence of marriage, divorce, and adultery in the act of remarriage (Matthew 19:8). What Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is not an exception to dissolving a genuine marriage (a new one-flesh union created by God) but dissolving only a *legal* contract of marriage which had no binding value, since near-kin relatives were not considered a legitimate marriage under the Mosaic Law and in God’s eyes. Instead, they were only seen to be incest and uncleanness as recorded in the Levitical code of holiness (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:21).

The whole point of Matthew 19:6 is this: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” But since God has NOT put a marriage together between near kin relatives and created another “one flesh” union there is no severing of a legitimate marriage or “one flesh” relationship in God’s eyes. The exception then becomes a unique exception of severing a marriage from a legal standpoint, which God never considered to be a newly established one-flesh union. *God puts all marriages together except when two people commit incest.* In this case, an exception can be made, where the two sever their marriage from a *legal* standpoint and no longer live together in incest.

We must simply understand that God does not unite these types of people (near kin) in marriage. Another similar case would be homosexual marriages between two parties of the same sex. God does not recognize certain marriages as creating new one-flesh unions. The best thing that one could do with these illegitimate marriages is to legally dissolve them with a bill of divorcement.

Actually, the same was likely true in Ezra's day (Ezra 10:1-4). In Ezra's eyes and way of understanding the breaking up of the marriages in his time was not a question of ending legitimate marriages but of nullifying those which were contrary to the Mosaic Law - marrying Gentile pagan wives (Deut. 7:3).

In Ezra's day he returned to Jerusalem and commanded separation from their wives (Ezra 10:3). The Jews had married foreign women (Ezra 9:1-2). The problem was not that the marriages were with foreigners (Deut. 21:10-14 and consisted of international marriages, but that the wives were pagan (Ezra 9:14). The very existence of Jews, as a distinct people who worshipped God, and the promised entrance of the coming seed (Gen. 3:15) into the world was being threatened by these pagan marriages.

When Ezra called the men to separate from their wives (Ezra 10:3-4) he was obviously doing so on the basis of God's law regarding marriage with heathen people (Deut. 10:3). He was indicating that separation was God's will. But in Ezra 10:3, when Ezra said, "let us make a covenant with our God to put away ("yatsa" = exit, depart) all the wives" he did not use the more common Hebrew word for divorce ("shalach" = "send away" as in Malachi 2:16).

There are three possible explanations for the unusual word: 1) Perhaps the marriages were not legitimate in God's eyes and therefore divorce was not the right word to use. If so, the men were free to marry Jewish women. 2) The word for separate or depart may be synonymous with divorce and a right of remarriage is assumed if the marriages were not legitimate in God's eyes. 3) Or perhaps the men were to separate only, without any permission to remarry (Carl Laney). We do not know which situation is correct but we must turn to other passages for a clearer teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce.

Let's one again restate our findings in a simple fashion. God puts all marriages together (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9), *except* when two people commit incest (marriage among near kin or relatives). In this unique case, *a marriage was never established in God's eyes and an exception could be made*, where the two could sever their marriage from a *legal* standpoint and no longer live together in incest.

According to Christ's teaching, He did not consider the near kin marriages (marriages between relatives) as legitimate unions, much like the lesbian or gay marriages of today, which according to God's moral code are never sanctified by Him. We have discovered that the "near kin" background of the divorce clause ("except it be for fornication" - Matt. 5:32; 19:9) is not some kind of obscure view; it's the most probable understanding of this passage.

Remember that sometimes a different view may be better than your own view when all the facts of Scripture are carefully and fairly considered. Scholarly men such as Charles Ryrie and Carl Laney, among others, have espoused the "near kin" view of the word "fornication" (porneia) when looking honestly at these texts and all the teaching that God has given us on the subject of marriage. There are many scholarly and discerning Bible teachers who espouse the permanency of marriage and find no loopholes anywhere in Jesus' or Paul's writings for divorce and remarriage.

God Hates Divorce

Malachi 2:16

"For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

We must remember that God still hates divorce. This definitely is a universal prohibition based upon the original purpose for marriage (Gen. 2:24). God is sending a very clear message in both the Old and New Testament regarding the permanence of marriage and His hatred of divorce. God despises divorce because it was not part of His original creative plan for marriage. If God hates something you should not do it (Amos 5:15). For this reason, no exception was made for any so-

called legitimate divorces. One simply cannot find God's acceptance of divorce in the Bible. Trying to find a legitimate ground for divorce is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

Pauline Teaching on Marriage

The epistles clearly reveal that remarriage is only permissible after the death of the spouse. There is no exception clause for adultery or sexual unfaithfulness as becoming the Scriptural ground for divorce and remarriage.

Romans 7:2-3

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress (because the previous one-flesh union still exists in God's eyes): but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law (the established law of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24); so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”

This is exactly what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. When a divorced person remarries he or she commits adultery since the previous one-flesh union still exists with the previous living partner. The union has not been terminated. This is why a woman is “defiled” even when she remarries (Deut. 24:4; Jer. 3:1). It's because she has physically cohabited with another man. This is consistent with what Jesus taught (Mark 10:11-12). Divorce is wrong because it attempts to separate what God has joined together (Mark 10:9). However, remarriage, which normally occurs after divorce, compounds the sin. This is because adultery takes place in the act of remarriage.

1 Corinthians 7:39

“The wife is bound by the law (the law of marriage as outlined in Genesis 2:24) as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

You will notice that Paul gives no exceptions for divorce and no exceptions for remarriage unless the partner dies. God has not changed His mind on the matter of divorce in spite of the so-called grounds for divorce being promoted within Christian circles and churches today. Divorce is always wrong and death is the only cause for remarriage. Remember that Jesus took the religious people back to the beginning so they would remember God's original and unalterable design for marriage (Gen. 2:24).

According to Pauline theology, even if immorality occurs, forgiveness and reconciliation are always to be the goals for those within a troubled marriage (1 Cor. 7:16) - not divorce. Furthermore, even if a legal divorce should occur, the "one flesh" relationship cannot be severed, and that is why remarriage is not allowed (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

Death of a partner alone breaks all that is involved in the "one flesh" relationship (1 Cor. 7:39). Paul included no exception for divorce when he summarized the Lord's teaching on marriage and he only allowed for remarriage after the death of one partner.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 reveals this:

“And unto the married I command, *yet not I, but the Lord*, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband (either by separating from him or divorcing him as a Gentile - Mark 10:11): But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.”

Once again, no exceptions! The main point of Paul's marriage counsel in the entire passage of 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 is clear: maintain the marriage. If separation occurs, which is initiated by one partner, then only two options remain: remain unmarried or be reconciled to the original partner. But if an unbeliever departs one should not remain in “bondage” (1 Cor. 7:15).

Some claim that this statement is the “Pauline exception clause” and teach that the innocent party is free to divorce and remarry. However, the freedom of a deserted believer is not the freedom to remarry. The claim is also made that 1 Corinthians 7:15 is an exception to verse 39. However, this simply cannot be the case. We must

remember that God is not sending us mixed messages. He does not command the permanency of marriage in verse 39 after allowing for divorce in verse 15. God is consistent with Himself. The interpretation that 1 Corinthians 7:15 allows for divorce and remarriage is in error.

Paul is not teaching that the believer is no longer bound to their marriage, that they can stop the process of reconciliation, and are now free to remarry. This is because verses 14, 16, and 39 make it very clear that possibility for divorce and remarriage is NOT the subject of Paul's teaching. Paul does not introduce the subject of remarriage until verse 39 and it is only for the death of the spouse.

Paul is teaching that the believer is not in "bondage" (vs. 15) to keep the marriage together by compromising his own convictions and following the sinful patterns of the unbelieving spouse. In other words, a person does not have to become a slave to the sinful actions and lifestyle of the unbeliever in order to maintain the marriage at any cost. This is how the Bible uses the word bondage (Heb. 2:15; 2 Pet. 2:19).

Yes, God has called us to strive for "peace" (1 Cor. 7:15), which means we should strive for peaceful relations in a mixed marriage (1 Cor. 7:15), but a line must be drawn in the sand. It's not "peace" at any price (Acts 5:29). We must live a sanctified life and not compromise our own holy living in order to maintain a marriage relationship.

God has granted a believer freedom from sin's bondage and power (John 8:36) and we must no longer be corrupted by the sinful actions of others, even a marriage partner. Therefore, there are legitimate times when separation is necessary (mental, spiritual, and physical spousal abuse). However, there is never a time when divorce is approved and endorsed by God.

Paul clearly reveals that God does not want believers to *initiate* the termination of their marriages ("for if the unbeliever depart" – vs. 15). Why no divorce? It's because your partner may become saved! This is why we should always strive for reconciliation and live with the hope of a transformed marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:16 asks: “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”

Peter agrees with this Biblical premise. He did not give instruction for a believing wife to depart from her unbelieving husband but remain a testimony in the relationship and keep it going (1 Pet. 3:1-2). This is the pattern we are to follow in our marriage relationship. We should strive for reconciliation, a peaceful relationship, and the salvation or spiritual growth of our marriage partner. God has never called us to terminate a marriage relationship but strive for reconciliation and wait on the Lord to change our marriage partner.

1 Corinthians 7:14 adds: “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” In the case of mixed marriages between the saved and unsaved (the spiritual and unspiritual), the presence of a believer in the home sanctifies that home in the sense that it gives a Christian influence it would otherwise not have.

The testimony of a believer may be used by God to bring the children and unbelieving partner to Christ. This is a good reason to remain married and not divorce. The principle and importance of a spiritual influence can be applied to every marriage situation. The person with the godly example needs to strive to keep the marriage together in order to have a spiritual impact on their partner.

At this point, some would say that it’s still better to remarry after a divorce occurs then to burn in lustful craving (1 Cor. 7:9) toward the opposite sex. However, this is spoken in relation to a legitimate marriage between those who are unmarried and widows (1 Cor. 3:7). One must understand that it’s never right to remarry and commit adultery (Matt. 5:32; 18:8; Rom. 7:3).

It’s clear that Paul is not dealing with terminating the marriage relationship and giving permission to remarry in 1 Corinthians 7:13-17. He is teaching just the opposite. He is summoning God’s children to stick it out in the marriage relationships (no divorces) and seek for the reconciliation and transformation of

your partner and marriage. This is God's way and is why Paul concluded: "And so ordain I in all churches" (1 Cor. 7:17).

Another argument in this same passage suggests that if we are loosed by our marriage partner, through a legal divorce, then we are no longer obligated to remain single since Paul states, "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned" (1 Cor. 7:27). Of course, this interpretive conclusion is totally self-imposed, since Paul within this context is talking about young unmarried virgins (vs. 25 – "Now concerning virgins") and also widows and widowers (see 7:39).

The sense of 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 is this: "**Art thou bound** (*knit, tied together*) **unto a wife?** (*this speaks of the permanency of marriage*) **seek not to be loosed** (*no divorce*). **Art thou loosed from a wife?** (*in the sense of becoming a widow or widower – released from the matrimonial ties through death – vs. 39*) **seek not a wife** (*because of the unique difficulty of the times [vs. 26], the imminence of Christ's return, and less time you will be able to give to serving the Lord – vv. 32-33*). **But and if thou marry** (*as a widow or widower*), **thou hast not sinned** (*since you have the option of remarriage*); **and if a virgin marry** (*one who has never married before*), **she hath not sinned** (*since she has the option to marry for the first time*)."

Marriage and Eternal Security

Ephesians 5:25

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

The marriage analogy between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32) is an important comparison we can make with our own marriage. I find it inconceivable and horrifying that Christ would divorce His Church! He loves His Church to the end and we are safely married to Christ without the fear of being put away. This is because Christ promised eternal security to His followers (John 10:27-28).

This same example of loving and not giving up on our spouse should be followed by Christ's followers. True love never ends (1 Cor. 13:8) and therefore a marriage

should not end with divorce. This has never been God's design for marriage. "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed" (1 Cor. 7:27).

The great mystery and marriage between Christ and the Church should be reflected in Christian marriage. Among other things, this surely means showing love, forgiving as often as necessary, and being faithful to the vow of commitment each made to the other until death separates. "Till death do us part." Remember that you also made a vow to God!

In addition, you must remind yourself that doctrine (the truth about the permanence of marriage) must never be compromised by cases (situations we face in our marriages); cases should always conform to doctrine. Feelings should not override facts. Let us obey God's Word on the matter of the permanency of marriage and never adjust it for immediate solutions and our own personal preferences. We must live according to God's standards and ways (Isa. 55:8-9).

Creation, Evolution, and Marriage

From the beginning God has set the pattern, purpose, and permanence for marriage. When you try and change what God has originally established and created at the beginning (the permanency of marriage), you no longer take God as His Word. We cannot undo God's original creation of the Biblical permanency of marriage any more than we can change God's truth on the Biblical creation of the universe. Come what may, whether it's different theories on creation, evolution, or marriage, the truth which God stated in the beginning is unalterable.

Since God created marriage to be permanent (Gen. 2:24), since God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), and since Jesus commanded that it be stopped (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9), and Paul four times declared that there should be no divorce (1 Cor. 7:10-13), I would have to conclude that there are NO legitimate, Biblical grounds for divorce such as adultery, sexual unfaithfulness, desertion, innocent party, etc.

According to both Christ's and Paul's teachings, a mere legal divorce does not dissolve a marriage union, and remarriage constitutes adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:1-2). God's attitude toward divorce and remarriage

has not changed. When one divorces their spouse they elevate their own will above God's and therefore commit a great sin (1 Sam. 15:22-23). Furthermore, one must remember the consequence connected with divorce and remarriage (Prov. 6:32-33). The sin of adultery is self-destructive and brings an indelible mark and reproach on one's name (Isa. 54:6). There is a moral and social stigma attached to divorce and remarriage (Lev. 21:7; Deut. 24:4). There can also be temporal consequences of God's judgment that is related to the sin of adultery (2 Sam. 12:19; 13:1-29).

Marriage is a sacred institution and union in God's eyes. Therefore, what God designed and said at the beginning stands. Evolution will not overturn the physical creation of everything in six literal days and no exception clause will ever overturn God's creative design or purpose regarding marriage. Therefore, we must believe and practice what God has clearly taught in the beginning regarding the permanency of marriage (Matt. 19:8; Gen. 2:24).

Marriage is a padlock without a key. The "divorce myth" is being promoted today within evangelicalism but it was never condoned by Christ or Paul. If we go back to the beginning, we can maintain the hope that we will have a right ending for our marriage relationship. This means we will continually strive for reconciliation, refuse divorce, and continue to ask for God's amazing grace to change the heart and life of our marriage partner (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Marriage is still "for better or for worse." It is for life! Many people live with the regret of broken marriages, broken homes, broken families, and broken promises. Dear friend, when it comes to marriage, do it God's way; not your way. Most times divorce does not solve problems; it evades them. Divorce often creates more difficulties of its own.

Personal Responsibility

Each one of us is responsible to obey the teachings of Christ and the Bible because of love for Him (John 14:15). This includes the teaching regarding marriage. Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage is strict in contrast with the teaching within the modern evangelical church today and our society. But when it is all said and done,

God demands that we seek for reconciliation and preserve our marriage. Divorce is not an option.

Dear friend, I encourage you to maintain your own integrity if you are in the midst of a bad marriage or less than ideal situation. See your “fiery trial” (1 Pet. 4:12) as part of God’s sovereign plan, pray for your disobedient spouse and marriage, ask God to demonstrate the greatness of His redeeming power and grace by bringing about change and reconciliation in your marriage. This is the Biblical teaching and admonition.

Don’t allow a marital tragedy to make you bitter. Instead, allow it to turn you into a better Christian (Job 23:10). Again, take your marriage trial as from the Lord (1 Cor. 10:13) and use it as an opportunity to deepen your own spiritual life and walk with God (James 4:8).

I challenge you to keep trying to save your marriage. Divorce is a copout and is never the right choice. Stay committed to the sacredness and permanence of marriage. Face your marriage problems instead of running away from them and hiding behind them. Decide to love with a steadfast love that is tough and real. After all, love is a choice (Eph. 5:28, Col. 3:19; Titus 2:4).

I also would instruct you to face your marriage challenges in a mature way. Don’t surrender to the pressures of the world (1John 2:15-17), follow your emotions, throw in the towel, and end your marriage. Make a choice based upon the eternal truth of Scripture (2 Tim. 2:15). Truth must always be your foundation for every action that you take and choice that you make in life.

Choose the path of irrevocable commitment to maintain your marriage regardless of how troubling your marriage might be. In order to do this, you must “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Pet. 1:13) and think soberly about the sacredness of marriage. This will keep your mind and heart from swerving away by following the waves of human opinion and listening to bad advice. Girding up your mind will keep you following the clear path of God’s eternal truth and purpose for your marriage. When your mind is settled, your thoughts and heart is clarified, and your commitment made to maintain the marriage, you will find that you no longer lie at

the mercy of outside changing circumstance, the opinions of man, or the actions of your spouse.

Understand that there can be suffering for whatever action one chooses, whether it's remaining in a marriage or severing a marriage, which results in torn relationships and other hardships. Peter said that it is far better to suffer when doing what is right than to experience suffering for doing something wrong (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

This means Christians can stay in their present marriages and if need be "suffer according to the will of God" and "commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19). Deal with your marriage problems in a Biblical manner while remaining in the marriage, and whatever hurts you might experience, they will be less than when disobeying God by severing the marriage relationship and experiencing the long-term effects of divorce.

Dear friend, clarify your thoughts, stabilize your emotions, and learn to behave in a Biblical, consistent, and purposeful way within your marriage relationship (Psalm 119:101-105). Are you willing to make a commitment to your marriage based on the eternal principles and promises of God's Word?

Contrary to what the world says, a Christian can save a marriage, if that Christian remains committed to change in the marriage, whether it's to experience change in themselves, or help their marriage partner to change through prayer, counsel, and committed love (1 Cor. 7:16). But there can be no change or growth in your relationship if there is any doubt to your commitment to your partner. So, make your commitment.

You can be sure that God will meet your emotional needs and every true need that you have as you seek to do what is right (Phil. 4:19). His strength will be your portion (Ps. 142:5; Phi. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9). He won't let you down! Live one day at a time (Matt. 6:34). Don't try and do it on your own. The Lord is with you (Heb. 13:5). Don't develop bitterness (Eph. 4:31-32). Spend as much devotional time in prayer (Col. 4:2; Phil. 5:3) and the Word of God as you can (Joshua 1:8) and ask God to show you how you can change (James 1:5). Don't pull your marriage apart. Continue to

seek for healing and restoration. God can make brand new hearts and give fresh new starts to marriages.

Faith, hope, and love will keep you from terminating your marriage. This dynamic transforming trio of graces will keep you moving in the right direction. Faith makes the load lighter and the way brighter. Hope keeps the fire burning on the altar of our heart and love keeps us committed to both God and our marriage partner.

1 Corinthians 13:13

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.”

Questions

What was God’s original design for marriage?

What did Jesus mean by the exception clause? Prove your answer from the lexical meaning of the word fornication (how it used elsewhere in Scripture), the Jewish context, and what the Pharisees were trying to do when tempting Jesus.

What were the Pharisees trying to do when asking Jesus about the exception clause?

How did Jesus support the permanency of the marriage union?

Why shouldn't a divorced person remarry?

What did Paul say about the permanency of marriage?

What does the phrase "no longer under bondage" mean?

How should you view your trials in marriage?

Can you save your marriage alone? What steps must you take to keep your marriage intact? Support your answer with Scripture.