

THE CASTAWAYS!

A DEFENSE OF THE DIVORCED

A Thesis

BY
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2007

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THE CASTAWAYS!

A THESIS ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, & REMARRIAGE

THESIS STATEMENT: THE BIBLE DECLARES IN BOTH THE NT AND THE OT THAT GOD ALLOWS AND RECOGNIZES DIVORCE AS A DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE, AND THE DIVORCED DO NOT SIN WHEN THEY REMARRY, NOR DO THEY COMMIT ADULTERY WHEN THEY REMARRY, NOR DO THEY LIVE IN ADULTERY AFTER MARRIAGE.

INTRODUCTION

The fact is that there have been thousands of papers, books, dissertations, term papers, etc., written on the subject of divorce and remarriage, and some would say "*Then why do we need another one?*" Perhaps we don't. Obviously, I feel we do. Therefore, it will be my goal to address what I believe to be a weakness, or shortcoming, if not an outright sin, when it comes to this particular subject. What is that weakness and perhaps "outright sin?" Glad you asked!

First of all, I think there is a lack of good scholarship and Bible exegesis when it comes to the subject of divorce. It seems to me, in talking to many Baptist preachers on this subject, that their views have been formed more by tradition, peer pressure, and a general tendency of causal study than by the truth of the Word of God. It seems that most look at the Scriptures through the eyes of commentators or some denominational patriarch. Perhaps I am wrong, and no doubt most who read this will disagree with what I have to say, will be offended immediately, and put this little book down right now and dismiss me as some rather insignificant, under qualified, upstart who shouldn't even be given a hearing. It is not my intention to offend but to challenge. And yet, in order to present a valid argument, I must state my position and present what I believe to be the truth. It will be my goal to do this in love. I will not be calling anyone names nor attacking someone's position by trying to destroy their character as is common in political circles and far too common in Christian circles. In much of my research on this subject I have been confronted with the "***argumentum ad hominem***," Latin: "argument to the man", "argument against the man." Wikipedia Online. "Don't brag on me, I had to look it up too." There are many that resort to destroying the messenger and neglecting the message. This is epidemic in politics and far too common in religious circles as well as among us Baptists.

These men with whom I disagree are, as far as I know, very good men; dedicated men; men of character and godliness. I respect them as I hope they do me. But as I have discovered in my own life, I have inherited a belief system to a degree. Some things I have believed in the past were things that I examined through the eyes of others. Sometimes those others were commentaries; sometimes it was through the eyes of other preachers who strongly influenced me; and sometimes it was through such things as books and papers that advocated a certain position and sought to prove that position by examining the Scriptures, even as I am attempting to do. Lack of good scholarship does not imply stupidity or ignorance in general. Many times very bright and scholarly pastors do not have the time, nor do they see this subject as a priority, for which they should devote so much study. Sometimes very bright men concentrate on certain fields of study in which they become very proficient and tend to neglect some other fields of study in which they are not so proficient. There are more important doctrines in the Word of God and sometimes our

neglect is understandable when we consider the great volume of truth we are to teach; the lack of time for proper study of it all; and the particular need of our churches at any given time. By the way, there is no shortcoming which I have mentioned here of which I have not been guilty of at some point in my ministry. I am still learning.

The second problem I see with many pastors is that they have accepted the traditional view of divorce and remarriage simply because, in not doing so, they face pressures from their congregation and pressures from other pastors. It is sometimes a lot easier to go along with the group rather than make waves—the old principle of “not making waves” or “going with the flow.” There are many churches that accept the traditional view and if the pastor does not do the same then he will have to find a new church or he will lose a good many in his congregation. Now I know that everyone who holds the traditional views are not guilty of this. I believe most are truly convicted that their position is true and that they have “*rightly divided the word of truth.*”

Now in stating the problem, let me also state a need. There is a need that we re-examine this issue. There is a vast mission field out there of divorced and remarried folks that need to hear the Gospel but will never do so because someone alienated them before they could reach them. For their sakes, it is my hope that all will proceed with an open mind and examine every verse and passage to see if I have correctly interpreted said text. And finally, just put tradition; personal opinion aside; and look at this subject with an open mind. If I succeed in convincing one person to do that and change their attitude toward the divorced and remarried then that is enough. May God bless as you accept my challenge.

And finally let me add, I intend to support my position from the Scriptures and do the very best I can not to read into the texts something that is not there, or to make it say what I want it to say.

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CHAPTER ONE

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE PROBLEM

THERE IS FIRST THE PROBLEM OF NUMBERS—We shun those in need and those that we need.

Allow me to bore you with a few statistics—

- In 1997, there were a **total of 1,163,000 divorces** granted in the United States.
- That's **4.3 per one thousand** of the population.
- There are currently **19,400,000 divorced adults** (1998).
- There are an estimated **1,075,000 children** involved in divorce or **16.8 children per one thousand** under the age of eighteen who are involved in their parents' divorce.
- **80%** of divorced men and **75%** of women remarry whether or not they have children, and most do so within three years.
- Recent statistics suggest that **50% of all marriages will end in divorce.**

In Southern California the divorce rate is purported to be even higher, somewhere in the neighborhood of 60-75%. (Divorce Wizards, 5001 Birch St., Newport Beach, CA 92660, 949-622-1750)

Now those statistics may be a little boring but they also ought to be a little shocking as we consider the massive number of divorced and remarried people in our culture. But let's make these statistics a little more personal to those of us here in Kentucky, and I suppose the same rates are typical for most other states on a percentage basis.

- 43 percent of first marriages end in separation or divorce within 15 years.
- And in Kentucky that amounts to 22,366 per year approximately (1998 Census).
- Given this rate after 30 years you would have 1,341,960 divorced people living in the state at any given time (Generalized calculation).
- According to the U. S. Census Bureau the state population is 4,145,922. When you consider that the Census includes 30% of the population that is 18 or under and usually not considered to be adults and of marriageable age, that reduces the adult population to approximately 2,902,146 and with approximately 1,341,960 divorced people alive at any given time, then 40 plus percent of the population has been divorced and about 75% of these will remarry.

- In other words, some 35% to 40% or more of our population belongs to this neglected mission field.

THERE IS THE PROBLEM OF EXCLUSION-- Now here's another complication which is added by our traditional view as Baptists. When we consider how all these that remarry are looked upon as living in adultery by most our churches we see that this not only affects the attitudes of the remarried toward us, but also the attitudes of those in their family, and sometimes even their friends. In other words, the negative attitude toward us, as Baptists, increases dramatically. Now I realize that some Baptist churches, and many so-called Baptist churches, get around this just by never dealing with the issue. But for those of us that are of the more conservative bent who believe we should actually practice the Word of God—we have a serious problem. We believe we should teach the whole counsel of God and that includes what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. And especially if we hold to this traditional view—**We have excluded about half the population as members in our churches or have placed them on a inferior level with limited use and opportunities of ministry.**

It is true that many of these folks who hold to the traditional view truly have a burden for the souls of these that have been divorced and remarried and they want to see them saved—it is also true that they usually have a problem with them, and how to deal with them, when they are saved and seek membership in their church.

This problem is so huge that, in many cases, the very survival of our churches are in the balance. It is something that must be addressed in spite of being one of the most uncomfortable and controversial issues out there today.

Let me give you another example based on the statistics above: If it is accurate that forty percent of marriages end in divorce and that up to 25% of adults in our society are divorced and remarried or just divorced. And if my premise is true that our doctrinal position toward divorce has excluded these from our reach, by and large, then how many of us would not like to have 25% to 40% to our membership. Now our churches may not grow that much but the percentage is too much to ignore. We cannot continue to exclude a large segment of our society with an unscriptural doctrine that consigns them to a state of limbo or secondary membership.

Statistics are somewhat cold. What we often forget is at the end of those statistics are real people with broken hearts and lives who suffer, usually silently, at the hands of the ones who should be the most compassionate. Notice next...

THE PROBLEM OF EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL INJURY—We tend to victimize the victims.

Now I know a lot of good Baptist churches that are dedicated to missions. They send tons of money to home and foreign missionaries for monthly support and even more for special projects. Baptists are dedicated to mission work all over the world—But, there is one area

we have neglected, I believe, to our shame—And that is to the divorced and remarried in our culture and society.

And I can understand why we have done so, to a degree. For those that hold the traditional view, the married and divorced present a real problem when they are saved and want to be a member of a New Testament Baptist Church. What are we to do under such circumstances?

1) I know of at least one church (and I will not name that church here) that simply does not “encourage” divorced and remarried Christians to join their church. I have heard of other churches which do not allowed divorced and remarried folks to join. One pastor has admitted to me that he believes they can be saved, but since they have “*two living wives*,” they should not be members of one of the Lord’s churches. Now his view may seem a little hard to some, but in reality, this pastor is more consistent than any I know. And let me add, by giving these other pastor’s beliefs I do not intend to demean them in any way.

2) Most other churches which hold the traditional view also believe that a divorced and remarried person can be saved. And as the church above, believe these folks are “*living in adultery*” or “*have two living wives*.” Yet, these same churches allow them to be members and receive their tithes and offerings and even allow them to participate in some of the ministries of the church, but usually with restrictions. We will deal with the contradiction of this a bit later.

I remember one year when I preached about this “Lost Mission Field” in a conference in the South Irvine Baptist Church and the pain that our traditional view inflicted upon those who God had saved who were divorced and remarried. A certain brother from the audience then shared with me a story about a young man and woman who had been saved a couple of years before. They were both divorced and had just recently got married to each other. They were working, and going about to rebuild their lives, when one evening a Baptist preacher and one of his members knocked on their door. The Gospel was presented, the couple was saved, and then instructed to follow the Lord in Scriptural baptism, which they did at the earliest possible date. They were faithful to church and were wonderful and faithful members. Then one day the church lost a Sunday School teacher and needed someone to fill the vacancy. The husband of this couple felt a burden to teach, prayed about it, and thought the Lord was dealing with him to do so, and approached the pastor to volunteer for the position. The pastor, being very kind, and not seeking to shame or publicly reproach this young man, asked him to step into a Sunday School room to speak with him. Here this man was told that the church could not allow him to teach a Sunday School class because he had been divorced and since God does not recognize divorce, he now had two living wives and was not qualified for this position. Now I’m sure that most of us realize

the traumatic impact that this had upon the young man and his wife. They were demoralized and completely discouraged and within three months they were out of church altogether.

Now some would say that this church was an exception and that they themselves would never go that far. But the fact remains that those churches that hold the traditional view still see this man and woman in the same light—as two people living in adultery. One or both now having *"two living wives or husbands."* This alone is enough to demoralize and discourage divorced and remarried folks from joining any such Baptist church anywhere. Even those that persevere under these conditions and continue to serve the Lord in spite of the bias against them—they still feel the pain. They still feel as second class Christians. They often still fear involvement in the ministries of their church because of criticism from others. They still feel a little uncomfortable because they know what others often think when they look at them.

And this traditional view of divorce often victimizes even before these folks ever join a church and often even before they are ever saved.

I know of one lost young man who had just experienced divorce and who had heard the traditional view. He was under conviction for his sins and searching the Bible and reading other books to find out the truth of his situation. One day he asked a Baptist deacon, who also happened to be his uncle, *"How can a man be saved if he marries again after a divorce. Would he not then be living in adultery?"* Unfortunately, this deacon and uncle had no answer and the young man went away thinking it was impossible for him to be saved.

I will relate another instance where I witnessed to a young lady that was divorced and presented the Gospel to her and she told me very bluntly, *"I cannot be saved. I am divorced and am married to another man and I have been taught that this is adultery and someone who lives in adultery cannot be saved."* I tried to explain that this was not true but to no avail. Now some twenty five years later, this lady, no longer young, is still lost and cold to the Gospel. What am I saying? Simply that the problem is huge and for us to turn away these and put a stumbling block in their path, and promote the tradition of the past is to do a great injustice to those that have divorced and remarried.

I can relate to another friend that was divorced after being saved and who believes in the traditional view of divorce and remarriage. So rather than find a godly lady to spend the rest of his life with and enjoy the blessings thereof, he is determined to live out the rest of his life without a wife and remain single. Now he may not be victimizing anyone but himself, but the traditional view is having a terrible impact upon his life. Any man out there, and woman for that matter, knows the reality of what the Bible says when it declares **Gen 2:18 KJV** *"And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."* God designed us for marriage and there is just something missing in life when we do not enjoy that blessed relationship.

With permission I give another account of a victim of divorce—

- Listen to what one divorced Christian woman wrote: *"I have lost my husband, but I am not supposed to mourn. I have lost my children; they don't know to whom they belong. I have lost my relatives; they do not approve. I have lost his relatives; they blame me. I have lost my friends; they don't know how to act. I feel I have lost my church; do they think I have sinned too much? I am afraid of the future, I am ashamed of the past, I am confused about the present. I am so alone."* (Erickson, 2007) *From a sermon by pastor Dan Erickson, "DEALING WITH DIVORCE." (Baptist Sermons Online).*

It is my contention that these kind of stories are repeated over and over again far too many times. With the exception of the last account, I have only used those cases with which I am personally acquainted and of which I know to be true. The pain and rejection that these folks endure should not be happening, and especially, at the hands of Baptists. May God challenge us to consider the effects of what we believe upon these folks and re-examine with an open mind our position in the light of the Word of God.

WE VICTIMIZE OUR CHURCHES--But let me also state that the problem does not end there. I believe another major problem with the traditional view of divorce, held by our churches, is that we close the door to many that would be a blessing to the church itself. If this vast field of humanity was open to us, and sought by us, then perhaps we could reach many more. Our neglect of this group, in my opinion, has a very negative effect upon the church and the on-going ministries of the church. We rob ourselves of evangelists, pastors, members; Sunday School teachers; prayer warriors; tithers and givers; workers; folks for visitation; potential missionaries; and more.

WE VICTIMIZE DOCTRINALLY-- Another problem with our attitude is that we not only fail to reach many of these potential church members, but we also tend to drive them into other denominations and religions that are in error, at the least, and downright dangerous at the worst. Now if they are truly saved they may find a true Baptist church out there that will gladly accept them as sinners saved by grace who are no different than any other sinner saved by grace. But these churches are few and far between. A good example of what I am speaking of comes from Bro. Larry Davis, in his book, "Sowing the Seeds of Faith." He states "A recent Gallup poll seems to indicate that people who experience divorce often draw closer to God by praying and reading the Bible more frequently. However, the same poll also found that those who are separated and divorced feel alienated from their church. The common complaint is that churches are focusing on the needs of intact families and ignoring the divorced."

So many divorced people find a stronger faith in God, yet so few belong to the church. Look at your own church. Of those who have experienced divorce, how many are still active? As a divorced and

remarried pastor, I have seen this to be tragically realistic for two reasons.

- 1. We have simply not learned how to offer ministry to those going through the emotional, financial and physical pain of divorce.*
- 2. Those experiencing divorce often mistakenly assume the church will only judge them and therefore avoid any contact with their church family.*

The Gallup poll goes on to say, *"From the standpoint of the church, divorced people are an intriguing and challenging group to try to serve. Their lack of church involvement may make them appear to be alienated or hostile to religion in general. But their private religious practices -- frequent Bible reading, regular religious television and radio exposure and dedication to prayer -- **show that they are far from being a lost cause.**"* (Davis) (*Seeds of Faith*, by Bro. Larry Davis, UMC, <http://www.sowingseedsofffaith.com/divorce1.htm>).

And in case the reader has not got it yet, I am trying to impress upon the mind that there is more to this issue than first meets the eye. It involves the lives of many tens of thousands of people in our communities, in our state, and millions in our country! It is at least worth reconsideration and careful examination.

In other words, the divorced person is a victim. Now do not confuse what I am saying. I am not saying that he is innocent of sin. Divorce is always a sin in my eyes, of at least one party in the marriage relationship, and usually both. I am not dealing with that issue. In the sense that they may be guilty I do not count them as a victim. However, for the innocent in a divorce this does make them a victim of divorce in a very real sense. But still I am not dealing with this issue although I think it is important and should not be overlooked. Those that are innocent and who have been victimized in such a way should be recipients of our compassion and not our scorn or shunning.

Now having said all that let me explain of what I am really speaking here. I am dealing with those that have gone through a divorce, whether guilty or innocent, and who have remarried once again and who have come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I would also include in this those that have been divorced and yet have not remarried and who also know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

What I am exposing is the fact that we as Baptists (And we are not the only ones) do not ever let these folks get over the divorce even though their sins have been forgiven. We continually victimize them by our unsound interpretation of the marriage and divorce passages to the point where they can never be completely recovered; never fully respected; never fully accepted; and never used as they should be. We have put them into a caste system as they have in India; we have labeled them "unclean," and we tend to think of them as somehow "defective" or "inferior."

And in getting back to my point of harming them doctrinally—We often drive them to other unsound churches and denominations who do not have the truth. This will result in deception; it will result in great spiritual harm to the individual or family that is involved; and in a sense it will make us guilty of casting a stumbling-block before a brother who is in great need. The divorced need someone who forgives like Jesus and most of the time this is absent in a Baptist church.

In the following pages I will be examining each issue related to the subject of divorce. I will try to make this examination as concise and short as possible. I am not attempting to impress with my rhetoric but just to present the facts for your consideration. So the first issue to examine...

CHAPTER TWO

DID MOSES SAY WHAT I THINK HE SAID?

AN ANCIENT PROBLEM—AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORDS OF MOSES (Deut. 24:1-4).

WHAT DID MOSES REALLY SAY-- NO! NO! NO! I just don't think Moses really said that! In other words, when I studied this out a bit I found that what Moses commanded in the Old Testament was nothing like I had been told and completely contrary to the traditional view.

So what did Moses say? Here it is, read it for yourself, and try to do so without any personal and traditional bias—Just let Moses explain for himself...

Deu 24:1-4 *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a **bill of divorcement**, and give [it] in her hand, and **send her out of his house**. (2) And when she is departed out of his house, **she may go and be another man's [wife]**. (3) And [if] the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth [it] in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her [to be] his wife; (4) Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that [is] abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance.*

FACT #1—The man has found some uncleanness in his wife.

FACT #2—He writes her a "bill of divorcement."

FACT #3—She is sent out of his house.

FACT #4—When she is departed out of his house she is free to marry another.

Now you will notice right away that the "Law" of God does not forbid divorce at all—"And when she is departed out of his house, **she may go and be another man's [wife]**" (Vs. 2). In fact the "Law" of God says things that are completely different and completely contradictory to what most Baptist preachers believe in their hearts and teach from their pulpits. Many are so bold as to stand against the Word and declare so boldly and righteously that "God does not recognize divorce and in the eyes of God they are still married!" But let's look at the facts as stated above.

STEP #1--First, there is this matter of uncleanness in the wife. What does it mean? Here is what the word "uncleanness" means...

- *Strong's defines the word this way: **nudity**, literally (especially the pudenda) or figuratively (disgrace, blemish): - **nakedness, shame, unclean** (-ness).*
- *Brown-Drivers-Biggs defines it this way: **BDB Definition: 1) nakedness, nudity, shame, pudenda. 1a) pudenda (implying shameful exposure) 1b) nakedness of a thing, indecency, improper behaviour 1c) exposed, undefended** (figuratively).*

Now that is somewhat less than adultery and fornication or some other sexual perversion, isn't it? It also implies more than just a blemish or defect in body. The word seems to point to a defect in character that is revealed by some kind of shameful behavior which resulted in a state of "uncleanness." This text presents to us a very wide, broad, and extensive list of reasons upon which a man could divorce his wife besides fornication and adultery. In fact, these two are not really included in this definition. In other words, when someone tells us that there are no Scriptural reasons for divorce other than adultery then they must conclude that either Moses was in error, or this text does not apply to God's people today. In fact the "uncleanness" was more or less left up to the discretion of the husband and could include such things as...

- 1) A woman bending over in the presence of men and bearing too much up top; or crossing her legs when she thought no one was looking and expose something that she didn't even intend to do.
- 2) A wife caught flirting with another man or men.
- 3) A wife overheard talking about a desire or fantasy in relation to another man or a wife saying unkind or humiliating remarks about her own husband, etc.
- 4) And so under the standard of the Word of God through Moses any of these could have resulted in a legal divorce.

But let me add here the reason that we know that none of these divorces, no not one, were for adultery. The fact is that anyone guilty of adultery was executed. They did not have the option of divorce and remarriage. They did not even have the choice to live. So adultery in the Old Testament was not grounds for divorce.

The next thing to consider here before we move on is the contention of some that this refers to "...*some uncleanness*" found in the bride after the groom has gone after his bride. They thus conclude that the only divorce that Moses was speaking of, and the only one in which such a divorce was allowed, was one in which the groom found some such fault in his new bride. This no doubt is included. If a man has married his betrothed and waited the appointed time and then came and took his bride, as was the custom, and then found some

fault in her, then he could legally divorce her. This would have protected the husband from being deceived like Laban deceived Jacob when he gave him Leah instead of Rachel. However, with this being correct, as I believe it to be, it does not exclude the reality of divorce after the husband and wife had been together for some time. There are two reasons I say this which the Bible supports:

1) The first is simply because of the text under study— **Deut. 24:1**, *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes...*

- There is no limitation given in the text. No indication that this cannot be applied at any time in the marriage if the husband is so pleased. It allows for the previous interpretation but does not exclude the possibility of finding some other fault in the wife as stated which might not be a natural blemish or fault, but could be a moral one as allowed by the word “uncleanness.” Such a moral problem may not come to light until months or years after the marriage is consummated. And yet such a moral problem could qualify as grounds for divorce under the terms here given by Moses.

2) Secondly we know for certain that a moral or physical blemish upon the wife discovered by the groom on his wedding night was not intended here for in the New Testament Jesus tells us that the divorce was allowed by God because of the “hardness” of the hearts of certain husbands.

- **Mat 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.*

The implication being that there was no fault in the woman at all, but rather fault in the man. His hardness of heart may have been his lack of love and compassion or just the natural lust for another where he took another wife to himself and sent the previous wife out of his home. So the idea that it applies only to a new bride and some fault found in her may be true to a degree, but it is not the whole truth. The context of Deut. 24 cannot be confined to such a narrow interpretation especially when it is clarified in such a manner by Jesus. The text and the explanation by Jesus shows that it went much farther. Notice the explanation of this text by some notable commentators and the agreement that this “uncleanness” was not some grievous sin punishable by death and possibly no sin at all:

- **“Some uncleanness** - Any cause of dislike, for this great latitude of meaning the fact itself authorizes us to adopt, for it is certain that a Jew might put away his wife for any cause that seemed good to himself; and so hard were their hearts, that Moses suffered this; and we find they

continued this practice even to the time of our Lord, who strongly rephended them on the account, and showed that such license was wholly inconsistent with the original design of marriage;” See Mat 5:31 (note), etc.; Mat 19:3 (note), etc., and the notes there. Adam Clark’s Commentary on the Bible, E-Sword Module, 2008.

- “...**because he hath found some uncleanness in her**; something that he disliked, and was disagreeable to him, and which made their continuance together in the marriage state very uncomfortable; which led him on to be very ill-natured, severe, and cruel to her; so that her life was exposed to danger, or at least become very uneasy; in which case a divorce was permitted,” John Gill, John Gill’s Commentary, E-Sword Module.
- “It was not sufficient to say that he did not like her, or that he liked another better, but he must show cause for his dislike; something that made her disagreeable and unpleasant to him, though it might not make her so to another. This uncleanness must mean something less than adultery; for, for that, she was to die; and less than the suspicion of it, for in that case he might give her the waters of jealousy; but it means either a light carriage, or a cross froward disposition, or some loathsome sore or disease; nay, some of the Jewish writers suppose that an offensive breath might be a just ground for divorce. Whatever is meant by it, doubtless it was something considerable; so that their modern doctors erred who allowed divorce for every cause, though ever so trivial...” Matthew Henry’s Commentary On the Whole Bible, E-Sword Module.

When Jesus brings out this idea that God allowed divorce because of the “hardness of your hearts” certainly implies that many of the men in that day were doing exactly what many of the men of today also do. They live with a wife for a while and when some bimbo (pretty, loose, and willing) comes along the man divorces his wife and takes what we have come to call a “trophy wife.” The difference between the two was that the husbands in the day of Moses were not divorcing their wives when they took another while the husbands of today generally do divorce their wives to marry another. They could, before Moses instituted divorce, simply put away their unwanted wife without the benefit of divorce and marry their new wife and not violate the letter of the law since polygamy itself was tolerated. The first wife now being put away and yet not divorced was therefore put in a very difficult position—thus the law requiring a bill of divorcement.

So now that we “know” the grounds, (the grounds may be unknown but the fact there are grounds for divorce we do know) we need to look at the procedure that was to be followed to divorce your spouse. Notice...

STEP #2--Vs. 1, “...then let him write a bill of divorcement...” Notice the order here for this is extremely important. The next step, after finding some uncleanness in the wife, is to write a bill of divorcement. This was given by God as a rule in order to protect the woman that is being divorced. Without such a “*bill of divorcement*” she is not free to marry another. For a Jewish woman to be put

away without a bill of divorcement would be almost the same thing as a death sentence. So it was absolutely essential, in order to protect the victim in a divorce, that she be issued a "*bill of divorcement.*" We will get to the other reasons behind this a bit further on. Next we come to...

STEP #3—“...send her out of his house.” (Vs. 1) The phrase “send her out” here literally means, according to Strong’s,

- *A primitive root; to send away, for, or out (in a great variety of applications): - X any wise, appoint, bring (on the way), cast (away, out), conduct, X earnestly, forsake, give (up), grow long, lay, leave, let depart (down, go, loose), push away, put (away, forth, in, out), reach forth, send (away, forth, out), set, shoot (forth, out), sow, spread, stretch forth (out).*

Having read all that it still means to send her out. Or the equivalent of “to put her away.” In other words, the husband was to write a bill of divorcement then he was to put her away, or send her out, to get rid of her, to cast her out, to conduct her out, to let her depart—you choose the one you like the best—it all amounts to the same thing. And now we come to the last step...

STEP #4-- Deu 24:2 *And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's [wife].* Uh-Oh! I must be missing something here. My intellect just doesn't seem to grasp this. Maybe I need someone to interpret this for me because it seems to be saying that once she leaves that she is “no longer married” and “...she may go and be another man's wife.” Yep, I have to be missing something here. No one, absolutely no one, has ever told me such a thing before. I must surely need to look for some other interpretation since this can't possibly be right. Oops. I looked at it again and it says the same thing. I guess the best thing for me to do is ignore this, it's messing up my theology and I can't have that. (Couldn't avoid a little sarcasm—my old sinful nature!)

According to this text, if we take it at face value—

- 1) If the woman had a Scriptural divorce in the Old Testament period and had a legal bill of divorcement in hand, she was no longer married and free to marry another.
- 2) If they were free to marry another in the eyes of God and His Law, then no adultery is committed by either party when they remarry.
- 3) If that is so, then the remarried divorced person does not live in adultery; does not live in sin; and does not have two “*living wives.*”

4) And it further means that he/she is free to serve the Lord as any other that belongs to the Lord, considering of course, if they are saved.

- Now I am not saying that this is the way it is today. I am just saying that this is the way it was under the Law of God in the Old Testament as given here in **Deut. 24:1-4**.

5) And it further means, if the same principle is true today, and it is, that if a person has a bill of divorcement in hand that they are no longer married and do not commit, nor live in adultery after being remarried then we have a lot of Baptist preachers that has disparaged; abused; insulted; harmed; and victimized a lot of their brothers and sisters in Christ. I realize they do not intend to do that by any means and probably do not believe they do that, but their error in interpretation has led to the same result either way.

But let me add a footnote here in relation to the idea that if a divorce and remarriage has occurred and the belief that this results in two people living in adultery. And I am speaking only in view of the law concerning divorce and putting away as given in our text here in Deuteronomy and in the Old Testament era. If this were true, considering the text above, you would have God approving both the divorce and the living in adultery. This is clearly contradictory. And this is the inevitable conclusion we would be forced to accept because our text states the facts very clearly. Moses is saying, at least by the permissive will of God, that the woman divorced could marry another man (as long as she has a "bill of divorcement). If she does so, and is therefore living in adultery as many claim, you have God sanctioning, permitting, and actually encouraging the sin of adultery. That just does not happen, nor is it possible for it to happen. If there had been any sin in the woman who possesses a bill of divorcement in remarrying the words of permission would have never been allowed by the Holy Spirit through the lips of Moses.

Now at this point most of those that read this will be thinking that all this may have been possible under the Old Testament Covenant but when we get to the New Testament and examine, in particular, the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, then we will find something completely different. And if we do, that will be fine. But we also must remember that the Old Testament is part of a complete revelation. If the teachings of Christ or Paul or any other New Testament writer or character is in opposition to anything taught in the Old Testament then we have a contradiction in Scripture. That cannot be! For example, a marriage cannot be legal to dissolve in the Old Testament and illegal to dissolve in the New Testament. Certainly restrictions could be added and conditions could be further explained (and they are), but the basic fact that divorce is permissible and that it dissolves the marriage completely and totally when it occurs is the

same in both Testaments. In other words, the Old Testament sets a precedent that cannot be changed. That precedent is this: Divorce dissolves a marriage. And that includes those marriages that were dissolved for the right reasons or for wrong reasons. God recognizes as legal, the bill of divorcement, when given, in the Old Testament.

So at this point we must conclude, based upon the Old Testament text under examination, that divorce was permitted under various circumstances; those thus "legally" divorced were free to remarry; and those that did remarry were obviously not "living in sin" or "adultery." Moses did not uphold the "TRADITIONAL VIEW OF DIVORCE!"

Now to the next issue...

CHAPTER THREE

DO WORDS REALLY MEAN WHAT THEY SAY?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WORDS OF “PUTTING AWAY” AND “DIVORCE”

Now I wish to state up front that I use the grammatical, historical method of interpretation to interpret the Bible. Some would call this the “*literal method*.” In other words, I want to find the meaning of these words used in our study as they were used in the historical context in the days of Moses. I will do my very best to adhere to this standard as we look at the meaning of these words.

There are two words used in relation to divorce in the Old Testament. It is essential, in my little feeble mind, that we keep before us the meaning and use of these two words if we are going to properly understand the truth about this subject as presented in Deuteronomy 24. Notice the meaning of the words:

I. THE FIRST KEY WORD-- The word used in **Deut. 24:1** for “divorcement” is *ker-ee-thooth*; a *cutting* (of the matrimonial bond), that is, *divorce*: - divorce (-ment).

As far as I can tell by this definition it simply means “divorce” as we commonly use the word. It is use always in reference to “*a legal dissolution of a marriage*.” This word is only used four times in the Old Testament. In the text before us in **Deut. 24**, it is used two times. It is used also in the following verses. Notice the consistency of its usage:

- **Isa 50:1** KJV “Thus saith the LORD, Where [is] **the bill of your mother's divorcement**, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors [is it] to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.”
- **Jer 3:8** KJV “And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, **and given her a bill of divorcement**; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.”

Again, in both verses above, it is used in the same way as in **Deut. 24:1,3**. It is speaking of a legal dissolution of a marriage. The “*mother*” in this case has been “put away” but she has been put away legally, having been given “*a bill of divorcement*” according to the Law.

Now the divorce in **Jer. 3:8** is between God and “*backsliding Israel*.” In this case we see that God **does not** violate His own law. He gives Israel a “**bill of divorcement**” and dissolves the “*marriage*” relationship between Him and Israel. God found fault with Israel and

put her away. But the “putting away” here is accompanied with a “bill of divorcement” to make it legal. And once it is done is there any that would find fault with God? There is a divorce just as surely as we see in **Deut. 24:1-4**. We see that there is no fault placed upon the “divorcing party” (God), if it is done according to the Law.

II. THE SECOND KEY WORD-- of interest in **Deut. 24:1-4** is “...and **send** her out of the house. *shaw-lakh*. A primitive root; to send away, for, or out (in a great variety of applications): - X any wise, appoint, bring (on the way), cast (away, out), conduct, X earnestly, forsake, give (up), grow long, lay, leave, let depart (down, go, loose), push away, **put (away, forth, in, out)**, reach forth, send (away, forth, out), set, shoot (forth, out), sow, spread, stretch forth (out).

This word can be used in two primary ways— First, it means putting away of any kind. Legal or illegal. If a man puts his wife away without a bill of divorcement she was still put away but it was illegal to do so and she is not free to remarry.

Secondly, If he put her away with a bill of divorcement, she was still put away, but this was legal and she is free to remarry. The point that I am trying to make is that the term can be applied to any kind of “putting away” and the only way we can tell which is intended by the Holy Spirit is by examining the context. If it says “put away” and there is no clarification then we must assume there is no bill of divorcement. If it says “put away with a bill of divorcement” or “according to the law,” then we can assume that this is a legal “putting away” or what we would call a “divorce.” The simple fact is this, “the Holy Spirit used these words for a purpose and the distinctions, in both the Old Testament and New, are there, I believe, to show us the distinction and difference between a legal and illegal “putting away.” Notice the following statement by Walter L. Callison:

“Not much explanation is needed here. Except to say it is possible to send away, or to put away one’s wife, in this case, without a bill of divorcement. But as God points out here in His Word, without that “bill of divorcement” it would simply be wrong. It would be sin because it violates God’s law and does harm to the woman.” (Divorce, the Law, and Jesus, By Walter L. Callison).

4. Which brings us to the implication of these two words in the Deuteronomy passage—Here’s the passage from your KJV Bible:

Deu 24:1-4 *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a **bill of divorcement (ker-ee-thooth, 1)** and give it in her hand, and **send her out (shaw-lakh 2)** of his house. (2) And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. (3) And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement (1), and giveth it in her hand, and*

sendeth her out (2) of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; (4) Her former husband, which sent her away (2) may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

In the Deuteronomy text Moses is only dealing with the requirements of a legal divorce. Divorce is a putting away, but does not exclude the possibility for someone to be “put away” or “sent away” illegally, as would be the case if they were not given a “bill of divorcement.

CHAPTER FOUR

DOES JESUS CORRECT THE ERROR OF MOSES? THAT IS THE QUESTION! (MATT. 5:31-32)

As we look at this particular text in Matthew we must remember that Jesus is interpreting the text in the Old Testament as given by Moses which was examined in the two previous chapters.

- **Mat 5:31-32** *"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: (32) But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."*

In **Vs. 31** Jesus says *"It hath been said..."* This phrase takes us back to the words of Moses in **Deut. 24:1-5**. If we try to interpret this passage outside of the Deuteronomy passage we will be taking the passage out of context and could very possibly come to an erroneous interpretation. So with our dependence upon the words of God, as given to Moses, we move forward and now seek to examine the words of Jesus and answer the question, "Does Jesus correct Moses?"

Let me state the main points clearly established by the passage in **Deut. 24:1-5**.

- 1) The grounds upon which a *man could divorce his wife was if "...any uncleanness be found in her."* (This did not include adultery since a woman would be stoned for this sin).
- 2) The man was to give his wife, declaring his intentions of divorcing her, a "bill of divorcement."
- 3) He was then to "put her away" or send her out of the house.
- 4) And the woman, thus legally put away, was "free to marry another."
- 5) And being free to marry another means that a) the marriage is dissolved by the bill of divorcement; b) she does not commit, or live, in adultery when remarried.

So now it would be wise if we just examine the words of Jesus and see what they really say and then we will know if there is a change in the law between Moses and Jesus or if there is a contradiction between the two and what they say on this subject. Here's what Jesus said...

- **Mat 5:31-32 KJV** “It hath been said, Whosoever shall **put away** his wife, let him give her a **writing of divorcement**: (32) But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that **is divorced** committeth adultery.”

Under Moses a man could put away his wife legally with a bill of divorcement. Well, so far, Jesus and the Law are not in conflict—Moses has not erred as of yet, according to Jesus. But then it seems that Jesus is changing everything with the words “I say unto you...” And I do not think that anyone would disagree with the premise that what Jesus says is more authoritative than what Moses said. In fact we would agree that Jesus is the “*final authority!*”

Now the question still remains “Does Jesus correct Moses?” And the answer really lies in the interpretation of **the two words** that are used in relation to a “legal divorce” and an illegal “putting away” of the wife without the benefit of divorce.

Notice what Jesus is actually saying in **Vs. 32**, “But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife...” Now this little phrase that says “...put away his wife” goes right back to **Deut. 24:1** and means the same thing (remember the word “send?”)

- 1) It does not mean divorce.
- 2) There is another word for divorce and this is not it.
- 3) The subject here is the “putting away of his wife” before a bill of divorcement is given to her.
- 4) If a man does this she is “put away” but still legally his wife. She is not free to remarry and if she does so it is obvious she will have committed adultery.
- 5) By failing to give her a bill of divorcement her husband has victimized her.
- 6) Without that bill of divorcement she is not free to remarry; she has no means of support, since in most cases she would be seen as unfit even by her own family; and more than likely forced into prostitution or just living with another man in order to just survive—i.e., the committing of adultery.

In other words, the “putting away” of one’s wife would be like a “separation” that married couples often agree to today. For example, because of a conflict a couple may decide to live apart for a while. However, if one has any kind of sexual relationship during this period with another other than with the one whom they are married to--- they commit adultery. I do not believe anyone would say they are “divorced” while they are separated and all would agree that such illicit relations would be adultery.

Now notice that the KJV of the Bible says in **Vs. 32**, “...and whosoever shall marry her that **is divorced** committeth adultery.” At last, Jesus corrects Moses here and we now have the answer. We were right all along! Not so. The fact is, and I don’t suppose it will convince anyone of anything—I just state it because it makes sense to me—the word “divorced” here is the same Greek word that is used in the previous phrase “...to put away.” The Greek definition as given by Vine’s New Testament Dictionary—

- *Verb. apoluo (G630), "to let loose from, let go free" (apo, "from," luo, "to loose"), is translated "is divorced" in the KJV of Mat 5:32 (RV, "is put*

away"); it is further used of "divorce" in Mat_1:19; Mat_19:3, Mat_19:7-9; Mar_10:2, Mar_10:4, Mar_10:11; Luk_16:18. The Lord also used it of the case of a wife putting away her husband, Mar_10:12, a usage among Greeks and Romans, not among Jews. See DISMISS.

Now about the definition above—Vine's makes an error in this explanation of what the word means. Notice in the definition above that Vine's says of this word "...it is further used of "divorce" in Mat_1:19; Mat_19:3, Mat_19:7-9; Mar_10:2, Mar_10:4, Mar_10:11; Luk_16:18. Mar_10:12." And yet when you check these verses you see that it is translated "put away" each time and not as divorce." Vine's is assuming that the words are synonyms but they are not! Thus Vine's, along with the Roman Church, and many Baptists commentaries, and several translations continue to perpetuate this error. It is an error that was also retained by the Church of England and carried over into our King James Bible and then handed down to us thus ending up as the source of our so-called "*traditional position on divorce*." The refusal to correctly translate this word, in my opinion, was to preserve their own doctrine and protect it from criticism.

Now the second word associated with our subject of divorce and remarriage is also used in this text and it is the Greek word "apostasion." Vine's definition is as follows:

• *Noun-- apostasion (G647), primarily, "a defection," lit., "a standing off" (apo, "from," stasis, "a standing"; cf. ahistemi, "to cause to withdraw"), denotes, in the NT, "a writing or bill of divorcement," Mat_5:31; Mat_19:7; Mar_10:4. In Sept., Deu_24:3; Isa_50:1; Jer_3:8.*

Notice that the "literal" meaning for all of us who use the "*historical, grammatical method*" of interpretation means to "*relieve, release, dismiss...*" The "*put away*" and the word "*divorce*" are one and the same in this text. Now this is all so interesting since both the Hebrew and Greek had words for "*putting away*" and both had another word for "*divorce*."

Jesus is very careful here to use the words for "*putting away*" rather than for "*divorce*." And since we are getting down to the literal meaning it is obvious to me, understanding my intellectual limitations, that Jesus is saying that any one that marries another without a bill of divorcement commits adultery. But can it really be that simple? That would have Jesus agreeing completely with Moses. Jesus is interpreting it just like Moses said it. And the truth is...Both Jesus and Moses are in agreement—

- Divorce was not the sin that they were dealing with—
- It seems that both were dealing with the wickedness of certain men's hearts that victimized their wives by putting them away without a bill of divorcement.
- Which would result in them being stoned for adultery if they married another, or forced into prostitution, or into slavery in order to survive.
- What I believe to be the correct translation of this in some other "*notable*" translations—

Mat 5:32 (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*) LITV *But I say to you, Whoever puts away his wife, apart from a matter of fornication, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever shall marry the one put away commits adultery.*

Mat 5:32 (World English Bible) WEB *but I tell you that whoever **puts away his wife**, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she **is put away** commits adultery.*

Mat 5:32 (Authorized Standard Version) ASV *but I say unto you, that every one **that putteth away** his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her **when she is put away** committeth adultery.*

Mat 5:32 (Modern King James Version) MKJV *But I say to you that whoever **shall put away his wife**, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever shall marry her **who is put away** commits adultery.*

Mat 5:32 (Young's Literal Translation) YLT *but I--I say to you, that whoever may **put away his wife**, save for the matter of whoredom, doth make her to commit adultery; and whoever may marry her **who hath been put away** doth commit adultery.*

Some would say that I am begging the question by using these other translations. But the fact is, as far as I can see, is that the manuscripts from which we received the KJV agrees perfectly with all the above translations. Even today, in many of the translations which we would consider conservative, there is a bias toward the matter of divorce and the bias is clearly seen in the fact that the translators do not consistently translate according to the earliest manuscripts but according to their presuppositions about marriage and divorce.

Another thing we might add in concerning the response of Jesus and the fact that He says exactly the same thing as Moses is that He acknowledges that divorce ends the marriage. In agreeing with Moses He thus agrees with the conclusions in the Deuteronic text that a bill of divorcement dissolves the marriage and that the divorced party is free to remarry and does not commit adultery nor live in adultery upon remarriage.

It appears that the reason that no "bill of divorcement" is mentioned here in relation to one that has committed fornication is simply that if the wife has committed such a heinous sin, and was put away for that sin, then there is no need for a bill of divorcement. The sin itself would have taken care of the severance and dissolution of the marriage union for the woman, thus guilty, would be taken out and stoned. That is why it says "...*saving for the cause of fornication.*"

So in conclusion to this chapter we see that the Words used in **Matthew 5:31-32**, when properly defined and interpreted reveals that Jesus agrees completely with the text given my Moses in **Deut. 24:1-4**. But then that should be exactly what we would expect if the Bible is inspired.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY DID GOD ALLOW DIVORCE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The answer is found in...

- **Mat 19:8 KJV** *"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."*

Clarke says in his commentary on Matthew the following—
"Moses perceived that if divorce were not permitted, in many cases, the women would be exposed to great hardships through the cruelty of their husbands: for so the word (sklērokardia) is understood in this place by some learned men."

It certainly appears obvious that the men in that day were victimizing their wives in order to satisfy their own lusts. Notice another little piece of information about the meaning of the word "put away."

- Some of the hardships and terror experienced by women who were "put away" can be seen as, this Hebrew word "shalach" is described in the **Langenscheid Pocket Hebrew Dictionary** (McGraw-Hill, 1969) *"to let loose, roaming at large, to be scared, abandoned, forsaken."*
- *Hard-hearted men unilaterally put away women and married others, considering themselves divorced, but leaving the women without recourse and deprived of that first basic human right. Human rights were for men only in those days. Jesus changed that! He demanded obedience to the law; he demanded equal marriage rights for women. Grace does abound in Jesus Christ!*
- *As opposed to putting away, written divorce, commanded by the law, provided a degree of human dignity for women subjected to cruel abuse, adulterous polygamy, and the whims of hard-hearted men. Nothing so flimsy as an oral "I divorce you" would do. Divorce declared the legal end of a marriage, thereby precluding any charge of adultery or bigamy should either party ever marry again. Divorce severed all marital ties and all control by the former spouse, Divorce demanded strict monogamy. Divorce prevented unilateral dismissal and preserved the basic right to be married. Divorce does the same today. Abandonment, desertion, putting away, or whatever one calls that hard-hearted forsaking of a wife for another, without divorce, was and is forbidden by the Lord Jesus*

himself (Mt. 19:9, Mt. 5:32, Mk. 10:11-12, Lk. 16:18). (Callison **Walter L. Callison** is currently writing a book on this subject. **ADDRESS:** 311 S. Green Street, Yales Center, Kansas 66783-1535)

After all, they lived in a polygamous society where the man could simply put away his wife without any consideration toward her such as food, lodging, clothing, or any other type of care, and still not commit adultery. Husbands were just “putting away” their wives and marrying another. The wife who was put away had little recourse. She had no income or means to make a living. It is doubtful that she would have been welcomed back to her family but certainly some may have found refuge there. She would not have been free to remarry even though her husband could take as many wives as he wished. She literally became the victim which the Law of Moses was intended to protect. It is even possible that many of these victimized by the unlawful “putting away” of hard-hearted husbands resorted to begging or even prostitution in order to survive. A good example of the way things were done before the institution of the “bill of divorcement” by Moses is given in **Genesis 21:9-16**. Notice the way of divorcement before the law of Moses was simply to cast out the woman. To get a glimpse of the hardships this would cause the woman we only need to read the text:

- **Gen 21:9-16** *“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. (10) Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. (11) And **the thing was very grievous** in Abraham's sight because of his son. (12) And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. (13) And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. (14) And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (15) And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. (16) And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, **Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.**”*

Now the request of Sarah was too much even for Abraham. In this case it may not have been his care for Hagar but certainly was as far as his son, Ishmael was concerned. He knew that to cast them out in the environment where he lived meant almost certain death—and so

he grieved. Now we see that God comes and comforts him and reveals that this is a sovereign act of God to bring His will to pass. He is told that God will protect Ishmael and make of him a great nation and Abraham is satisfied with that. But then we see from the viewpoint of Hagar that she viewed this as a death sentence, which is obvious by the words, *"Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept."* Abandoned! She was left without any means to carry on; to keep herself and her child alive; and if God had not intervened she would have certainly perished. I wonder how many times that such "so called divorces" took place where the women did not survive or was forced into the most difficult and horrible of circumstances?

The "hardness of heart" that Jesus mentions here is not just of the Jews in a general sense but a particular "hardness" directed toward the wife that is "put away" for the convenience of her husband without any regard for her well-being, present, or future. The Law of Moses did not keep the woman from being victimized. When she was put away, even with a bill of divorcement, she may very well still have been the victim. What the bill of divorcement did was to prevent her from being continually and indefinitely victimized. For with the bill of divorcement in her hand she could depart and be free to marry another and start her life over again.

Now it is my argument that such a principle is built into every principle of Bible truth. When it comes to salvation there is the principle of forgiveness and a new beginning. The past no longer being held against us. We are free to start over and are encouraged to do so (in the Lord.) And when the Christian stumbles and messes up his or her life, there is the call to repentance. And when the Christian repents they are encouraged to start over again, knowing their sins have been forgiven and that they can be used of the Lord once again. Why? Simply because they have been forgiven. And so for those who are the victims of divorce, God made a plan where they could put the past behind them and start over again. But then again, the very nature of God and His love for His people would almost demand that He devise such a plan to take care of the innocent. Now my belief that this is true may seem like an assumption at this point but I think the correct interpretation of these Biblical texts is beyond doubt and very clear.

One of the sad things that we Baptists do is that we join in with the hard-hearted ones and seek to continually punish and victimize the victims of divorce when we should be the very ones reaching out to them with love and forgiveness.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT IS THE TRADITIONAL VIEW AND WHY IS IT WRONG?

**A critique of the traditional view in light of Scripture,
And an explanation of opposing arguments**

I. THE FIRST SUPPOSITION—Each marriage partner is bound to the other so long as they are alive and that the marriage bond can only be broken by the death of the husband or wife. This position is presented as follows: (I have underlined points of emphasis, From the tract "Divorce and Remarriage," by C. Burns). And I quote:

"Let's look at these verses and see if God condones divorce and remarriage and if there are any exceptions that allow us to break the marriage contract. Turn to

Romans 7:2-3: *"For the woman which hath an husband is BOUND BY THE LAW [OF GOD, NOT MAN to her husband SO LONG AS HE LIVETH; but IF her 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: but IF her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Anyone who is married a SECOND TIME (or more) while there is a LIVING PARTNER is STILL BOUND BY GOD'S LAW TO THE FIRST PARTNER. The laws of the land may say that a woman is no longer bound to her first partner, but GOD says that she is and it is God's Word that counts. Although God can and does forgive the adulterers and adulteresses (if they ask Him to do so), God says that they are still BOUND BY THE LAW until death parts them. In conjunction with this is I Corinthians 7:39: *"The wife is BOUND BY THE LAW 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." The ONLY EXCEPTION listed here is when a partner dies. Then, AND ONLY THEN, is a person allowed to remarry and this person is commanded to be remarried to another Christian. This passage also states that if a woman marries another man while her first partner is still living, she is an adulteress. This, of course, also goes for the man who remarries and we are told numerous places in God's Word that those who commit adultery cannot enter heaven in an unforgiven condition (Galatians 5:19-21; I Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 15:19;**

Mark 7:21).” (From the tract “Divorce and Remarriage,” by C. Burns).

Now the author of this little tract gives us his opinion as to what this text means. But does it really mean what he says? Is there another possibility? I think there is a very real possibility that another interpretation is a little closer to the truth.

1) The first thing we notice in the text above from **Rom. 7:2-3**, is that Paul was using marriage and the normal dissolution of marriage as an illustration to show the difference between law and grace. The subject was not marriage and divorce. No new truth was being presented and everyone already knows that when two people get married it is supposed to be for life; they have made commitments, one to the other for life; and they should stay together for life, or until separated by death. God does not give anything other than a perfect standard and staying married for life is the perfect standard for all marriages.

2) Secondly, Paul is speaking of a woman that is married to her husband. The simple fact is that a person is not married to someone from whom they have been divorced. In other words Paul is not dealing here with the potential for divorce but rather the binding that takes place when we exchange our marriage vows. Now I hate to repeat these words again but they are relative and foundational to every text relating to divorce and separation, and if we move from these foundational principles then we will get farther and farther away from the truth. So I say again, it is very plainly stated in (*Deu 24:2*) *And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife*. In other words, when a divorce takes place they are no longer husband and wife. Notice some obvious conclusions to this truth:

- a) The woman is no longer bound to her former husband.
- b) The man is no longer her husband.
- c) She is as free as she can be to either remain single or to marry another.
- d) She does not commit adultery when she remarries or you have God encouraging and sanctioning adultery for He is the One who is giving permission for her to marry again.

3) In plain words, **“Romans 7:2-3”** deals with those that are married and who have not been divorced. As long as her ‘husband’ is alive she is bound to him and if she goes out and marries another while married to the first then she quite obviously, commits adultery. However, if she has a bill of divorcement she is free to marry another simply because she does not then have a husband and she is no longer bound.

Deut. 24:2 proves beyond the shadow of doubt that a bill of divorce dissolves the marriage and breaks the bond holding the two together. It was accepted of God, it was accepted of Christ, and it should be accepted by us.” One thing the passage in **Deut. 24:2** establishes is that a divorce dissolves the marriage; and the parties are allowed to remarry without committing divorce!

4) It seems to me, and I am fallible, that Bro. Burns makes the mistake of assuming that divorce does not break the marriage bond and that the man or woman is still married in the eyes of God, if not the state, even after the divorce has taken place. God says this is not the case.

5) He is also assuming that Paul is talking about divorce when he is actually talking about a woman marrying another without the benefit of divorce. He would argue with this but it is, at least, in the realm of possibility and the most likely intent.

II. SUPPOSITION NO. 2—A divorced man or woman who remarries while their former mate is still alive commits adultery.

1) Note what Bro. Burns says in the same paragraph under discussion:

“This passage also states that if a woman marries another man while her first partner is still living, she is an adulteress. This, of course, also goes for the man who remarries and we are told numerous places in God's Word that those who commit adultery cannot enter heaven in an unforgiven condition...”

a) Here Bro. Burns creates a monster of a theological dilemma. He says very plainly that if they remarry they are either an “adulteress” or an “adulterer.” Not just that they have committed adultery, but that they continue to live in adultery.

b) There are serious implications to this:

- The remarried live in adultery.
- They cannot be saved as long as they live in adultery (“...*those who commit adultery cannot enter heaven in an unforgiven condition...*”).
- If they are living in adultery how can they then be forgiven and go to heaven?
- And the obvious and only conclusion is “They cannot!” They obviously would not be forgiven to start with because salvation begins (from man’s side) with

repentance and if they continue to live in adultery there can be no true repentance.

2) Notice that this goes against what he has already stated:
"Although God can and does forgive the adulterers and adulteresses (if they ask Him to do so), God says that they are still BOUND BY THE LAW until death parts them."

a) Now I am glad our dear Bro. here agrees that adulterers and adulteresses can be saved. But if they are adulterers and adulteresses and they continue to be so while married to another then how can they be saved? It cannot be both ways.

b) It seems he is leaving something out here or else there is a contradiction.

c) The facts are, and I will deal with more proof later to back up this statement is this: They can be saved because a divorce and subsequent remarriage does not make one an adulterer or an adulteress. And if they have committed adultery in the past even this is forgiven, as all sin is, when they come to Christ by faith in His substitutionary death on their behalf.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

The text before us is one of constant debate and of which many dogmatic views have been established, usually without regard either to the context; to the culture in which it was written; and to its real purpose. The two texts are as follows:

- **1Ti 3:1-7 KJV** “*This [is] a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (2) A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (3) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (4) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (5) (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (6) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*”
- **Tit 1:5-9 KJV** “*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: (6) If any be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. (7) For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; (8) But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; (9) Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*”

To highlight the difficulty in interpreting this text I submit the following little chart by Dr. Peterman: This is a “possibility chart” of the possible interpretations of the phrase, “...*the husband of one wife.*”

Hypothetical Interpretive options for *mias gunaikos andra* (Husband of one wife):

- An elder (or deacon) must be married
- An elder (or deacon) cannot be married to more than one wife at a time
- An elder (or deacon) cannot be one who is divorced
- An elder’s (or deacon’s) spouse cannot be one who is a divorcee
- An elder (or deacon) cannot remarry while his wife is alive
- An elder (or deacon) cannot remarry even in the event of the death of his spouse
- An elder (or deacon) must be of a character such that he is a one-woman kind of man.

There are some variations of the above hypothetically possible interpretations, and the various commentators have held to almost every

*possibility, some interpretations being more common than others. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, it was common, for instance, to interpret *mias gunaikos andra* as disallowing widowers who had remarried. (Dr. Vern Peterman, is pastor/elder at Holly Hills Bible Church in Denver, Colorado.)*

Now the next question is simply "*Which view is the correct interpretation?*" And the correct one to most is the one that matches a preconceived position concerning the subject of divorce. As multiple as the answers in our little chart were, so too would be the answers from the many Baptist pastors I know. But in reality, as I have discussed this passage and others with my Baptist brethren, this passage is often used but it is dependent upon a presupposition established by a "*mis-interpretation*" of **Matthew 5:31-31**. The generally established position that most Baptists have been taught in school or by previous pastors who have preceded them is that there is no such thing as "*divorce*." That once a man is married, he is always married, with the one exception of the death of one married partner or the other. And as ambiguous as this passage may be it is not in their mind once this presupposition is accepted. To them it suddenly becomes very clear. And we know how they interpret **Matt. 5:31-32**. If a divorced person remarries they "**commit adultery**." And since they are still "*married*" in the eyes of God they now have "*two living wives*." And then this is where I Timothy and Titus kicks in—They cannot be a pastor because they now have "*...more than one wife*." The fact is, even if I could prove beyond the shadow of doubt that they are wrong in how they interpret the phrase "*...the husband of one wife*" here in our two texts. It solves nothing in their eyes—The divorced and remarried man still has two living wives. So in reality, this passage is not really the problem—it is primarily quoted because it makes those that hold this position sound like they have "Biblical support" which I strongly and openly question. They have used "assumptional interpretation." That is they have an assumed position and they interpret the text to match the assumption.

But before we get into the actual exposition of the phrase under question, let's look at some of the implications of "*...having two living wives*" or for that matter, "*having two living husbands*." If for instance, those folks that believe this is right, then what? What are the logical conclusions that come from that? The first and most serious implication of holding this position is that it goes directly against the Word of God. This idea of having two living wives or husbands after a divorce has taken place is alien to the Bible.

- Note the first proof: **Deu 24:1-2 KJV** *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give [it] in her hand, and send her out of his house. (2) **And when she is***

departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's [wife].

Now we have expounded upon this in a previous chapter, but it continues to be of crucial importance in every text having to do with the subject of divorce. According to the above passage, once a woman has been divorced, for whatever reason it was that her husband gave her a bill of divorcement, "...*she may go and be another man's wife.*" So this Old Testament text proves that divorce is a "*dissolution*" of the marriage and the one "*divorced*" or "*put away legally*" is free to remarry or to stay single. There is no inference, no innuendo, no implication, no hint, that this one that has been divorced is still married or obligated to her former husband in any way. There is no indication that she was to be despised; shamed; disgraced; or suffer any kind of retribution whatsoever. And what I am saying is, that according to the Old Testament, there is nothing that indicates a man has "...*two living wives*" after a legal divorce has taken place. Not only does this concept go against the revealed Word of God in the Old Testament, but I contend, and intend to prove, at least for my own satisfaction, that it is taught in the New Testament by Jesus himself and the other inspired writers of the New Testament. Note the following—

- ***Mat 5:31-32*** KJV *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: (32) But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

To make this short and sweet—Jesus is saying the same thing that Moses was saying in ***Deut. 24:1-4***. If you put away your wife, give her a "bill of divorcement." That is a legal divorce. After that she is free to marry another and would not be guilty of having two husbands here any more so than it was under the law of Moses. Secondly, do not put her away without a bill of divorcement. If you do that you will "cause" her to commit adultery. Why? Because she is still married and if she marries another while legally married she would be committing adultery. And the same is true for the other party that may marry her—If he married a woman that was "put away" without a legal divorce, then he too would be committing adultery. (The same word, "apolo" is used here for "to put away" and "divorce" and means to put away, not divorce. It can only be used in reference to divorce if a bill of divorcement has been given beforehand). The conclusion here is this—That Jesus is agreeing with the Law of God given by Moses. But then again He should, for I believe that it was He that gave the Law to Moses in the first place. We would certainly expect Him to be consistent with His own law. When the words of Jesus in ***Matthew 5:31-32*** are compared with the Law of God as given in ***Deut. 24:1-4***, we have perfect harmony. To say that a man or woman has two living

“mates” when God does not impose that upon them is to place a stigma upon them; to place a shame and reproach upon them; to place a sin upon them that does not exist. And when we do that then we, perhaps our church; and all who do so stigmatize; slander; and sin against those individuals.

Having looked at these possible interpretations in the light of other Scripture, the practice of comparing Scripture with Scripture, here is the interpretation which I believe to be correct. *“An elder (or deacon) must be of a character such that he is a one-woman kind of man.”* This position is not unique or original with me. Here’s how another commentary puts it:

“Husband of one wife: *The idea here is of “A one-woman man.” It is not that a leader must be married (if so, then both Jesus and Paul could not be spiritual leaders in our churches). Nor is the idea that leader could never remarry if his wife had passed away or was Biblically divorced. The idea is that is love and affection and heart is given to **one** woman, and that being his lawful and wedded wife. This means that the Biblical leader is not a playboy, an adulterer, a flirt, and does not show romantic or sexual interest in other women, including the depictions or images of women in pornography.”* David Guzik, “Bible Study Resources,” Enduring Word Media, http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.html.

I think the ideal situation would be that the pastor is not married so that he can dedicate himself completely to the work of the Lord. But the “ideal” and reality are often two different things. I do not know of any man that can do that. I’m sure that there are some like that or have been in history, but I don’t see how they could do that. And if they cannot do that then they should be married and that to one woman. And frankly, I believe that our texts in 1 Timothy and Titus simply is referring to a prohibition against polygamy. This is the most logical and simplest answer and the first conclusion one would come to by reading the text for the first time. In some of the cultures of the far east this was practiced. Paul is saying that a man who has more than one wife has more trouble than he can handle at home. He will not have time to take care of the church as he should. There may have also been a problem with a personal witness. For example, the Bible does not condemn the use of wine, but if you use wine in our country you can kiss your testimony goodbye. Paul may have been saying that for a preacher to have more than one wife, not only would he have time restraints and responsibility problems, but it would affect his testimony negatively even in that culture back then. Being allowed under law does not mean accepted by the culture. Notice the external evidence that would make the above argument seem reasonable. History does not show that polygamy was prolific during the time of Jesus and when the books of the Bible were being written. But none-the-less it did exist in Jewish society to a degree and in some other societies. Some perhaps to a lesser degree and certainly some to a greater degree. The following is giving as evidence to show that polygamy was certainly a problem (not the greatest one by any means) that the

early churches had to contend with—Please pardon the length of this article but I feel it is beneficial to present sufficient evidence to substantiate my argument:

EXAMPLES OF EARLY CHURCH FATHERS DEALING WITH POLYGAMY-- We might also point out that the post-NT church was likewise anti-polygamy: (Glen Miller, Christian Think Tank, [Polygamy in the NT period](http://www.christian-thinktank.com/), www.christian-thinktank.com/)

1. Justin Martyr (c.160) rebukes the Jews for allowing polygamy:
"Your **imprudent and blind masters** [i.e., Jewish teachers] even until this time **permit each man to have four or five wives**. And if anyone sees a beautiful woman and desires to have her, they quote the doings of Jacob." [ANF, vol. 1, p. 266]
2. Irenaeus (c.180) condemns the Gnostics for, among other things, polygamy:
"Others, again, following upon Basilides and Carpocrates, have introduced promiscuous intercourse and **a plurality of wives...**" [ANF, vol. 1, p.353]
3. Tertullian (c.207) was also explicit:
Chapter II. -Marriage Lawful, But Not Polygamy. "We do not indeed forbid the union of man and woman, blest by God as the seminary of the human race, and devised for the replenishment of the earth and the furnishing of the world, and therefore permitted, yet **Singly**. For Adam was the one husband of Eve, and Eve his one wife, one woman, one rib." (ANF: Tertullian, *To His Wife*)
4. Methodius (cf.290) was clear on the issue, arguing that it had stopped at the time of the Prophets:

"The contracting of marriage with several wives had been done away with from the times of the prophets. For we read, 'Do not go after your lusts, but refrain yourself from your appetites'...And in another place, 'Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.' This plainly forbids a plurality of wives." [ANF, vol. 6, p.312]

5. The Pseudo-Clementine Literature boasts about how St. Thomas taught the Parthians [i.e., an Iranian culture] to abandon polygamy:

"But I shall give a still stronger proof of the matters in hand. For, behold, scarcely seven years have yet passed since the advent of the righteous and true Prophet; and in the course of these, inert of all nations coming to Judaea, and moved both by the signs and miracles Which they saw, and by the grandeur of His doctrine, received His faith; and then going back to their own countries, they rejected the lawless rites of the Gentiles, and their incestuous marriages. In short, **among the Parthians-as Thomas, who is preaching the Gospel amongst them, has written to us-not many now are addicted to polygamy;** nor among the Medes do many throw their dead to dogs; nor are the Persians pleased with

intercourse with their mothers, or incestuous marriages with their daughters; nor do the Susian women practice the adulteries that were allowed them; nor has Genesis been able to force those into crimes whom the teaching of religion restrained. (ANF 8: "Book IX: Chapter XXIX.-The Gospel More Powerful Than 'Genesis.'")]

6. The Council of Neocaesarea a.d. 315 (circa) refers to a 'purification period' for polygamists. By that time, sinners had to 'sit out' of Church activities until they had demonstrated reformation. If a sin showed up on this list of canons, it was considered a 'bad sin'--and polygamy shows up here:

"*Ancient Epitome of Canon III. The time* (for doing penance and purification) of **polygamists is well known**. A zeal for penance may shorten it." [ANF]

7. Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea, mentioned it a number of times in his letters, generally concerning the period for exclusion from church for polygamists, calling it 'limited fornication'(!):

"IV. In the case of trigamy and polygamy they laid down the same rule, in proportion, as in the case of digamy; namely one year for digamy (some authorities say two years); **for trigamy men are separated for three and often for four years; but this is no longer described as marriage at all, but as polygamy; nay rather as limited fornication**. It is for this reason that the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, who had five husbands, "he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." He does not reckon those who had exceeded the limits of a second marriage as worthy of the title of husband or wife. In cases of trigamy we have accepted a seclusion of five years, not by the canons, but following the precept of our predecessors. Such offenders ought not to be altogether prohibited from the privileges of the Church; **they should be considered deserving of hearing after two or three years**, and afterwards of being permitted to stand in their place; **but they must be kept from the communion of the good gift, and only restored to the place of communion** after showing some fruit of repentance." [ANF: (Canonica Prima.)*To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons*. Letter CLXXXVIII written c.347.]

This is not the only evidence that polygamy was a problem in the New Testament era and one which continued to some degree in certain cultures several hundred years. Such a practice and such continuation would have elicited the words of Paul concerning a bishop and the most obvious interpretation is the correct one. But many commentators come to the same conclusion as I have on this issue. Does that make them correct because they agree with me on the Timothy and Titus text? Absolutely not. However, with the early church fathers and the conclusions that others have reached using proper

exegesis lends credence to the possibility that my proposition has just as much Biblical support; historical support; and commentary support as any other position. In fact I would conclude that the Biblical support is overwhelming in my favor as to the interpretation of these so-called "divorce" texts.

Note the comments of the famous Puritan Baptist Commentator, John Gill and his notes on 1 Timothy 3:2—

- ***"The husband of one wife; which is not to be understood in a mystical and allegorical sense of his being the pastor of one church, since the apostle afterwards speaks of his house and children, that are to be ruled and kept in good order by him, in distinction from the church of God; but in a literal sense of his conjugal estate; though this rule does not make it necessary that he should have a wife; or that he should not marry, or not have married a second wife, after the death of the first; only if he marries or is married, that he should have but one wife at a time; so that **this rule excludes all such persons from being elders, or pastors, or overseers of churches, that were "polygamists"; who had more wives than one at a time, or had divorced their wives, and not for adultery and had married others.**"***
- ***"Now polygamy and divorces had very much obtained among the Jews; nor could the believing Jews be easily and at once brought off of them. And though they were not lawful nor to be allowed of in any; yet they were especially unbecoming and scandalous in officers of churches. So the high priest among the Jews, even when polygamy was in use, might not marry, or have two wives, at once; if he did, he could not minister in his office until he divorced one of them" f44 . For it is written, (<032113> Leviticus 21:13), "he shall take a wife", **μῦτς αλῷ τῆ α**, "one, and not two" f45 . And the same that is said of the high priest, is said of all other priests; (see <264422> Ezekiel 44:22), likewise the Egyptian priests might not marry more wives than one, though others might have as many as they pleased" f46 : and so the Flamines among the Romans f47. (Emphasis mine) (Gill's Commentary, I Tim. 3:2).***

(A little disclaimer here—I do not agree with Gill that the references he gives of Lev. 21:13 and Eze. 44:22 says that a priest is to have only one wife. Both of the texts do say that when he takes a wife, with one exception, she should be a virgin. That is not the same as saying he is restricted from taking another wife who is also a virgin.)

Gill points out that the text is obviously referring to polygamy and nothing more. And we notice in the second paragraph above (and according to Gill) that once a priest, who had two wives was barred from ministering in the service of the Lord. If he divorced one of them

he was then free to minister in the service of the Lord as before. The divorce being no hindrance to his service in any way and evidently no blight upon his character or reputation. The early churches, with their Jewish heritage, would have certainly assumed that the husband of one wife would have referred to "one wife at a time" as was the custom for the High Priests. Since no other explanation is given it seems quite reasonable that we should accept it as first understood, i. e., in relation to polygamy.

Notice also that Gill is not the only notable commentator that agrees with this conclusion. The following is from the Commentary by Albert Barnes:

1Ti 3:2 - The husband of one wife -

*(1) It is the most obvious meaning of the language, and it would doubtless be thus understood by those to whom it was addressed. At a time when polygamy was not uncommon, to say **that a man should "have but one wife" would be naturally understood as prohibiting polygamy.***

*(3) There was a special propriety in the prohibition, if understood as prohibiting polygamy. **It is known that it was extensively practiced, and was not regarded as unlawful.** Yet one design of the gospel was to restore the marriage relation to its primitive condition; and though it might not have seemed absolutely necessary to require of every man who came into the church to divorce his wives, if he had more than one, yet, in order to fix a brand on this irregular practice, it might have been deemed desirable to require of the ministers of the gospel that they should have but one wife. Thus the practice of polygamy would gradually come to be regarded as dishonorable and improper, and the example and influence of the ministry would tend to introduce correct views in regard to the nature of this relation.*

Another comment, not from a commentary but from Robinson's Word Pictures. He says this concerning the "husband of one wife" in our text from 1 Timothy and Titus:

- **Of one wife** (*mias gunaikos*). *One at a time, clearly.*

The same might be said for certain cultures today. For example, if I was speaking of this subject in Utah, a culture that is rich in the tradition of polygamy, and said that a bishop must be the husband of one wife they would obviously conclude that I was saying that a bishop could not have multiple wives—that he must be monogamous. If Paul had been dealing with the married, divorced, and remarried issue it seems there would have been more of an explanation to avoid any misunderstanding. But divorce, or the putting away of a wife is not mentioned in this text. So it seems to me, that both by implication,

and by the facts of existing practices of multiple wives, that Paul was dealing with the problem of polygamy.

But let us consider the texts of **1 Timothy 3:2** and from **Titus 1:6** a bit further. We have seen that this text is restricting a deacon and a bishop to being a "*one woman kind of man.*" But there are other considerations to examine here. And one of the major considerations that come to the forefront in this text is that all these qualifications presented in the texts under study only apply to a man from the time of his salvation to the time of his consideration for the office of a bishop or deacon.

Now I will only deal with one of the words in the text and that is the word "blameless." A bishop or deacon must be "blameless." The fact is that if we go back and take their lost life into consideration then none would be blameless. No church that I know of holds any of their acts committed while in a lost condition against them, with the exception of divorce, when considering them as a candidate for the office of bishop or deacon. It seems quite strange, and somewhat hypocritical, that a murderer; a thief; a rapist; a liar; can all be saved and completely forgiven and go into the ministry and none of their past sins are even thought of or considered in relation to their calling and selection.

Yet, if a man has been a good (or not so good) man but has suffered a divorce this sin is still held against him forever and he is seen as unfit for the office of bishop or deacon. There are many things I do not know but I do know that when Jesus forgives sinners He forgives all their past sins.

- **Rom 3:25** *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

It seems to me that God has put these sins in the past and that for any of us to bring them up to use them against any man would be a great sin in itself. And yet that is exactly what many of us do when we bring up the sin of divorce against a man when he committed that sin before he was saved and the Word says that we have been forgiven for the "sins that are past" (i. e. before conversion). Even God Himself would not consider doing such a thing and He tells us so in His Word in the most vivid way possible.

- **Psa 103:12** *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

And furthermore we must consider that such a man may not have even been guilty of sin but rather the victim of divorce. It just happens that good moral men, who are good husbands and faithful to their wives, are victimized by ladies who are more like Jezebel than Ruth. For a man like this it is especially sinful that we might victimize him

the second time. And the worst thing about this is that he is often being victimized by those who call him "brother" and say they love him.

Now if my position is correct the above supposition would not be needed since I do not see that a legal divorce is a disqualification for the office of bishop or deacon. I include this in order to show how far some go in their effort to condemn and victimize those that have experienced the trauma of a divorce. Concerning this, notice the words of Ed Glasscock, Pastor of the Bethel Bible Church and notable author:

*"Divorce and remarriage, when committed outside the provisions for them in the Bible, are sins; but like any other sins, they can be forgiven and the believer cleansed. Once a person has come to Christ, all sins are forgiven and to claim that so long as a man stays married to his second wife, he is still living in sin is to ignore God's provision of mercy, to degrade the power of Christ's work, and to overlook God's forgiveness...Further, it is inconsistent to allow a divorced and remarried man to become a member of a church on the grounds that his previous sins have been adequately paid for through Christ and yet forbid him a leadership role because of his previous sins (which Christ removed by His death)...Certainly one cannot attempt to make the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 apply to a man's life before he is saved. If God has forgiven him and made him a part of His church, why do Christians hold his past sins against him? When one is saved, all his sins are forgiven (Col. 2:13), he becomes a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), his body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), he receives a new nature after God's own holiness (Eph. 4:24), he becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), and he becomes part of God's spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)...**Paul states that even adulterers (as in divorce and remarriage) were washed...sanctified...justified** (1 Cor 6:9-11)...For those concerned with the testimony of the church, let them consider which glorifies God more-that He takes an unworthy defiled human and makes him pure enough to become His servant (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12-16) or that though God forgives, He does not let a man's past sins be forgotten?...Is the church guilty of Peter's prejudice (Acts 10:9-16) so that God must also rebuke believers and say as He did to Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy"? It does not seem possible that by Paul's phrase in 1 Timothy 3:2 he intends to hold a man's pre-conversion sins against him.⁷⁰ 70 Glasscock, **"The Husband of One Wife Requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2,"** 252-53.*

Let me present one other argument in favor of the interpretation I am putting forward here. As the reader can see it is not original with me but is held by many good and learned men. And the point I now make is where the texts actually brings out the hypocrisy of those that seek to interpret the passage in **1 Tim. 3:2**, and **Titus 1:5-9** as

forbidding a man divorced in a lost state and later saved, from holding the office of a bishop or deacon.

And that point is that none of these of whom I know or have even heard of actually consider a man unqualified if he violates any of the other requirements that Paul presents:

1Ti 3:1-12 *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. (2) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; (3) Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; (4) One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (5) (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (6) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (8) Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; (9) Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. (10) And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. (11) Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. (12) Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Now I would like to list these qualifications:

Bishop:

1. Blameless.
2. Husband of one wife.
3. Vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach.
4. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy; patient. Not a brawler; not covetous.
5. Rules his own house well; children in subjection.
6. Not a novice.
7. A good reputation in the community.

Deacons:

1. Grave; not double tongued, not given to much wine; not greedy.
2. Hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
3. Be proven and blameless.
4. Husband of one wife.
5. Ruling their children and household well.

Now it is obvious to many of us that have been around for a while that something is not quite right here. And I admit my methods

are not scientifically correct. But any reasonably intelligent Pastor or Deacon, who has been around for a few years, can see and deduct that there are a great many pastors who fail in one or more of these qualifications other than the one referring to being the husband of one wife—And the thing is that we see this and we do not look upon any of these as disqualified; we still fellowship with them; we often hold them in high esteem.

I, like many that has eyes to see and a brain to figure out a few things, have seen many a deacon and pastors whose children were spoiled rotten while growing up and who were never in subjection to their parents and a disgrace to their home. Was that pastor ever considered “disqualified or asked to resign?” Absolutely not!

I know of a few other pastors, missionaries, and deacons who had no ability to teach—they could put you to sleep yet could not do a simple outline; organize a simple message; and yet we hold them in high esteem because they are a brother pastor and it never enters our little brains that one of the requirements of a pastor or deacon is that they “...*be apt to teach.*”

Now I could go on and on with this but a couple of examples should make my point. We Baptists have been utterly hypocritical on this matter as a group. There are exceptions and I thank God for them. But we do ourselves no good when the world can see such hypocrisy is us and when we act in such a hypocritical manner.

We often get on the “husband of one wife bandwagon” and march down the street with our banner of self-righteousness held high showing others how we hate this great sin of divorce and adultery and then we quietly sweep all the other failures in living up to these qualifications under the proverbial rug!

So we have seen from our texts in **1 Timothy 3:2** and in **Titus 1:5-9**, that Paul is almost certainly forbidding those who are polygamous from being bishops or deacons and nothing more. Secondly, we have seen that the evaluation and judgment of the candidates for the office of bishop or deacon can only take into consideration their life from the time of their salvation to the time of their call and examination. To go beyond this is simply taking the Word of God farther than it goes. And we have revealed the inconsistently of those who call themselves Baptist. ***“We have met the enemy and he is us!”***

CHAPTER EIGHT

DID PAUL MESS IT ALL UP?

(An examination of I Cor. 7:10-40)

Now some would say that Paul gives us something completely different in this letter to the Corinthians. First I present the text for examination. Then I will seek to examine each point that Paul makes and its relevance to the question of divorce. Note the text:

- (10) *"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: (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."*

The first thing Paul presents is the ideal marriage relationship and the ideal way to handle marital problems. In **Vs. 10-11**, he gives the standard. One man and one woman are to come together as man and wife and the woman is not to depart from her husband. I do not know of anyone that would argue with this standard. The only thing we might add here is that the same thing goes for the goose as for the gander—The husband should not depart from his wife. Now I believe that is also understood and so we will leave that part there.

Secondly we see if there arises a situation where the wife sees fit to depart from her husband she is to remain unmarried or to be reconciled to her husband. We must remember that Paul is putting forth the ideal standard of marriage and the ideal way to deal with it. The "remaining unmarried" is urged and even commanded with the goal of reconciling this woman to her husband.

And the second thing we notice here is an admonition toward the husband, *"and let not the husband put away his wife."* Now the word used here for "put away," simply means to "send forth." Obviously this is not a bill of divorcement. There is a Greek word to use for a divorce and this is not it. This is an admonition not to kick his wife out of the house; an admonition not to separate; and basically an encouragement to work things out which usually do not work out very well with the wife in one place and the husband in another.

The next issue that Paul deals with is one in which a Christian brother or sister is married to someone that is lost. Are they to divorce them or are they to stay with them?

- (12) *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.*
(13) *And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.*

Paul answers this issue as plainly as he can and there is little interpretation needed in the understanding of these verses. And the answer is this: *"If one mate or the other is lost the saved person is supposed to stay in a the marriage relationship in which they find themselves."*

And then he gives the reason for doing so...

(14) 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.

Now this is a controversial passage of Scripture that has been variously interpreted down through the centuries. Rather than give all those different interpretations that do not really relate to the subject of divorce I will give one which I believe is closer to the truth than any I know. To me the text is simply saying that the relationship of what would be an unholy relationship if neither party were saved is recognized of God as a holy relationship if either party in the marriage union is saved. God by grace, declares an unholy or worldly marriage, made without His leading and consent; made by our own carnal and selfish desires—holy.

This rendering makes sense also when we consider the phrase relating to the children of a marriage union of two lost parents. It is not a holy relationship. It is not sanctioned by God. And the children born to these parents is born, not of an adulterous relationship or an illegal relationship but an unholy one because it is done outside the will of God. Thus the children are not born of a holy relationship and are considered “unclean” in the eyes of God. And evidently when one or the other of such a relationship gets saved God pronounces both the relationship holy and the offspring of that relationship “clean.” And He does this by His grace and not because of anything in them. Once one of the parties is saved this marriage is looked upon by God as if it is one that was made in heaven or as one where two people in the will of God come together to be man and wife.

Now in reality all of this does not have too much to do with the subject of divorce. However, as we look at the remaining verses we see that they have very much to do with this subject. Notice the further instructions of Paul:

(15) But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. (16) For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? (17) But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

It is at this point that Paul deals with the subject of divorce although he does not specifically mention the word itself. But there is little doubt that this is the subject of what he is saying. Notice the very clear words:

- *“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.”*

Now if it ended here we might be prone to think he is referring to a separation as mentioned in the beginning of the text. But the words here and the even more dramatic and climatic words that follow shows he is referring to the saved person either being divorced by the unsaved or abandoned by their unsaved mate. In either case, Paul says, “...let him (or her) depart.” In a case like this the saved person is no longer required to wait to reconcile because the separation has gone beyond reconciliation. And when it does get to this point Paul adds the words...

- *“A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases...”*

Literally is “not enslaved” or “bound.” Even here there is dispute. Some would contend that this liberty to act is only to go ahead and live a life separate from the one that is departed but not necessarily the liberty to get a divorce and remarry. But it seems more likely and more logically that the innocent party here is free from their marriage bond if the unsaved person has departed (i.e., divorced them already). At least at this point there is no room for reconciliation and Paul is saying that the innocent party here is no longer “bound or enslaved” by a bond that has been broken by the other party. This is further supported and strengthened by the following verse in our study. Note the words of Paul once again:

- (27) *“Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. (28) But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.”*

In **Vs. 27** Paul gives a commandment for the saved partner of a relationship. If they are married they should not seek a divorce, i. e., to be loosed. Again as in the beginning of this text here in **1 Cor. 7**, Paul is dealing with the ideal situation and the need to be faithful to our marriage vows. But Paul is also pointing out in this text that there are some situations that are less than ideal and thus he gives the instructions or commandments to deal with them, and here in this text, the relationship between the believing mate and the unbelieving mate.

But we also notice here that if a partner has been “loosed” from a wife (or husband) and if and when they do remarry, “...*thou hast not sinned.*” Now this phrase takes all the way back to **Deuteronomy 24:2** where Moses said,

- “ *And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.*”

In other words God recognizes the divorce as the dissolution of the marriage and the party thus divorced was thus free to marry another and be sinless and innocent in doing so with no accusations to be brought against them. The two text are in complete agreement. As long as the party seeking to remarry has a bill of divorcement in his or her hand the marriage is legal and there is no adultery and there are not then two living wives or two living husbands as many, if not most proclaim.

Now to the text which causes many the most difficulty—

- (39) *The wife is bound by the law 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. (40) But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.*

This is used by many to say the marriage bond cannot be broken in spite of the fact that divorce dissolves the marriage completely and those thus legally divorced are free to remarry. How can both be true? That they are bound together as long as they live and yet there can be a legal and Scriptural divorce

where they are not longer bound to each other as husband and wife and certainly not as long as "...her husband liveth."

Actually it is very simple—The bill of divorcement dissolves the marriage just as death dissolves the marriage. They are bound together by their marriage vows before God and yet divorce allows them freedom to remarry if they are divorced. This is simply allowed because of the mercy of God who knew the sin of man and how many would be taken advantage of by way of the marriage relationship. The intention of divorce is to protect the innocent. The fact that even divorce is abused today does not mean that it still does not accomplish its purpose today as it did in the day of Moses.

CHAPTER NINE

DIVORCE AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

In this passage we have an example of the mess that some folks got themselves into because of their pursuit of sin. It certainly parallels the sins of our culture today and we all can point to similar circumstances about us. Now I do not relate all the things that the Bible says about this Samaritan woman who Jesus met at Jacob's well. I seek to keep this examination focused on our subject and so will present only the verses which relate to the subject:

- **Joh 4:16-19** *"Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. (17) The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: (18) For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. (19) The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."*

Notice first, when requested by Jesus to "...go, call thy husband, and come hither," that she responds with these words, "I have no husband." And then Jesus reaffirms that she has told the truth. Now those that hold to the position that for this to be true then all of her previous five husbands must all be dead. Is this true? We cannot prove that point beyond a shadow of doubt. However, it is very unlikely and against reasonable possibility that this claim is true. The thing Jesus is doing here is revealing her sinfulness and not to commend her for being faithful to five husbands and staying with them until death. This was not a good and moral woman as obviously bought out by the fact that she was now living with a man to whom she was not married. The bringing up of the "five previous husbands" is obviously to reveal her wicked and sinful past so that she will see that she is a violator of the law of God; that she is condemned; and that she needs a Savior. However, whatever sin she had been guilty of, if indeed she had sinned, it had to fall within the category of uncleanness as given in **Deut. 24: 1-2** since if she had been guilty of adultery she would have been put to death. But there are other possibilities here. Shawan R. B. Atteberry states in her article entitled "The Samaritan Women" gives two other very reasonable possibilities:

"When Jesus told her to go get her husband we find out that this woman has had five husbands, and was now living with a man who was not her husband. Many commentators have jumped to the conclusion that she was an immoral woman who had been divorced five times (O'Day, 384). Yet, John 4 never says she was divorced. There are at least two other possible reasons why this woman has had five husbands."

"One possibility is that she was unable to have children (the biblical language is "she was barren;" cf. Gen 11:30). In a culture

that placed supreme importance on having children, especially sons, barrenness was solid ground for divorce (cf. Deut 24:1). So it is possible that the men had married her, then found out that she couldn't have children so divorced her to marry more fertile women.

She could also be trapped by the Levirate marriage law. Her five husbands could have been brothers for whom she was supposed to produce an heir (Matt. 22:24-28). Either the family ran out of sons or the next son could have refused to marry her. That she was living with a man now who was not her husband could have been the lesser of two evils. Since the culture provided economic security only within family structures, her only other choice after husband number five died or divorced her could have been prostitution. Regardless of why the woman had had five husbands, **the implication is still that she is a woman who cannot keep a man.**" (Shawana R. B. Atteberry, "The Samaritan Woman," at the web site "Voice- Biblical & Theological Resources for Growing Christians, www.crive.org).

Now the point in all this, regardless for the reasons of her obvious multiple divorces. This text plainly declares that she "For thou hast had five husbands..." These are the words of Jesus and they are authoritative. Excluding the possibility that all five of these husbands were now dead and there is no commentary that I know of, nor Biblical scholar that I can find that takes the position that all of these previous husbands were dead. One or two having died may be a reasonable conclusion but to go beyond that is stretching the text beyond reason. And if that were the case, then why would Jesus even bring it up? There is some sin involved in these previous relationships and the dissolution of these marriages and evidently the woman was to blame to some degree. It was obvious it was something she was ashamed of and something she sought to hide from Jesus. And it is just as obvious that Jesus was using the sin involved in the past relationship and the sin of the relationship in which she was now in to bring to see her sinfulness before God.

The conclusion is simple. If Jesus said she "had," past tense, five husbands, then Jesus recognized the dissolution of marriage by divorce. I have examined some fifteen different translations, from the conservative to the somewhat liberal, and all agree concerning the tense. We see also in the Greek as presented by Robertson's Word Pictures that the word is also in the past tense:

- **For thou hast had five husbands** (*pente gar andras esches*).
"For thou didst have five men." Second aorist (constative)
active indicative of *echō*.

Furthermore, Jesus substantiates this fully when He himself says, "Thou hast well said, I have no husband..." In other words, "You

have told the truth—you now have no husbands.” And the only conclusion we can draw logically and reasonably from this text is that Jesus understood Biblical divorce and the grounds upon which it could be granted. He understood that this woman had been divorced multiple times. And He accepted the obvious that she was no longer married to all five or any one of them. It is obvious that each of these husbands had obeyed the Law of Moses and given her a bill of divorcement as required and the marriage unions were dissolved.

Once again, in this case, as in all the others we have examined, we have seen that they all are in perfect harmony with the original revelation on divorce as given in Deuteronomy 24. And it is the case once again that those who hold to no legal divorce, or that the divorced and remarried are living in adultery, find themselves totally at odds with the Word of God. Divorce does indeed sever the marriage relationship completely.

CHAPTER TEN

DOES GOD REALLY HATE DIVORCE? (MALACHI 2:16).

It is a common occurrence among us Baptists to hear the phrase that "*God hates divorce.*" The fact is that nowhere in the Bible does it say that God hates divorce, but that still doesn't stop many preachers, pastors, and even scholars to declare quite dogmatically "*God hates divorce.*" Note the following, quite typical quote by Roy Davison: "*God hates divorce because of the damage it does. 'For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, 'for it covers one's garment with violence,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously'" (Malachi 2:16). Davidson, Roy Allen, Published in **The Old Paths Archive** (<http://www.oldpaths.com>)*

Now let us look at what ***Malachi 2:16*** really says:

*"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."*

Now we notice that the text does not use the word for a bill of divorcement that we studied in earlier chapters as presented in ***Deuteronomy 24:1-4***. To take this text and make it speak of a divorce is taking it farther than the Bible does. And once again, we that are Baptists should be the first to pick up on the stretching of truth in this manner because we are one of the main proponents, and defenders, of the historical- grammatical method of interpreting the Scriptures. To take this text beyond what it is saying literally is to violate one of our basic principles.

The second thing that gives us a clear understanding of this text is the context.

Mal 2:14-16 "*Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, **against whom thou hast dealt treacherously**: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. (15) And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, **and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.** (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 notice, when looking at the context, that Malachi is dealing with abuse by the Hebrew men of the wives of their youth. Notice that according to **Vs. 14**, they "...*hast dealt treacherously...*" Then in **Vs. 15**, Malachi says "...*and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.*" And it is repeated the third time in **Vs. 16**, "...*that ye deal not treacherously.*" Whatever was taking place was a sin against the wife of their youth. Now obviously this was not an act of divorce. Moses had given them permission to divorce their wives if some "*uncleanness*" was found in them as long as they gave them a bill of divorcement. Such an act would not have been described as "...*dealing treacherously with their wives,*" because they would have been dealing with their wives as the law prescribed. To do as the law prescribed was not necessarily sin. However, I do admit that on occasion one can use the keeping of the law as an instrument of evil and that is true even of what would be considered a "legal" or "Scriptural" divorce. But with that said, it certainly appears that these Israelites were doing something else besides getting a divorce according to the law of Moses as stated in **Deut. 24: 1-4**.

Now it is obvious that what was going on here is that these men were putting away their wives without the benefit of divorce. First of all the word translated here as "*putting away*" is the Hebrew word "*shalach*" which refers to putting away without a bill of divorcement. Once again we see the "*hardness of heart*" of which Jesus later mentioned as the reason that divorce was implemented or allowed by Moses in the first place. It is not the divorcement that is hated in this text but the putting away of one's wife without the benefit of divorcement thus once again victimizing her and leaving her without means of support or options. It was indeed a cruel and treacherous act to foster upon the wife of one's youth to whom you had sworn allegiance and whom you now put away, more than likely, for some more beautiful and younger wife. Notice the meaning of the word "*treacherously*" as used here to get a sense of the cruelty being described:

- "BAGDAD," *A primitive root; to cover (with a garment); figuratively to act covertly; by implication to pillage: - deal deceitfully (treacherously, unfaithfully), offend, transgress (-or), (depart), treacherous (dealer, -ly, man), unfaithful (-ly, man), X very. (Strong's).*

Since the man could have more than one wife and since there was no public blight on his character if he did so, he then could have dismissed his wife, as some were evidently doing, take another wife and go about his life and leaving the dismissed wife to fend for herself.

So does God hate divorce? I don't believe that the Bible teaches us anywhere that God hates divorce. I do believe the Bible teaches

that He hates the sin that leads to a divorce and it's possible that He hates those divorces that are for evil purposes but that does not make all divorces sin or something that God would necessarily hate.

In looking at **Malachi 2:16** we see that when properly interpreted it harmonizes perfectly with all the other text dealing with divorce and putting away that we have presented.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IS GOD DISQUALIFIED TO BE GOD?

Now I obviously speak as a fool here but I do so to make a point. What many do not realize is that God is divorced and the fact that He has been divorced is also illustrative and instructional in relation to the general subject of divorce itself. Notice the texts of which I speak:

- **Isa 50:1** *Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, **whom I have put away?** or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.*
- **Jer 3:8** *And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery **I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce;** yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.*

In these two verses we see that God pictures himself as one that has experienced a divorce. In this case we see that it is according to the Law as given to Moses in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. In the first instance there is "uncleanness" found in Israel and thus on the grounds of that uncleanness God issues a bill of divorcement to Israel.

So the law of God is satisfied and no sin can be charged against God because He kept His own law as given to Israel by way of Moses. God issued a bill of divorcement as required and then He put away Israel in compliance with the Law. Israel is therefore no longer the wife of Jehovah—she has been put away legally.

Now the implication of this action on the part of God is extremely important to the subject of divorce. First of all, we see that the act of divorce, when on the proper grounds and in compliance with the Law of Moses is not sin. No one can accuse God of sin. To do so would be foolish, presumptuous, and maybe a little dangerous. God chose to comply to the Law He had given Moses and in the process validating the truth that divorce itself is not always sin.

Now the second thing we notice in this is that divorce severs the relationship—Israel is no longer married to God in any sense once the bill of divorcement has been given and the wife (Israel) is put away. She thus becomes an ex-wife and there remains no marriage union between the two.

Now it may be argued that God has not remarried and that is true. But it is also true that God has divorced Israel and yet He is still married—to Judah which is referred to quite often as Israel, especially in the New Testament and in prophecy. Even though Judah had committed the same sin and had been punished by the destruction of

Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews, there is no Biblical record of a bill of divorcement or a hint of the possibility that God has forsaken and divorced Judah as He did Israel. I realize some, from their position in eschatology, will make the claim that Israel has been cast off forever. However, no such separation as God gave to Israel with His bill of divorcement has ever been issued to Judah. Now I do not get into the complexity as to how Judah is now called Israel for that is another field of study where we may agree or disagree upon but lends nothing to the subject of divorce.

Now I have presented all this in this little chapter to make the point that God did not see divorce as a sin when done according to the Law. Therefore, we can make a solid assumption that if a man or woman puts away their spouse, according to the law, i.e., finding some uncleanness in them, then they do not sin either. To denigrate someone because of a divorce when we do not understand the circumstances that led to that divorce puts us in the position of making a judgment when we have no right to do so.

The following is an example of how bias many have become because of their traditional view of divorce and how, once again, we make a victim out of those that have been divorced. The strange thing about this one and the reason I put it here in this chapter instead of the chapter dealing with examples how divorce hurts and victimizes so many is that in this case—God Himself could not enroll in their Seminary.

- *Note—By action of the Board of Trustees, no one who has been divorced or who is married to a divorced person may be admitted as a student. Prospective students who are separated from spouses will not be accepted. **Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA. 1.800.451.2287 from their web site at <http://www.bbc.edu/seminary> .***

The conclusion—Obviously not every divorce is sin, at least for one party or the other. The divorce may very well be because of sin in one party, as it was with Israel. Yet the innocent party does not commit sin when he, or she, puts away the offending party by a legal bill of divorcement. Once again, to take divorce itself any farther than that is taking it farther than the Bible takes it. I close this chapter with a quote from Joe M. Sprinkle:

"But, you might say, it is absurd to suppose that God's divorce with Israel disqualifies him as leader in the Church. After all, he is God. And I agree. But does not this example show it to be equally absurd to adopt a rigid rule that permanently and unconditionally, regardless of all mitigating circumstances, excludes from church leadership everyone who has undergone a divorce?"

I draw two conclusions from this analogy. (1) Divorce can be morally justified, since it is not likely that God would portray himself as performing a sinful act. Hence we may assume that initiating a divorce is not under all circumstances sinful. (2) Though I am

admittedly pressing the analogy to its limits, this passage suggests that divorce does not always disqualify someone from leadership among God's people, since to say that is to exclude God as leader of the Church." Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Dec 1997 by Sprinkle, Joe M.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“DOES A COVENANT REALLY MEAN UNTIL DEATH DO US PART?”

An examination of Romans 7:2-3

In this chapter we want to look at the charge often made that the marriage covenant can only be dissolved at the death of one party or the other in the marriage relationship. Is this charge true? That is the question before us here! Now we have examined this earlier but not in relation to the marriage covenant itself.

Notice carefully the quote by Bro. Burns, whom we quoted earlier as supporting the traditional view of divorce which I am challenging in this thesis:

*"Turn to **Romans 7:2-3**: "For the woman which hath an husband **is BOUND BY THE LAW [OF GOD, NOT MAN] to her husband SO LONG AS HE LIVETH**; but IF her 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: but IF her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." **Anyone who is married a SECOND TIME (or more) while there is a LIVING PARTNER is STILL BOUND BY GOD'S LAW TO THE FIRST PARTNER.**" (Highlights mine). From the tract "Divorce and Remarriage," by C. Burns).*

In reading this it is easy to see that there is no wiggle room in the traditional position. All divorces are a violation of the law of God; all divorces are invalid; and all who divorce and remarry are living in adultery. This position completely excludes any other Scripture which opposes and contradicts it and assumes that a covenant, once made, cannot be broken.

It will be my purpose to present the evidence that 1) A marriage covenant is made when a man and woman marry, 2) The covenant they make is conditional, and 3) A violation of this covenant is grounds for divorce according to Scripture. In reality, I have already proven this by the evidence presented in dealing with the other issues on marriage and divorce. But yet I feel a need to focus a little more attention on this particular issue—so here I go again.

Before we examine our text in **Romans 7:2-3** we first want to note that marriage, according to Scripture, is the forming of a covenant voluntarily entered into by the bride and groom. I quote once again **Mal 2:14** "Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been

*witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and **the wife of thy covenant.**"*

In Proverbs we have another verse describing the wicked woman and the danger she poses to a young man. Note how this woman is described: **Pro 2:17** "*Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, **and forgetteth the covenant** of her God.*" This is an obvious reference to one that has been married and who has violated the marriage covenant and become either a prostitute or a loose woman. She, by her behavior has violated her covenant of faithfulness to her husband and played the harlot much as did the wife of Hosea. Whether a divorce has taken place or not in this situation is not the question. She is guilty of violating the marriage covenant regardless whether she has been given a bill of divorcement or just put away as the men did far too often. It is not the circumstances of this woman's situation that is relevant to us but the fact that she had been in a covenant relationship with her husband and had now violated that covenant. The point— marriage is a covenant relationship.

Every preacher that has performed a wedding is very familiar with the exchange of the wedding and ring vows of the marriage service. Each marriage partner exchanges pledges of fidelity. Since there are many types of wedding ceremonies used today I present for an example an excerpt from a very traditional wedding ceremony to make my point—

TO THE MAN: _____, do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife? And do you solemnly promise, before God and these witnesses, that you will love, honor, cherish her; and that, forsaking all others for her alone, you will perform unto her all the duties that a husband owes to his wife, until God, by death, shall separate you? **(Man replies: "I do").**

TO THE WOMAN: _____, do you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband? And do you solemnly promise, before God and these witnesses, that you will love, honor, and cherish him; and that, forsaking all others for him alone, you will perform unto him all the duties that a wife owes to her husband, until God, by death shall separate you? **(The woman replies: "I do"). (Traditional Wedding Ceremony, Adapted from various sources, Richard D. Adams. 2008).**

Notice the commitment of each: "To love, honor, and cherish, forsaking all others for their mates alone; to perform the duties of a wife and husband, until separated by death." And usually a ring is exchanged and expected to be worn by the wedding couple as a sign of their fidelity to one another. These are solemn vows made before God and what we would call the making of a covenant. Notice the definition of a covenant:

- *an agreement, usually formal, between two or more persons to do or not do something specified. (www.edictionary.com).*
- *1 a: the quality or state of being faithful b: accuracy in details : **EXACTNESS**2: the degree to which an electronic device (as a record player, radio, or television) accurately reproduces its effect (as sound or picture)*
- *synonyms **FIDELITY, ALLEGIANCE, FEALTY, LOYALTY, DEVOTION, PIETY** mean faithfulness to something to which one is bound by pledge or duty. **FIDELITY** implies strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty <marital fidelity>. (Merriam-Webster Online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>)*

When one party, or the other, violates this covenant the other party then has grounds for divorce, for in effect, the guilty party has been unfaithful. Unfaithfulness is not necessarily the act of adultery but the act of violating the marriage covenant. It is infidelity! In other words, adultery itself is only one act, among many others, that could be considered an act of unfaithfulness to their wedding vows. Once that covenant is violated the offended party has liberty, according to the Scriptures, to divorce the offending party. Is this always the right thing to do? Probably not. Can even this liberty be abused? Certainly it can. However, it is much like the instruction given in **I Corinthians 7:15**, where Paul declared " *But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.*" In other words, if the unbelieving depart he or she has broken the covenant of faithfulness and the innocent party is free to pursue a new life after a bill of divorcement has been given. If they are pleased to dwell with the believer Paul instructs them to stay. Why should they stay? Simply because being lost does not mean that one has violated their oath of fidelity.

Now here's a bit of opinion. The uncleanliness described in the divorce passage of Deuteronomy 24 is a bit vague simply because the marriage covenant of different cultures may be a bit different as well as evolving over time. By being purposely vague the uncleanliness is determined, in some cases, by the custom of the culture. For example consider the Jewish culture and the state of marriage itself. Women in that culture had very few rights and they were placed into a position where they had very little recourse if the marriage did not go well. They could freely be abused, at least to a degree, and the man who did so would still be respected in the community. In contrast to that culture we should consider our own which places equal responsibility in marriage upon both the man and woman. What would be considered grounds for divorce in our culture may not always have been considered grounds of divorce in theirs. In some cultures a woman that would hug another man in a simple greeting might be considered loose, a flirt, and as disrespectful to her husband. If it happened more than once and the husband was shamed and insulted by the act he could consider it an act of "uncleanliness." In our culture we are more

than likely to look at such a greeting just as a greeting and nothing more.

Another example of such a thing is the Muslim culture and their custom of requiring their women to dress modestly to the point of wearing a head-covering and a dress covers the arms and reaches to the ground. To wear less would be a disgrace to her husband. Whereas here in America we would not consider the way a person dresses as grounds for divorce at all.

The point I am making is that the "*uncleanliness in any culture*" is either stated or understood in the making of the marriage covenant. We can go back to the Garden of Eden and see the example of the first marriage where we notice that God joined Adam and Eve together in **Gen 2:23-24**, "*And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (24) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*" One cannot help but see in this the very foundation to our own marriage vows as represented in the example given in this chapter. The man and the woman are to begin a new family and cleave unto each other and become one flesh. The idea of one flesh is that each will love and be faithful to the other as long as they shall live. This is the ideal standard that God gave and it has never changed. It is still what God expects from those that exchange marriage vows and willingly enter into the marriage union.

In summation, the text from Romans 7 simply presents the ideal situation in the marriage union to show how the believer is now dead to the law and free to have a new relationship and union with Christ. Because a marriage partner is free to marry another after death so too is the believer free after dying to the Law in Christ. Each is now free to have a new relationship. Secondly, we have seen that a marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, each making pledges of faithfulness to each other and if there is an act of infidelity then the covenant has been violated and the offended party is free to write a bill of divorcement. And thirdly, the uncleanliness spoken of in Deuteronomy is simply any failure of the marriage covenant whether spoken, written, or just understood.

Once again divorce is a means that God has provided to protect the innocent. We have seen this to be true in both Testaments.

CHAPTER 13

DOES GOD EVER APPROVE OF DIVORCE?

An examination of Ezra 9 & 10

In answer to the question I believe we can safely say yes! The incidence of which I speak is recorded in Ezra, chapter 10. Notice **Vs. 1-3** which describes the problem leading up to the divorces that take place in the latter part of the chapter:

Ezra 10:1-3 *"Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. (2) And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, **We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land:** yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. (3) **Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.**"*

The sin of Israel was that some of the men had taken to themselves wives from forbidden tribes which was leading to a breakdown in the moral fabric of the nation as it had done many times before. Ezra saw the great danger in this and was moved to take action to solve the problem and to purify the nation from these pagan religions and their influence from those that had married these foreigners. In **Ezra 9:1-2**, we see the nationalities of these wives and the presentation of the sin to Ezra.

Ezra 9:1-2 *"Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. (2) For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass."*

We notice that the children of Israel were to be a separate people but some had married these pagan wives in violation of the commandment of God. Ezra evidently had not known of this previously and was told of the sin by the princes mentioned in the text. He

immediately rents his clothes in grief and begins to pray in repentance for himself and the nation. In chapter ten we see that a large crowd had gathered before Ezra when they heard of his grief and repentance over the sin. It appears that the people were also grieved over the sin they had committed or tolerated in their midst. It is hard to tell if they were more grieved over the sin or over the possibility that they may have to separate themselves from their pagan wives and the children by them.

The next thing in this sequence of events is the declaration by "*Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam.*" It may have been that Ezra himself was too grieved over this issue at the time to do anything other than mourn. We see that Shechaniah puts forth a solution to the problem in a very simple straight-forward manner:

"Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law." (Ezra 10:3).

He was proposing that the ones guilty of marrying pagan wives enter into an agreement (a covenant) to put away their pagan wives and the children born by them. Notice that there were not merely to be "put away" as has been mentioned before without the benefit of a bill of divorcement, but put away on this occasion "...according to the law." The "law" here is a clear reference to the only law given concerning divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which we have discussed in detail.

In that law given in Deuteronomy 24 there must be the presence of some kind of "*uncleanliness*" found in the wife to warrant the bill of divorce. In this case the uncleanliness was simply the pagan and idolatrous religion of their wives. But there is one other factor which adds to the "*uncleanliness*" as required under the law in this situation here with Ezra. It certainly appears that the uncleanliness was not just the pagan religion but also the unwillingness to repent of it and to convert to Judaism. I offer three evidences which would point to this conclusion:

- 1) Rehab the harlot and her family—they too were pagans and idol worshippers but were spared from the destruction of Jericho and accepted into the Jewish community as their own. Why? Because they converted to Judaism. That is obvious by the confession of Rehab about the God of the Hebrews.
- 2) Secondly, we have the story of Ruth and Naomi. I assume the reader knows the details of this story. Ruth was also a pagan and an idol worshipper, but with the death of her husband she chose to follow her mother-in-law and took Naomi's "*God as her God.*"
- 3) Thirdly, there are only one hundred and thirteen that are named as being guilty of marrying these pagan wives and expected to put

them away according to the law. It seems that there were certainly more marriages than this with others of the pagan faith but the reason so few are named in the divorce list is that most of the other pagan marriage had resulted in the wives converting to Judaism. If they had so converted, as I propose here, they could not have then divorced them for there would have been no grounds for doing so any more than there would have been against Rehab and Naomi.

Now back to our opening question "*Does God ever approve of divorce?*" I think that this text from Ezra clearly shows that these divorces were approved of God.

First, we have Ezra the prophet leading the people to cleanse themselves from paganism so they would be pleasing to the Lord by obeying the Law and purifying themselves. Secondly, it seems that the wrath of God, in some manner, was felt by the people. Notice ***Ezra 10:14 KJV*** "*Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, **until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.***" The word "until" clearly shows they were experiencing the wrath of God in some sense and that God had revealed their sin which had brought this wrath upon them—the continuing relationship with unrepentant pagan wives! It was the time to repent and make things right and under the leadership of the prophet Ezra, and according to the will of God, they both repented and departed from their sin by divorcing these unrepentant wives.

This text in Ezra is a difficult text for those that do not believe in divorce on any grounds for here God obviously approves of divorce if not actually leading these men to divorce their pagan wives. If they leave their pagan wives and are still yet married to them and then take Jewish wives they would commit adultery. Once again we would have God sanctioning sin, at the very least, if not leading them to sin, at the very worst. This cannot be. The only possible conclusion left is that divorce severs the marriage union and those thus legally divorced are free to marry another.

CHAPTER 14

THE “CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT ARGUMENT!”

One of the strongest arguments in favor of my position, as presented in the previous chapters, is that it is completely consistent with every passage relating to divorce and putting away. The problem with the traditional view is that it is completely inconsistent with other texts dealing with the subject of divorce and putting away. In other words my position harmonizes both the Old and New Testament texts while the traditional view has them contradicting each other. The reason this is important is simple—there are no contradictions in the Bible. There are no inconsistencies. If such exist once we have come to the conclusion of a matter then the problem lies with us and not the Bible. It means our interpretation of the passage has been faulty rather than the Scriptures in error. Therefore the responsibility for us is to accept the fact that there is something defective in our position and then to correct it.

Now let me make the point using some texts that we have already carefully examined and truth that the Bible has clearly declared:

- 1) According to **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, divorce ends the marriage and the divorced are free to remarry. This is what the Bible clearly declares.
- 2) The traditional view says that divorce does not sever the marriage relationship and that the woman (or man) is married to their first mate for life with absolutely no exceptions. Now I realize that some will say that adultery is grounds for divorce but even these will usually also say that the divorced are not free to remarry and if they do they will be living in adultery.

The inconsistency of the traditional view is simple—In one place they have to admit (Well, they may not actually admit it!) that divorce ends the marriage relationship, and if not, they have God approving of both divorce, remarriage, and the subsequent adultery that would follow by holding to their position. We stated before that this would have God approving adultery for all those that had a bill of divorcement and whom had remarried. Then when the traditionalist gets to the New Testament they have to come up with a different meaning for the word “divorce.” It now doesn’t mean a severing of the marriage bond at all but only a separation. Neither party therefore is free to remarry without entering into a perpetual state of adultery.

This may not seem too important to some but inconsistencies and contradictions in our doctrine pose some very clear implications. After all, we as Baptists are in the forefront of defending the Bible as the Word of God. We openly declare that there are no contradictions in the Word of God (And that is true). If we then take an inconsistent or contradictory position we undermine our own credibility. Some may think that the divorce issue is so small that few would notice an inconsistency in this area but I contend that the divorce issue is of major proportions and effecting so many that are divorced and those relating to them that our lack of consistency on this position has more negative impact than we might imagine.

But the traditionalists are not only inconsistent with the way they interpret texts in the Old Testament as compared with the New Testament, they are also inconsistent with the way they interpret text within the same Testament.

The second area of inconsistency in the traditionalists position is the one of marriage and exactly what is a marriage and when is a man and woman really married? I quote from Bro. Steve Flinchum's little book on divorce as to when marriage takes place:

*"A good example of some of the marriage customs of the Jewish people of the time Jesus was born is found in **Matthew 1:18-25**. After the prospective bride and groom had been selected they would become espoused to each other. There would be a meeting of the prospective bride and groom with their parents or family when vows would be made and contracts signed. From that time the two were legally bound, "**espoused**," as husband and wife (v. 19-20). The marriage was usually not consummated at that time and typically might be as much as a year later. During that time the two were legally bound as husband and wife."*

Bro. Flinchum goes on to say "Joseph was considering divorce because it seemed to him that his wife had been unfaithful to him. If Mary's being found with child had not been of the Holy Ghost, or of himself, he would have had scriptural grounds for divorce and would then be free from any obligation to her. The marriage had not yet been consummated." Bro. Flinchum holds to the position that a marriage is not yet a marriage until consummated by sexual intercourse and yet in the previous statement he claims that "*...the two were legally bound as husband and wife.*" Now that appears, at least in my little feeble mind, to be inconsistent. Notice what another says.

In a printed sermon by Evangelist Paul Ragland he contends that the espousal of Mary and Joseph was not an actual marriage on one hand and that it is a marriage on the other. In other words if Mary had been unfaithful before they came together as husband and wife then the act of unfaithfulness would have been fornication instead of adultery. He states, "*They also had to go before a judge and write a bill of divorcement, but it was before they had ever been to the*

marriage altar or the marriage bed.” Let me add a few more comments he makes on this subject:

“Now then if during this betrothal period, uncleanness was found in the woman, even then they had to go before the court and the judge and there had to be a written bill of divorcement given to break an engagement but no place in the Bible is there any mention of a divorce after the marriage altar or the marriage bed...but you see this bill of divorcement was before a marriage altar.”

“Moses said the only thing a bill of divorcement was for was during the espousal or betrothal before the marriage altar. After it goes there, it is death then no divorce. Death is the only thing the Bible teaches that dissolves marriage.”

It is needful here to examine the claims of Bro. Ragland to see if his very dogmatic claim is as he says. First, we notice that the text (**Deut. 24:15**) which we have quoted and noted extensively does not make such a distinction between a so-called betrothal period and the marriage union itself. Bro. Ragland assumes, without presenting one iota of Scripture evidence, that they are not legally married until the union has been consummated physically. In fact Bro. Ragland’s statement is completely contrary to the very text he quotes. Notice what the Bible actually says about the relationship between Mary and Joseph in **Mat 1:18-20**, “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (19) **Then Joseph her husband**, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee **Mary thy wife**: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*”

If the Holy Spirit looks upon them as husband and wife how can any saved person rise to the occasion to refute such clear revelation. It is obvious they are just as much as husband and wife at this point as they were when the marriage was consummated physically. That is why Joseph would have needed a bill of divorcement at this point even as he would need a bill of divorcement if an act of uncleanness had been discovered after they had come together physically. The problem with Bro. Ragland’s (and the traditional) position is simple—he must invent some way to get around the facts. Those who have changed the original marriage union into an engagement period have done exactly that and it is simply wrong. Since they are just as married when they exchange their vows as they are when they come together physically makes the passage in **Deuteronomy 24:1-5** very clear—The bill of divorcement is referring to a legal and Scriptural divorce—a dissolution of the marriage at any time in that marriage. Bro. Ragland’s claim, “*Death is the only thing the Bible teaches that dissolves marriage*” is in direct contradiction and opposition to what the passage really declares.

Another problem Bro. Ragland’s position poses is “*Just exactly when does the marriage take place?*” If not at the point of the

“espousal” as it did between Joseph and Mary—then when. In other words if Joseph and Mary were not actually married when they were first “espoused” as Bro. Ragland claims, then when were they married? Since there were no further ceremonies or exchanging of vows after the initial espousal does the act of intercourse make them “married?” Now I know some preachers who claim such an outlandish and foolish thing but I don’t know many that would go that far. And yet if the sex act does not join them together as husband and wife—what does? If the sex act joins them together as husband and wife then you have a lot of Baptist preachers who had premarital sex before they were saved and would thus be classified as having “multiple wives” since they had become “one flesh” by the physical relationship and polygamous because they have never given any a bill of divorcement. Even here, we are forced to go back at the original espousal and say this (the espousal) was when they become husband and wife just as the Bible declares for Mary and Joseph. The “*espousal*” was not an engagement but rather a wedding ceremony. The traditionalists are consistently inconsistent on their claims and completely undermine their position with those inconsistencies and contradictions.

In Bro. Ragland’s little book he makes another statement that is just not accurate. Notice the statement: *“One of the greatest preachers that ever walked the face of the earth got his head cut off because he preached on divorce (Referring to John the Baptist). I guess this the reason it scared a lot of other preachers. Now notice here in **Mark 6:18**, “For John said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.”* This conclusion is at odds with the facts. Bro. Ragland is claiming that John the Baptist was saying that Herod’s wife was still the wife of his brother Phillip even though she had supposedly divorced Phillip, Herod’s brother. Now Bro. Ragland is half right. Notice the comments of Albert Barnes on this passage:

Mat 14:3-5, For Herod had laid hold on John ... - See Mar 6:17-20; Luk 3:19-20. *“This Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was first married to Herod Philip, by whom she had a daughter, Salome, probably the one that danced and pleased Herod. Josephus says that this marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias took place while he was on a journey to Rome. He stopped at his brother’s; fell in love with his wife; agreed to put away his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, King of Petraea; and Herodias agreed to leave her own husband and live with him. **They were living, therefore, in adultery;** and John, in faithfulness, though at the risk of his life, had reproved them for their crimes. Herod was guilty of two crimes in this act:...”*

1. Of “adultery,” since she was the wife of another man.
2. Of “incest,” since she was a near relation, and such marriages were expressly forbidden, Lev 18:16.

This is inconsistent theology when we take a text that is dealing with one issue—the illicit marriage of Herodias and Herod and then try

and make it appear that the text is dealing with the subject of divorce. Barnes points out the two objections of John the Baptist—Herodias was still married to Herod's brother and of such relation that any relationship to them would have been a violation of the Law as given in **Lev 18:16** "*Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness.*" There is a great need here for us to be consistent with the Word of God. It is my belief that the evidence presented here show that the traditional belief on divorce continually puts its defenders into untenable and contradictory positions as they try to untangle the maze of problems their position creates by its inconsistent nature.

CHAPTER 15

“DOES THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD SET A PRECEDENT?”

In the response to my book on the subject of divorce one of the first questions I was asked was about the Old Testament Law in the book of Leviticus that forbid a priest from marrying a woman that had been divorced. I knew I would miss something. I suppose that the argument in the mind of those that thought of this is that divorce did disqualify a man from the priesthood in the Old Testament and therefore it would do the same in the New Testament age. If that was indeed what the Bible says then it would certainly prove me wrong in almost every point.

The passage of Scripture under question was one that I did not originally examine in my first edition. However, I did establish a principle in that book that should be applied in every question concerning the subject of divorce. And that basic, simple, rewarding, principle is to simply look up the words in question and see if the texts are speaking of a “bill of divorcement” or are they speaking of a “putting away” of a wife, i. e., to put her away without benefit of a bill of divorcement. That will answer the question very quickly but before I get to that particular answer let us examine these Old Testament qualifications for the Levitical Priesthood.

WHAT IF? (LEV. 21:1-24)

Now I speak as a fool here I suppose but for the sake of my feeble mind let’s just consider that in this passage of Scripture it really is forbidding a priest to marry a woman that had been divorced.

The next question is this, and I think the logical one, “*Can we carry this over into the New Testament age and apply it to preachers?*” The only problem is that we would also have to carry over into our age the other qualifications for the priesthood and apply it to preachers today. Let’s do that and see how that sounds to us. That would mean that the following would apply to all that are called to preach— I’ve numbered them to make it a little easier:

- Cannot be defiled by a dead body.
- Unmarried sister must be a virgin.
- He must not defile himself.

- No baldness on the head, no trimming of the beard, no cuts on their flesh.
- Shall not take for a wife a woman that is a whore, or a profane woman, or a one who has been “put away.”
- And if the daughter of a priest profane herself she is to be put to death by fire.
- He cannot have any blemish on his body (Read the list in **Vs. 17-21**).
- His wife must be a virgin.
- He also cannot marry a widow, a divorced woman, a harlot.
- His wife must be a virgin from his own people. (There are more but this is sufficient make my point).

I have not seen any preacher, congregation, nor any Christian who have put such demands upon the pastor they have called or might call. To bring out the one point about “divorce” in this passage and apply it forward to preachers today and not call the others forward and apply them in the same manner shows an inconsistency of interpretation that is troubling. I do not mean to accuse but such inconsistency grieves me when I see the resulting damage in the lives of those who have been divorced, singled out, and wounded by such poor exegesis of Scripture. I include the rather lengthy portion of Scripture so that we can see it all “in context.”

- *1 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: 2 But for his kin, that is near unto him, [that is], for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, 3 And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled. 4 [But] he shall not defile himself, [being] a chief man among his people, to profane himself. 5 They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh. 6 They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the LORD made by fire, [and] the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy. 7 **They shall not take a wife [that is] a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he [is] holy unto his God.** 8 Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the LORD, which sanctify you, [am] holy. 9 And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire. 10 ¶ And [he that is] the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; 11 Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or*

for his mother; 12 Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God [is] upon him: I [am] the LORD. **13 And he shall take a wife in her virginity. 14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, [or] an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.** 15 Neither shall he profane his seed among his people: for I the LORD do sanctify him. 16 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 17 Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever [he be] of thy seed in their generations that hath [any] blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For whatsoever man [he be] that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, 19 Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, 20 Or crookback, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; 21 No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God. 22 He shall eat the bread of his God, [both] of the most holy, and of the holy. 23 Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the LORD do sanctify them. 24 And Moses told [it] unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel.” (Le 21:1-24 AV)

Now that we have seen the absurdity of carrying these qualifications over to the New Testament era and applying them to preachers, let me now get back to my simple answer for the questions posed by this passage of Scripture.

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER

Now I say obvious only to those that are willing to look up the definitions of the key words relating to the subject of divorce in this text. They are of course...

The first is **Vs. 7** “*They shall not take a wife [that is] a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he [is] holy unto his God.*”

- Notice that in this verse the priest was not allowed to marry a “... woman **put away** from her husband.”

Again we go back to the Hebrew word and its definition which I have repeated over and over. The reason it must be repeated over and over is that it is mis-translated “over and over” and most reach the same incorrect understanding “over and over.” The Hebrew word that is used in **Vs. 7** is the word “gawrash,” which simply means “...to be put away,” i.e., without the benefit of a bill of divorcement. Again the

one put away in such a manner and still legally married to her husband would certainly not be marriageable material for a priest (or anyone else for that matter).

In the Authorized Version (KJV) the word is translated as follows:

- *AV-drive out 20, cast out 8, thrust out 6, drive away 2, put away 2, divorced 2, driven 1, expel 1, drive forth 1, surely 1, troubled 1, cast up 1, divorced woman 1; 47*

The fact that it is used as a synonym for “divorce” is the result of the bias of historical prejudice of the Roman church and later the Church of England. The latter of course authorized the translation of the King James Bible. It was a wonderful translation but the bias of the translations tainted their interpretation of things relating to divorce which they did not allow, and of baptism which they transliterated rather than translated in order to protect their doctrine of sprinkling for baptism.

The second verse to examine is **Vs.14** “*A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, [or] an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.*” The word “divorced” here is the same word in the Hebrew as the one in **Vs. 7**. Which brings us to the obvious conclusion—This text in **Leviticus 21** is not speaking of a divorced woman at all but rather one that has been put away because of the hardness of some man’s heart. The priest is not being banned from marrying a legally divorce woman who possesses a bill of divorcement as the law of Moses required. He would already been forbidden to marry this woman even if she had a bill of divorcement simply because she would not have been a virgin.

SILENCE CAN BE SO LOUD!

I must deal with one more issue here that seems relative to the discussion at hand. This text does not deal with, nor even mention, the possibility whether the priest had been divorced or not. In other words there is nothing in this text that forbids him to be a priest even if he is divorced, or even if he has put away a wife without benefit of divorce—or worse, he may have multiple wives. Evidently, a divorce or the putting away of a wife by a priest did not disqualify him from the priesthood. Sometimes silence speaks volumes. To read more into these qualifications then what the Bible gives may be overstepping a bit.

The standards of holiness, as given in Leviticus 21, were given for a very obvious reason—The priests were a type and picture of the great High Priest to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, these Levitical qualifications ensured that a priest was ceremonially, physically, and officially holy to represent the holiness of our High Priest. In this sense the Levitical priests were both prophetic, in pointing to the coming of our Great High Priest, and also symbolic in

pointing to His holiness, righteousness, and perfection. I do not see, nor know of, any Scripture that equates the office of a pastor to that of a priest. The type and picture of the Old Testament point to Christ and not to those who are called to preach in the New Testament age. And for this we should thank God for such restrictions would disqualify and eliminate just about every preacher on the face of the earth from the office of pastor.

SUMMATION OF THIS CHAPTER

First, we have seen that the qualifications for a priest under the Levitical system of worship does not carry over to the New Testament age in which we live and serve.

Secondly, we have seen that the text in question is not dealing with the subject of divorce at all. It is forbidding a priest to marry a woman who has been illegally "put away" and not a woman who has a bill of divorcement.

Thirdly, the physical, ceremonial, and official righteousness of a priest was a picture of the righteousness and holiness of our High Priest Jesus Christ to which they pointed.

Fourthly, the text under question puts no restrictions upon the priest himself. There is no reference or indication that his own marital status would disqualify him from the priesthood. Certain restrictions were placed upon whom he may marry but other than that there is silence.

CONCLUSION

I will summarize this as short and clearly as possible:

1. Divorce is a serious problem facing our churches; a problem for those who are the victims of divorce; and for the families of the divorced.
2. The original text on divorce in **Deut. 24:1-4**, clearly established the fact that divorce is legal on certain grounds if a bill of divorcement is given and those that are thus divorced are free to remarry. Thus a legal divorce is a complete dissolution of the marriage covenant and relationship.
3. We have examined the words used for a legal divorce and an illegal "putting away." We have determined they are not synonyms and speak of two different things. It was the illegal putting away of their wives which prompted the permission for divorce in order to protect them from the hardness of heart of the husbands who victimized the wife of their youth.
4. We have seen that Jesus did not change the Law of Moses concerning the bill of divorcement and putting away—they are in perfect harmony and agreement.
5. We have seen the restriction of which Paul spoke, "...the husband of one wife" is referring to polygamy and nothing more.
6. We also discovered that the instructions of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 was in complete agreement with Moses and Jesus.
7. We have seen that the marriage covenant is conditional. If either party violates those vows of fidelity they have potentially broken the covenant and given grounds for divorce.
8. We have seen that the traditional position held by the majority of Baptists is in contradiction to the Word of God and is inconsistent with their own teachings.

In saying all these things I do not suppose that the minds of too many will be changed. However, I do respect those that have given me a hearing by at least examining the evidences I have presented and the arguments I have made. I further hope that the divorced and remarried who read this little book will be blessed and encouraged to know that there are many who care, many who believe they deserve full citizenship as members in our churches and our ministries. May they be encouraged to step forward and may our churches be there to accept them and then use them in the local church for His glory and honor.

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