

OpenTheo

Divorce and Remarriage (Part 2)



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In this continuation of the conversation on divorce and remarriage, Steve Gregg examines the issue from a biblical standpoint. He notes that while divorce is not necessarily a sin, there are limited biblical grounds for a Christian divorce. One such ground is if one spouse committed adultery. However, the Bible does not require making restitution for divorce or even adultery for salvation, but it indicates that restitution can be proof of genuine repentance. Gregg shows verses from the New Testament, namely Luke 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 7, to support his arguments.

Transcript

Tonight we'll be completing our treatment of the subject of divorce and remarriage, a topic that we began looking at last time. I gave you a handout that's printed on both sides, and it worked out fairly neatly that we covered the material on the first side of the sheet last time, and now we'll be working through the material on the other side of the sheet, on the back. As I mentioned last time, it is a great folly and a great reproach for the church to take a casual view to this subject.

It is one of the greater evils of our society, and it is as much an evil in the church as it is outside the church. And while it is the case that we find it easy to point the finger at the secular society and the dominant culture, and say, look how corrupted it has become, yet the Bible says judgment must begin at the house of God. And Paul said, what have I to do to judge those who are outside the church? He says, you must judge those who are inside.

God judges those who are outside. It's an interesting thing because the modern church does just the opposite of what Paul suggests. We judge those who are outside, and we pay very little attention to the sins inside.

And divorce is one of the great scandalous sins inside the church of Jesus Christ. And while it's equally predominant as a cultural factor outside the church, that is not so much our issue. Certainly we want to evangelize those who are outside the church, and once they're in, then their sins become an issue for the church as well.

But it is not for us to seek to pull up all the tares in the world, but rather to grow up as good seed and bear the fruit that God wants from His harvest. The tares will be taken care of by God Himself. Now, divorce and remarriage.

In some cases we know, because Jesus says, divorce and remarriage can be tantamount to adultery. The Bible says that adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. So, we can't take a casual approach to this.

If there is adultery in the church, then those who are committing adultery, if they do not repent and cease to commit adultery, will not inherit the kingdom of God according to the Scripture. And while many people in the church would never dream of having an affair and committing adultery in that way, yet there are many who contemplate and actually go ahead and get a divorce and remarry. Now, if you were not here last time, you may not be altogether sure where I'm coming from on this.

I'm trying to be as severe as I can on this, but I also am not as severe as some would think I should be. Because I do believe that divorce and remarriage is not in every case the same as adultery. And when it is not, it's not a sin at all.

You know, there are some people, some Christians, who would look at cases, well, like myself. I have been through a divorce. I am not in my first marriage.

And they'd say, well, we don't want to say that Steve and his family are, you know, illegitimate, that they're actually living in adultery. But there should be some stigma, nonetheless, upon them. Because they've, you know, that's not the first marriage.

Now, I would agree that in some cases there should be a very severe stigma upon persons in second or third marriages. Because in many cases, the circumstances that led to their divorce and their remarriage are just those that Jesus said are adultery. And there ought to be a very severe stigma upon adultery in the church.

But what is very strange is that many churches don't want to be so bold as to refer to such cases as adultery. But they still want to relegate those who have been divorced and remarried, who are not, perhaps, guilty of adultery, to some lesser status. In some denominations, for example, the Assemblies of God would be an example.

And I don't say this to bad mouth them. They're not ashamed of it. This comes up every year when they have their conferences.

Should they change this? And they don't. They don't want to change this. They don't believe that divorce and remarriage should prevent somebody from being a member of the church.

But it is their official position that it should prevent someone from being a minister in their church. Now, I have a friend who was in the Assemblies of God. His wife had left

him, had married someone else, and took the children and went out of state.

And he was left unmarried himself. And he was attending an Assembly of God church. And he was teaching a Sunday school class there, which was permitted to him because he was a member of the church in good standing.

But he had, before his divorce, he had been a minister. Not in that denomination, but he'd been a minister. And he hoped to return to the ministry, but that denomination would not allow it because he was divorced.

And he was open to remarriage. Well, he told me once, he says, it's rather ironic. He said, if I had murdered my wife and then repented and remarried, I could be a minister in this denomination.

But if I was a faithful husband and my wife ran away with someone else and divorced me and I remarried, I cannot be a minister in this denomination. It's a stigma that's on me forever. And I must confess that I have not found ill treatment toward myself.

As a person who's got a divorce in my past, frankly, all the circumstances of my divorce, I think, make it as clean from my side as anyone could wish in a scenario. But divorce is still ugly. And there are some people who say that even if you have grounds for divorce, you should never remarry.

But I have not really had problems with this. I've never really had a church make an issue of it. And I have even criticized some churches because they didn't make an issue of it with me.

Because there are churches I showed up in and after I attended for a while, they found out I could teach and they had me teach adult Sunday school. Then they want me in the pulpit and then they want to become an elder. I said, wait a minute, do you know I'm divorced and remarried? They said, we don't care.

It's all under grace. You know, I said, you should care. I am a member in your congregation.

I have been divorced. I've been remarried. All this happened before you knew me.

You don't know what the circumstances are. For all you know, I might be in adultery. And unless you look into it, unless you examine it.

But many churches, they just want to turn a blind eye and they don't want to pay any attention to it. This is why the church is so compromised. This is one reason.

Because they don't want to take a hard stand against that which goes against the grain of the culture. Now, we need to take a hard stand against divorce and against remarriage in certain cases. There are, I believe, biblical grounds for divorce.

And where those grounds exist, there are grounds for remarriage as well. We're going to look at the Scriptures and see whether that's what the Scripture says. Not all Christians agree with that, of course.

But I'm going to look at the Scriptures with you and we'll see whether that is what the Bible teaches. But apart from those grounds, if there are not those grounds for divorce, then divorce alone is a sin and remarriage is another sin. Divorce without proper grounds is the sin of perjury.

It is the sin of covenant breaking. Because a couple stands at an altar when they marry and they make vows. And those vows are made before God and man.

They're solemnly made vows before God. And in those vows, they say that they will cleave only unto that person in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse. That kind of covers all the bases until death.

Now, if anything but death causes them to break that vow, are they not a covenant breaker? Now, the vow can be broken by the other party. And this is what we're going to be talking about. We have God Himself as example of this principle.

We pointed this out last time. But if one party commits adultery and breaks the covenant in that way, the Bible treats that as a release, at least a potential release, for the person who did not break the vow. That is, if one person has shattered their own side of their commitment to their spouse, the other person who did not do so is then free.

If they wish to be. Now, they don't have to be. God Himself is the picture of this in His marriage in the Old Testament.

And remember, Christians are always pointed to this very thing, God's marriage to His people or Christ's to the church, as the model of our proper thinking as Christians about marriage in general and divorce. God entered into covenantal relationship with Israel. Forever afterward in the Old Testament, Israel was called God's wife.

And God was Israel's husband. And God put up with a lot of different sins on Israel's part. But there was one sin that He said would end up in their destruction.

And that was the sin of idolatry, which is worshiping other gods. Why? Because in the analogy of God's marriage to Israel, He was the husband. She was the wife.

Israel's worship of Jehovah was really what it was about, to consummate and to continue a one-flesh relationship, as it were, with her husband. And for her to worship another god is like a woman going and having adultery, adultery relationships with another man. And now God forbade idolatry for this reason in the strictest of terms, because it is covenant-breaking.

Israel committed adultery in this very way, real early on. I mean, as soon as they entered into covenant within a few days, they'd made a golden calf, already had broken their vows. God was going to wipe them out.

But Moses interceded, you know, wouldn't let God go through with it, as it were. Of course, God could have, if He insisted, but Moses talked Him out of it. And throughout the rest of Israel's history, they lapsed intermittently into various idolatrous alliances.

And God was angry. And God was all through this time in the role of a husband whose wife is cheating. And he is in a position to either say, okay, I'm out of this.

Or to wait a little longer and see if she'd repent. Any man whose wife is cheating, or any wife whose husband is cheating, is in the position that God was in, in that kind of situation. The spouse has broken covenant.

And the faithful spouse can then either say, well, I'll stay in it. I'll hang in here. I'll wait it out and see if repentance is forthcoming.

Or they're free to get out. God was very patient. He waited for hundreds of years.

But finally, we read in Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Hosea, that God gave Israel a writing of divorce. Which is what, in God's law, a man was to do if he was divorcing his wife. Give her a writing of divorce.

It says in Deuteronomy 24. God did this according to God's own statements. In Isaiah and Jeremiah, He divorced Israel.

He gave her a writing of divorcement. He had told her He would. So, we can see that God considered Himself justified in breaking the covenantal union.

Because Israel had broken the covenant through spiritual adultery. Now, this is the picture that the Bible gives consistently about the nature of marriage. And in the New Testament, we have teaching that would indicate that the only grounds for a Christian to divorce would be if the spouse is guilty of adultery.

But even if the spouse is, that doesn't mean that the Christian should divorce. There are times when couples have gone through very low spots where one or the other party did commit adultery but repented. And where there is repentance, frankly, I think the cheated spouse still has grounds for divorce.

But I think a Christian cheated spouse, in such a case, would show themselves more godlike if they would forgive when there's repentance. But there's no insistence that a person must divorce an adulterous spouse. But the Bible seems to indicate that when one spouse commits adultery, that is a sufficient violation of the covenant as to give the cheated party the option of getting out of it as well.

Now, we saw that last time as we were talking about the history of God's relationship with Israel. Let's look now at the other side of the sheet here. I'd like to look at the various passages in the Bible that relate to this subject.

There are several, but they're not innumerable. And it would be good to see the whole Council of Scripture on this. The first scripture relevant to this is one that is found in Genesis chapter 2. And it is apparently so central to the issue that both Paul and Jesus quoted it.

Paul quoted it when he was talking about marriage. Jesus quoted it in the context of talking about divorce. The scripture is Genesis 2.24. It says, "...therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Now, there are some who have said that this teaches the indissolubility of marriage.

Two people become one person in God's sight. Well, if God makes them one, they can't very well be dissolved then. If God has unified them, what in the world could cause them to cease to be one? It's a miracle of union that God creates.

And therefore, because of this interpretation, many people, many Christians have said that marriage is never dissolvable. And even if one spouse commits adultery, even that isn't enough to dissolve it. Because God has made the two one, and there's no possibility of anything putting it apart.

However, Jesus taught otherwise. Jesus was asked about the very issue of divorce in Matthew 19. We'll look at it in a few moments.

But instead of speaking directly about divorce, He quoted this verse. And He decided to speak about marriage first. To understand divorce, you have to understand what God's view is of marriage.

And Jesus, when He was asked if a man might divorce his wife for any cause, He said, Well, have you not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female? And for this reason, He begins to quote this verse, shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? Now, then His comment is very helpful for us. He says, therefore, what God has joined together. He's talking about the statement that God has made these two one flesh.

He's joined two people into one. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder, which is King James English for divide. Let not man divide or separate that which God has joined.

Now, that very verse by Jesus has been sometimes seized upon by many who say, You just, a marriage can never be dissolved. Jesus said, Let not man put it asunder. But the very fact that He commands that people should not put it asunder means it can be done.

God doesn't ever give commands in the Bible telling people not to do things that they can't do, that can't be done. They're simply things that may not be done. If the Bible says, Thou shalt not murder, we don't understand that to mean, Oh, I guess it's impossible for one person to murder another person.

No, it's not impossible. It's just wrong to do so. If the Bible says, Don't covet your neighbor's house or his animals or his wife or anything that is his, this is not to be understood to mean, Oh, I guess coveting is simply not, humans aren't capable of coveting.

No, they're capable of it, but they're forbidden to do it. When there's a command not to do something, you can assume pretty well that it is something that can be done. But it's forbidden to be done.

And no one wastes their breath forbidding people to do things that they can't do. No one has ever forbidden me to flap my arms and fly out of the room. They don't have to forbid me to do that.

Nature itself forbids me to do that. I can't do that. When Jesus said, What God has joined together, let not man divide, it means that man can and should not.

Let it not be done. That is a command. The very fact that Jesus has to give such a command proves that what God has joined together can indeed be divided.

It can be broken up, but it's not supposed to be done. Now, you might say, Well, if Jesus said, Let not man divide, wouldn't that make it wrong to get a divorce in every case? Apparently not, because Jesus goes on to say that he that divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and marries another commits adultery. Now, that except for the cause of fornication is interesting because he has just said that man should not put asunder what God has joined.

And yet, when he says, Well, you shouldn't divorce your wife, except in the case of fornication, what he is suggesting is fornication apparently has done the deed. If somebody fornicates, that does divide. That does put asunder what God has joined.

And therefore, the man who divorces his wife in such a case is not dividing what God put asunder, not dividing what God joined, but actually is simply making it official what his wife has done. She has put asunder by the act of adultery. Now, there are some people who say, Well, no, adultery is not, even though adultery is very bad, it's not bad enough to really end a marriage, because God just doesn't want anything to end a marriage.

It's true, God doesn't want anything to end a marriage, but he doesn't want anyone committing adultery either. He's given strong commands against it. When people do commit adultery, it has the very real capability of ending a marriage, legitimately as it were.

I mean, adultery is not legitimate, but the person who then takes the option and says, Well, my husband has committed adultery, my wife has committed adultery, therefore I'm getting a divorce. It's not really the person who's initiating the divorce in that case that is breaking up the marriage. It's been done by the other party in such a case.

It is forbidden. Let not those people who might wish to do so, let them not put asunder what God has joined. The husband or wife that commits adultery has done that.

The spouse that divorces from their partner who has not committed adultery, that person seeking the illegitimate divorce is putting asunder that which God has joined together. It's forbidden. But what Jesus teaches is based on this early, and I should say earliest teaching in the scripture about marriage in Genesis 2. Now, divorce is mentioned in scripture for the first time in the law, in Deuteronomy 24.

We saw this last time, but I'd like to look at all the scriptures relevant to this if we might. And so let's look at this briefly again, just so we'll have the whole counsel of God fresh in our mind here as we've gone through these scriptures. Deuteronomy 24, 1 says, When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord.

And you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance. Now, we talked a little about this last time. I'm not going to go into it in detail at this point.

We will come back to it again later. But it makes it clear here that God at least allowed. That's how Jesus put it.

He allowed them to divorce their wives. You might remember this comes up also in that same discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees in Matthew 19, when Jesus said, what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. They immediately resorted to this passage.

They said, well, then why then does Moses command us to divorce our wives, giving her a bill of divorcement? And Jesus said, because of the hardness of your hearts, God permitted you to divorce your wife. See, they said, why does Moses command that we give a writing of divorcement? He doesn't. He permits it.

He doesn't command it. You don't have to divorce your wife. Even if she's unfaithful, you don't have to.

It was permitted in some circumstances. Now, Deuteronomy 24 did not specify what the circumstances were. It just says if he finds some uncleanness in her, but uncleanness is a very vague term.

And the Jews did not have an agreement among themselves exactly what constituted a grievous uncleanness that would justify divorce. It is there where Jesus fills in the missing details, where he tells us that the uncleanness that justifies divorce, and the only uncleanness that justifies divorce would be fornication on her part. We'll come to those verses, of course, in due time here.

The next place this is relevantly spoken of is in Ezra. In Ezra chapter 10, I'd like to read verses 2 through 5. And Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, we have trespassed against our God and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land. Yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.

Now, therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, the children, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our Lord, God, and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you.

Be of good courage and do it. Then Ezra arose and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath.

And then they put away the wives of these pagan wives. Now, it should be made clear that the Jews were not forbidden to marry all pagans. It's very clearly stated in the 20th chapter of Deuteronomy that when the Israelites would go out and make war and bring home captives from lands, they were entitled to marry women who were brought back as captives if they wish.

Now, he said, except for those captives from the land of Canaan. The Jews were forbidden to marry any Canaanites. They were not to make any alliances between themselves and the Canaanites.

They were supposed to exterminate them all. And marriages between themselves and the Canaanites were forbidden. But other pagans who were not of the Canaanite tribes, they could marry.

Now, in seeing that these people say they've transgressed the law in marrying pagan women, it must be that the pagan women they married were of the Canaanite tribes. Now, what do they do? Well, Ezra seemed to approve of the suggestion they made that they would take an oath before God that they'd put away these wives and the children from these marriages. In other words, they divorce.

Now, this is an interesting thing because there are people who would take this passage

today and say, well, you see, if people have married wrongfully, let us say they married a non-Christian, but they were Christians, or they married against their parents' wishes, or they've remarried after an illegitimate divorce or whatever. Whatever. If people are in a wrongful marriage, they ought always to get a divorce and end this wrongful marriage.

Now, I want to be very clear on this. The subject is more nuanced than that. There are cases where a second marriage or a marriage is so wrong, so sinful, even to continue in, that I do believe the Bible would call for that, but not always, and possibly not in most cases.

The point here is that these people had sinned against the commandment of God in marrying whom they married, and so they agreed to divorce their wives. Ezra agreed to it too, but we do not have any teaching in this passage that God inspired this response, nor even that God approved of it. Ezra was a good person, but then Abraham was a good person too.

He did some things God didn't approve of as well. I mean, David too was largely a good person, but he did some things that weren't right. Ezra, we don't know if Ezra's approval of this plan was God's mind or not.

Remember even when David spoke to Nathan the prophet and indicated he wanted to build a temple for God, Nathan initially said, do all that is in your heart. The Lord is with you. I mean, here's a prophet of God.

He wasn't speaking in the name of the Lord. He didn't say, let's say it's the Lord, but his first impressions were positive, even though he was a prophet of God. Then God corrected Nathan after that and said, no, you go back and tell David not to do that, because that's not my word.

And so we don't really, we can't make much about this. All we can say is in this case, the Jews who had broken God's law in marrying apparently Canaanite women went ahead and divorced them. And God did not say yay or nay about it.

We can't really use this story to speak about the legitimacy or lack thereof of these particular decisions that are recorded in Ezra. It's simply descriptive of what they did, not prescriptive. Okay, let's look at the next and last Old Testament passage that speaks about divorce.

That's in Malachi chapter two, verses 13 through 16. Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament. Chapter two, verses 13 through 16.

The prophet says, and this is the second thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying. So he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

Yet you say, for what reason? Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did he, that is God, not make them one, having the remnant of the spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring.

Therefore, take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 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. God hates divorce, he says in this context. And he does.

Now, some people have gotten the wrong impression and decide that God must hate divorced people. Well, he hates divorce. And he also hates murder and adultery and idolatry and a whole bunch of other things.

And therefore, there must be a sense in which it could be said he hates those who perpetrate these things. You might think it awkward to say God hates people because we heard that God loves everyone. And in a sense, he loves all because he does desire all to be saved.

But in another sense, he is disgusted and angry with many. It says in the Psalms that God is angry with the wicked every day. And the Bible actually says there are things that God hates.

Six, yea seven, are mentioned in Proverbs chapter 6, verses 16 through 19, where it says six things the Lord hates, yea seven, are abomination to him. And among the things he hates are, for example, a man who sows discord among his brother. Well, that's a man.

God hates that man in the sense that God sets himself against that man because he's doing something that God hates for people to do. Now, if God hates divorce, he hates the treachery. And that's the word he uses a lot in this passage.

You've dealt treacherously. You've dealt treacherously. Don't deal treacherously.

God hates the treachery of divorce. He must therefore be very angry at those who perpetrate such treachery. But we must remember that where there is a divorce, there is often a perpetrator and a victim.

There's often a person who is being divorced by their spouse and that against their will, that against their choice. And, you know, like I said last time, we could say, well, the church needs to take a stronger stand than it has against mugging. And therefore, anyone who's been mugged can't come to this church.

That'd be ridiculous. We might say anybody who is an unrepentant mugger shouldn't

come to the church. But anyone who's been a victim of a mugger is, you know, there should be no stigma on that.

And likewise, the treachery of divorce is often perpetrated by one party against another. Now, there are times when both are guilty. Both both want the divorce and neither have any grounds for it.

There are all there's a whole variety of cases out there in different situations. But there are certainly cases where one person is the perpetrator, the other is the victim. And God doesn't like that, to put it mildly.

He says he hates it. Now, can a person who's done it be forgiven? Of course. Divorce, even being the perpetrator of divorce, is not the unpardonable sin.

But like many sins which have enduring consequences, there are times when a repentant person may need to do some form of restitution. You rob a bank and you repent. You have to make restitution.

You have to give the money back. You can't rob the bank, repent and keep the money. And likewise, there are other sins.

There are a number of sins that once you've committed them, it's not just a one-time deal. The result of your act continues to victimize people for a very long time thereafter. And there are times when that doesn't cease to be so until you've made restitution to those people.

And while the Bible doesn't say that making restitution is necessary for salvation, the Bible certainly indicates that making restitution is a proof of genuine repentance. And repentance is a requirement for salvation. Everywhere in Scripture, repentance of sin is required for salvation.

Remember Zacchaeus? Jesus came into the home of Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus, we don't know much what transpired there, but at the end of whatever it was, after their lunch, Zacchaeus stood up and said, half my goods I bestow on the poor. And if I've robbed or cheated anyone, I'm going to restore fourfold.

I'm going to pay back four times as much as what I stole. That's simply agreeing to do what the law said he should do. The law required fourfold restitution to a thief.

But what Zacchaeus was saying, he said, I'm going to make restitution to everyone I've robbed. And what did Jesus say? He said, today salvation has come to this house. Jesus recognized this man was truly saved and truly repentant because he wanted to make restitution.

Anyone who really repents of their sin is going to be grieved at the harm they caused to

any other party through their sin. And especially if that harm is continuing in that other person's life because of that sin. And if there's any possibility of making restitution, they should.

I was once speaking to a group of YWAMers in Honolulu, and I was talking about the relationship of repentance and restitution. And I was trying to point out that there are some sins that you probably can't make restitution for. I said, for example, if you go out and you're driving kind of recklessly and you kill someone, you hit a car and kill a guy.

Well, you can't make restitution for that because you can't bring him back to life. And one of the students raised his hand and said, well, if he was the breadwinner for a family, you can make restitution by supporting his family. I said, you know, that's right.

I hadn't thought of that. You've got to be creative about restitution. You know, if you take your sin seriously and repent of it, it means that you're going to be looking for any way that any victims of yours are continuing to suffer and any way you can alleviate that.

If you, by your recklessness, kill somebody else's breadwinner, well, then it would only be the loving and just thing to support the family of the man you killed. That'd be a way of making restitution. When it comes to divorce, there are many, there may be some in this room, I don't know, who have sinfully gotten divorced and remarried.

I wouldn't be surprised simply because there's so many in our society and a great number in the church of whom that can be said. That doesn't mean that there can be no forgiveness. When a person recognizes that what they did was a sin and repent before God, they're forgiven.

But if the repentance is genuine, they'll wish to not continue to perpetrate the crime on the persons that they'd sinned against. And there will be times, and we'll look at these a little later in our study, I believe, where restitution needs to be made. But the reason I got off on this is because God does hate divorce.

And it's not so much that He hates all people who have been through a divorce. His anger, His contempt, His malice is toward those who are treacherously divorcing their partners. It is an act of treachery that God despises.

But even those who have done that, there is, you know, God doesn't have to stay mad at you forever. There is such a thing as repentance, restitution. There is such a thing as getting right with God about this.

But in saying that, we don't mean to minimize, and we certainly hope we don't, the great and grievous atrocity that such treachery is against a spouse, against children, against society, against the church, against Christ. It's a big issue. It has many victims.

Let's look at another passage. This actually belongs to the Old Testament category too,

although it's actually found in the New Testament. It's in Mark chapter 6. You'll notice we've been looking at the Old Testament teaching on the subject.

We're going to look at Jesus' teaching next. But in Mark chapter 6, and this is about John the Baptist. And the reason I mention this under the Old Testament, John never lived until the New Testament came into being.

John was the transitional prophet between the Old and the New Testament. He actually belonged to the Old Testament. Remember, Jesus said, Among those born of women, there's not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist, but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

John was the greatest of the Old Testament order, but the least in the New Testament order is more privileged and has a better message than John had. John could only say, the Messiah is here. But he did not live to see the death and resurrection of Christ.

John died before Jesus died. And therefore, he never preached the gospel as we know it. But he was nonetheless God's spokesman.

And he got in trouble with Herod because Herod had seduced his brother Philip's wife and persuaded her to leave Philip and to come live with him. And she did. Herodias.

This was not okay. And John the Baptist said in verse 18 of Mark 6, says John had said to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Now, what's interesting here is that Herod was now legally married to Herodias.

As far as the state was concerned, as far as the paperwork at the courthouse was concerned, Herodias was Herod's wife. But John said, Not as far as God's concerned, she isn't. She's your brother's wife.

She is still Philip's wife, which is kind of a scary thing to contemplate because it may mean that in some cases a person may seek a divorce without grounds, remarry, get all the legal paperwork, say, see, I'm married, this is legal, and they come join the church. And in fact, they're living with someone else's wife. Or they are somebody else's husband.

And they cannot be admitted into church under those conditions. Because why? Because they're in adultery. And Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6, no 5, near the end of chapter 5, he said if anyone professes to be a brother, and yet is a fornicator or an idolater or gives a long list of things, he says, have no company with that person, don't even eat with them.

Obviously, they can't take communion with you. They're not to be in the fellowship if they claim to be Christians and are any of those things. So this is a heavy duty thing.

This is not a light matter that we can just take a fly by and say, I think I got the idea,

next subject. We need to understand what God's mind is about this because it involves, in a very practical way, maybe as many as half the people in this country. And probably a percentage, not much less than that, of people in the church.

But what we see here is in at least some cases where a divorce has taken place and a legal remarriage has taken place, yet as far as God's concerned, it's not legal. The state calls it legal, but God doesn't. Herod had a new wife, but she wasn't his wife, God said, she's your brother's wife.

You're living with your brother's wife, not with your wife. And there are certainly cases where that would have its parallels in the church and in the society today. Let's look at what Jesus said now.

Jesus really, as far as we know, may have only spoken on this subject twice. One of the Gospels, Matthew, has two instances of Jesus speaking on it. Mark and Luke each have one instance of Jesus speaking on it, and in at least one of those cases, if not both, those are paralleling one of the cases in Matthew.

So we don't know whether Jesus spoke on the subject more than twice, but we know he did twice. He said almost the same thing in both places. One of the places is in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the context of Jesus trying to inform his disciples how they should look at the righteous requirements of the law differently than that way that they had been taught by the Pharisees and the rabbis. And in that lesson, in verse 31 and 32, Jesus said, Furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. Now, you should recognize that.

He's quoting from Deuteronomy 24. But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality or fornication, the King James says, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Now, that's pretty heavy duty. Now, why does he say he that divorces his wife for any cause other than fornication causes her to commit adultery? Well, it seems clear that he's anticipating that the woman must necessarily go and find another husband. In that society, a woman didn't just make it on her own in the business world.

She either had to be supported by her father or by a husband in most cases or beg or become a prostitute or something like that. But certainly the most common option for survival open to a woman who was cut loose from her marriage was to get married again. She needed someone to take care of her.

And so the man who divorces his wife, of course, puts her under pressure. She's got to do something to stay alive. And getting married is the thing she's most likely going to do.

Jesus takes it for granted she's going to get remarried. But in so doing, she's committing adultery and so is the man who marries her. Now, all of this, remember, is conditioned by the statement except for the cause of fornication.

It's very important. If Jesus had just said, whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery and anyone who marries her commits adultery and there is no exception. Well, then any divorced and remarried people would be living in adultery at this moment, regardless what the circumstances were.

But Jesus then says except for the cause of fornication, which puts a totally different spin on at least one category of circumstances, where the divorce has been because of adultery or fornication. We'll talk more later about what fornication means because some actually dispute whether it refers to adultery in the marriage. We'll talk about that.

But look at Matthew chapter 19 for the other instance. And you'll find that what Jesus speaks in this instance on the subject is almost identical to what he said there in the Sermon on the Mount. Not much different information is there.

But if you look at Matthew 19 beginning at verse 3, I've alluded to this story a couple of times already tonight. The Pharisees also came to him, testing him and saying to him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And he answered and said to them, have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female? And said, for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So then they're no longer two.

But one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away? And Jesus said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives.

But from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced, commits adultery. Now, here it's almost the same, but a little different.

Because in Matthew 5, 32, he said, whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery. But doesn't mention that he commits adultery. In this case, the scenario is only slightly shifted.

This time he divorces her without due grounds and he remarries. And now he's committing adultery. And the guy who marries his wife commits adultery too.

Now, certainly seen one way, this makes it look like any woman who remarries is in adultery. And anyone who marries a woman whose divorce commits adultery. And I have known some people who interpret it that way.

But I believe that when we take the whole of what Jesus and the rest of Scripture says on this subject, we'll find that that impression needs to be thought through a little more. Because let's face it, Jesus in his whole ministry, as far as we know, spoke only twice on this subject. In both cases, he said almost the same thing.

So, it's almost like he spoke once. He just repeated himself once. And of all the teachings Jesus gave about biblical ethics and righteousness and morals and so forth, we find only one small statement on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

And it's this one. I mean, it occurs twice, but it's the same statement, essentially. Now, we know, however, that divorce circumstances, scenarios are a multitude.

There are people who are... Both parties have committed adultery and they both agree to get a divorce. There's situations where one has committed adultery and the innocent party seeks a divorce. There's other cases where one commits adultery and the adulterer seeks a divorce.

There's times when neither has committed adultery and one of the other seeks a divorce. There's cases where any one of those scenarios may apply, but neither seeks to remarry. Or maybe the innocent party seeks to remarry.

Or maybe the guilty party seems to be... There's all these different factors that make the issues different in different cases. I'm not saying that it's so confused that we can never know what's right. That's the opposite of what I'm saying.

I believe we can. I think in every case pretty much we can ascertain what the mind of God is if we understand the principles that the Bible teaches on this. But what I'm saying is there are such a variety of situations that for Jesus to have spoken only one sentence and repeated it once to cover all situations is very strange.

Now we might say, well, strange it may be, but Jesus said it. We should just take what he said and that's all there is to it. True, if not for the fact that even the apostles understood somewhat differently than what Jesus said, than what we might think in some cases.

But before we comment further on this, we're going to talk more about fornication, what the exception means and so forth, because that is disputed in some circles. Let's look at Mark and Luke because both of them record Jesus making a statement about this. And there's a significant difference in Mark and Luke's account from that in from those two in Matthew.

In Mark, chapter 10, verses 11 and 12, it's the parallel of Matthew 19, which we just looked at. It says, So he said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

Now, the first part of this is exactly the same as the first part of what Jesus said in Matthew 19. And if you look at the context, it's the same story, same conversation. The difference here is he in the other case in Matthew 19, he says, and he that marries the woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Here it says, and the woman who divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Well, although the details differ from passage to passage, it's quite clear that everybody involved in a wrongful divorce remarriage is involved in adultery somehow, at least if they've somehow perpetrated one of the forbidden things that Jesus says not to do here. One other passage in Luke in the Gospels, and then I want to make an observation which I'll have to unpack a little later.

In Luke 16 and verse 18, we have the last of the statements of Jesus in the Gospels on divorce. And you'll see it looks very much like the others. This one is kind of context lists.

It's not his conversation with the Pharisees. It's not the Sermon on the Mount. And in fact, nothing before or after it necessarily seems to relate to the subject.

And it's a very strange intrusion at this particular context because he's not talking about divorce or marriage or anything related to that before or after this. It's just a standalone verse. Verse 18, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

And whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. Now, again, that's exactly the same as his statement in Matthew 19, 9. So there's nothing new added here except for one slight difference. And you may have noticed it.

Both Mark and Luke record the statement of Jesus, but they do not include the phrase except for the cause of fornication. In Mark and in Luke, there is no exception given. It sounds strictly absolute.

Anyone who divorces remarries is committing adultery, period. And no exceptions are mentioned. So we have this slight problem we're going to have to work through and we can do it in a bit tonight.

We have a tension here. We have a statement in Mark and one in Luke where Jesus seems to just broad brush, eliminate all possibilities of divorce from remarriage legitimately because he gives no exceptions. Then we have two statements in Matthew, one of which is parallel to the one in Mark.

And have the same statement with the exception that Jesus does add an exception clause in both of the Matthewan passages, both of the ones in Matthew, except for the cause of fornication. How do we deal with these kinds of differences in the Gospels? It might be merely an academic point, if not for touching on such a practical issue. There are many places where the Gospels differ a bit from each other in their wording.

And in most cases, it's merely a matter of curiosity and we can have the leisure to sort it out if we want to or just say, well, I'll say that for another time. But when it comes to something like this, where the very issue of whether a couple in the church, whether their marriage is adultery or not in the sight of God, it seems like we're not really at leisure to kind of just not worry about it. I think we need to figure out how do we deal with this difference in the Gospels.

Mark and Luke don't mention an exception, but Matthew does in both passages that record Jesus statement. We'll get to that. But I want to show you just a few other passages.

These come from the writings of Paul. There are three categories of passages in the Bible on divorce and remarriage. One is the Old Testament passages, and we've looked at all those.

Another is what Jesus said. We've looked at all those. The only remaining ones are those from Paul.

In Romans 7, verses 2 and 3, we have the earliest Pauline passage on this subject. Romans 7, verses 2 and 3. For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.

So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Now, you see a problem here for people who are divorced and remarried, especially women.

It says if a woman marries another man while her husband is still living, she's an adulteress. She that has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if he dies, she's free.

Now, that's eerie, especially for women who are in a second marriage in the church and who take Paul seriously. Are you an adultery if you're in a second marriage? It sounds like it, but wait a minute. Notice that Paul introduces this in verse 1. Or do you not know, brethren, for I speak to those who know the law, that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? And then he gives the example of a woman and her relationship to her husband.

He starts out by saying, I'm writing to you who know the law. What law? Certainly the law of Moses is what he has in mind. And yet, does the law of Moses say a woman cannot remarry? It doesn't say any such thing at all.

As a matter of fact, the only passage that addresses it directly is Deuteronomy 24. And it does seem to suggest that the woman can remarry. If her husband gives her a writing of

divorce, puts it in her hand, she goes out of the house, she can marry another man.

Paul certainly knew the law. And he's referring, he's writing to people who knew the law. He says, I'm writing to you who know the law.

So it must be that he is not saying something that is contrary to the law. He's not making a new Christian ethic that's different from the law. He's representing to them what the law teaches.

Now, we know what the law teaches from reading the law itself. We are among those that he's writing to who know the law. So what is he saying then? He sounds like he's saying if a woman marries while her first husband is still alive, she's an adulteress.

But wait a minute. He puts it this way. The woman who has a husband is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives.

If he dies, she's not. A woman who has a husband is a woman who is married. If a woman is not married to a man, she doesn't have a husband.

If her husband has divorced her, or if there's been something else that legitimately ended their marriage short of death, even under the law, she does not have a husband and she is free to remarry. Paul's talking about the case where there has been no grounds for divorce. There has been no divorce, in fact.

She's married to a guy and she goes out and gets another husband too. That's adultery to have two husbands at once. But think of the woman who Jesus met at the well.

She'd had five husbands, Jesus said. Now, remember, he said, call your husband. And she said, I have no husband.

Now, we happen to know that she had five ex-husbands, some of whom were probably still living. We don't know the details, but it'd be very unusual. If all of them had died in her lifetime.

But the Sadducees claimed to know of a woman who had seven husbands die in her lifetime, but that was a fabricated story. But it'd be very strange to conclude this woman, all of her husbands had died. In all likelihood, she had at least one of those five, if not several of them, still living.

Yet she said, I have no husband. Jesus said, you have rightly said you have no husband. In other words, although she had apparently been divorced probably more than once and probably still had living ex-husbands, he said, you're right, you have no husband.

You've had five and the man you're with now isn't a legitimate husband. It's interesting too that Jesus recognized the legitimacy of the first five marriages, but not the fornication she was currently living in. Jesus did make a distinction between legitimate

marriage and living in adultery.

And he said, you're currently living in adultery, but you've had five legitimate marriages as far as Jesus is concerned. She has had serial marriages. She's had serial husbands and some of them might well have been alive even as he spoke.

We don't know that they weren't. And yet he said she had no husband. Why? Because she was not still married to them.

Now, Paul says she that has a husband is bound to him unless he dies. Or, of course, you know the law, unless he gives her a writing of divorcement. That's another possibility, but that's not in the purview of what Paul's trying to illustrate.

What Paul's trying to illustrate here is that we were married to the law, but that marriage has ended by death because we died in Christ. And now we're free from that marriage so we can be married to another. He brings it all together there in verse four.

He says, therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ that you may be married to another, meaning Christ. The whole illustration of a wife and a husband and so forth being bound until one dies is simply there to point this out. The covenantal relationship exists only until death takes place, not beyond that.

The woman who is married to a man is bound to him as long as she's married to him and he's alive. However, if he dies, she's not bound to him anymore. She can marry again, just like we, having died with Christ, we can marry again.

Not the law this time, but he that rose from the dead. In other words, Paul is not trying to give us a new teaching, a new ethic, a new Christian ethic about divorce that's different from the Old Testament. He simply says, I'm writing about the law.

This is what the law says. You know the law. But we have to figure out how it is that what Paul says actually agrees with the law, since that's what he says he's doing.

And it agrees in this way, even under the law, if a woman had a husband and she went out and got a second husband at the same time, that would be adultery. Now, if her husband had died, then she's free to do that. Or, of course, we know from the law, if he had divorced her.

But that Paul doesn't bring up all these possibilities. All he is saying is this. She's bound to the law, bound by the law to her husband only as long as he lives no longer.

Assuming he does not divorce her, she's got to stay with him until he dies. But if a divorce takes place that ends the marriage, then even the law itself said she could remarry. And that would seem to be understood by Paul.

Paul makes the same statement, almost entirely the same, in 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 39. But 1 Corinthians 7 has quite a few verses relevant to the subject of divorce and remarriage. We'll look at them.

But in almost the last verse of 1 Corinthians 7, he has essentially a repeat of the statement in Romans 7. He says in verse 39, a wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives. That's if she's a wife. But if her husband dies, she's at liberty to be married to another, to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Now, Paul is not, again, making a new ethic. It's essentially the same lesson he gave in Romans 7. If a woman is married, she's a wife, she has a husband. She can't just marry another guy while she's got a husband.

Now, if something happens to mean she doesn't have a husband anymore, and he mentions her husband dying. We know from other places that he might divorce her. Some other thing can happen to where she doesn't have a husband anymore, like the woman at the well, who'd had five but didn't have one now.

Well, then she's free to remarry. She's not free to shack up like the woman at the well did, but she's free to remarry. Now, chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians has quite a few relevant verses, and we're going to look in detail at some of them in a little bit.

But I just want to show you which verses we're talking about here for the moment, because we're surveying at the moment just all the passages. I'm going to nail some of this down after we've gotten through the last one of them. 1 Corinthians 7, verse 10, Paul says, Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord.

A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

But to the rest, I, not the Lord, say, If any brother has a wife who does not believe her and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he's willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Now, I was actually going to talk about these verses in detail a little further down in the outline, but I think I'm going to transport them up to this point here so we don't have to come back. And we can look at them while we're, we can think about them while we're looking at them. Notice there are two categories of married people that Paul is addressing.

In verses 10 and 11, he says, now to the married, it sounds like maybe all the married people, he has mine. But then in verse 12, he says, but to the rest, I say this. Now, verses 10 and 11 are addressed to somebody.

And verses 12 are addressed to somebody else, the rest, those that aren't in the first group, to the rest. Now, the first somebody is those who are married. So you would expect that the rest must be the unmarried, right? But it isn't.

The rest, who are they? In verse 12, Paul says, the rest are Christians married to non-Christians. Well, then who is the first group? It doesn't take rocket scientists. The first group are Christians married to Christians.

The rest are Christians married to non-Christians. Paul is writing to Christians, the church. He's writing to the believers.

He's not writing to the world at large. He's writing to believers. He assumes that most believers have married other believers.

However, there would be some in the church who got converted after they were already married and their spouse may not have gotten converted. So these later converts are now married to non-believers because their spouse has not yet been converted, may never. So there's two categories of married people in the church.

All the people they're writing to are Christians, but some of them are married to Christians and some are married to non-Christians. The first group he addresses are married Christians who are married to other Christians. He gives certain instructions to them.

The rest are Christians who are married to non-Christians. Is that plain enough? I think anyone who just looks at the passage and thinks for a moment can see that that's certainly the case. He's writing two different categories.

Both are married Christians. The first group married to Christians. The second group married to non-Christians.

Now, there's an interesting difference he makes in his instructions to the two groups, because in verse 10 he says, Now to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. And in verse 12 he says, But to the rest, I, not the Lord, say. Now there's an interesting difference he makes.

I mean, he doesn't talk that way in most of his epistles. It's clear that he does this on purpose here. The first group he's talking to Christians married to Christians.

He says, Now I command you, not just me, this is what the Lord commands. And then he talks to the Christians married to non-Christians and says, Now I'll give instructions, but I

don't have any command from the Lord about this. Now, when he says the Lord or not the Lord, he's referring to Jesus, of course.

Jesus is the Lord. And when he says, Not I, but the Lord, what he means is this. These instructions clearly are not originating with me.

Jesus said this same thing. I'm going to give this command, but you'll recognize it should be from there because it's what the Lord said. It's what Jesus said.

I say this, but not I, but the Lord. You remember him? Remember what he said? That's what I'm going to be repeating here. But to the other group, he says, Now I, not the Lord, want to talk to this other group.

Why? Because Jesus never addressed the other group. Paul's saying, OK, to the first group, I can just tell you what Jesus said and I affirm it. The second group, Jesus never said anything about them because Jesus never was conducting a ministry out among the Gentiles where there would be mixed marriages, religiously mixed.

All the people Jesus talked to were Jewish people married to Jewish people. They were same faith marriages. Jesus never gave any instructions about marriages that were not same faith.

So when Paul, in his journeys among the Gentiles, saw some people converted and their spouses didn't convert, he had a new situation that Jesus had never addressed. He says, Now I'm going to go beyond what Jesus did here. I'll give these commands.

I, not the Lord, say this. Now, when he says, Not I, but the Lord, he means Jesus said this. When he says, I, not the Lord, he's saying Jesus didn't say anything about this.

That's essentially what almost all commentators, regardless of their views about divorce and so forth, all commentators pretty much are in agreement that that's what Paul means when he says the Lord or not the Lord. He's saying either Jesus spoke about this or he didn't. The first group, Jesus did speak about.

The second group, Jesus didn't speak about. Now, that's very interesting because when Paul gives his instructions in verses 10 and 11, he says he's giving his instructions, A, to those that Jesus' instructions applied to. Jesus didn't give instruction to the other group, but he's simply reiterating the authority of Jesus' own commands.

And yet, we know from the context, he's talking to Christians, married to Christians. What that means is that in Paul's understanding, and I'll go with him rather than somebody else on this, some other man who has an opinion. In Paul's understanding, when Jesus gave the instructions he gave about divorce and remarriage, he had in mind believers married to believers.

That is, Jesus' instructions, as far as Jesus was concerned, as far as Paul was concerned, applied to Christians married to Christians. But Jesus' instructions did not apply to Christians married to non-Christians. And that's why Paul had to give additional instruction going beyond what Jesus said.

I say this, the Lord didn't say this. But that doesn't mean what he said isn't important. It just means that he's going beyond what Jesus had opportunity to speak about.

Now, this has ramifications in a lot of ways. For one thing, if we want to understand what Paul says in verses 10 and 11, we can cross-reference what Jesus said, which we've already looked at. And Paul just said, I'm just kind of now reiterating what Jesus said.

It also helps us to know that when we read what Jesus said, according to the inspired apostle, Jesus was simply addressing marriages within the same faith. What Jesus said in Matthew and in Mark and Luke on this subject was not addressed to Christians married to non-Christians. And Paul indicated it does not apply.

He had to give separate instructions to that category. Having trouble seeing that? It's a very important thing to note. Because we may just look at the instruction of Jesus just applied across the board even to situations Jesus didn't intend it to apply to.

That Paul himself says that Jesus didn't speak to. Now, what can we say about this? Look at verses 10 and 11. Now, to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, a wife is not to depart from her husband.

And then at the end of verse 11 he says, and a husband is not to divorce his wife. In other words, neither party is to initiate a divorce. He does say in verse 11, but even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

Makes it very clear she can't remarry and her husband isn't to remarry either. They're not supposed to get a divorce at all, much less remarry. Now, this is applying to Christians married to Christians.

Why doesn't Paul mention the exception that Jesus mentioned? Well, Paul has already said earlier that Christians don't commit adultery. Those who do aren't going to inherit the kingdom of God. In fact, you shouldn't even fellowship with someone who claims to be a Christian and does commit adultery.

Obviously, he's giving these people the benefit of the doubt that the married, the Christian man and Christian wife are not going to be committing adultery. Therefore, giving him that positive, you know, judgment, I'm sure you guys aren't committing adultery, right? Well, then there's no grounds for divorce between you. Now, he knew what Jesus said and Jesus did say that there are cases where there would be grounds for divorce.

When a Christian does commit adultery against their spouse, then that Christian spouse, it's different. Paul is not writing to the public in general. He's writing to a particular congregation.

He grants that they are not committing adultery against their spouses. And therefore, how should they view divorce? Well, it's not open to them. Divorce is not open to them.

Except, of course, on the conditions Jesus said, but Paul doesn't have to enumerate those right here. The point seems to be that Christians, because they don't commit adultery, don't give each other grounds for divorce. And therefore, the Christian man should never divorce his Christian wife because the assumption is she's not committing adultery.

And the Christian wife should not depart from her Christian husband because, again, the assumption is he's not committing adultery. If she has already done so when this letter arrives and she can't get back together with him, well, she should try. She should either be reconciled to her husband or stay single.

As if her husband won't take her back right away. That doesn't free her to remarry because there's been no grounds for divorce between them. Now, you might think I'm reading too much between the lines, but how could you not? Paul is himself saying that he's giving a repetition of what Jesus said.

We read what Jesus said. Jesus gave the exception. Paul doesn't mention the exception.

He gives the people the benefit of the doubt that they're not going out and playing the harlot. They're Christians. They're married to Christians.

These are saints we're talking to. But, of course, if any of them did lapse and commit adultery, then the exception that Jesus gave would apply to Paul's statement too, of course. Paul can't overrule Jesus.

He's just expounding. He's just applying what Jesus said to them. So what I understand to be going on here is Paul's saying Christians who are married to Christians, they fall under the exact teaching of Jesus on this subject.

Of course, if there's adultery, there's grounds for divorce. But since Christians don't do that generally, it's not a Christian thing to do. Christians would be excommunicated from Corinth if they did that.

Paul said so. He said they had to be. Well, in that case, there'd be no grounds for divorce among Christians in that congregation if they're following his instructions.

And therefore, they shouldn't split up. And if they have already done so, they should seek to reconcile. If that's impossible, they should stay single.

Because, as Jesus said, if there's no grounds for divorce, to remarry would be adultery. And Christians aren't at liberty to do that. Now, what about the second category? To the rest, I, not the Lord, say.

And we read it. He says if a brother or sister is married to an unbeliever, what should they do? Should they seek a divorce? No, he says don't. Don't seek a divorce.

Why not? Well, you made a promise. You're supposed to keep your promises. The fact that you're the person who made a promise who isn't a Christian doesn't mean you can break your promise.

What a world that would be if Christians felt like every time they made a promise to someone, if the person they promised wasn't a believer, they don't have to keep their promise. No, we're supposed to be people of integrity. If you married somebody when you were not a Christian and they were not a Christian and you became a Christian yourself since then, you're still under your oath.

You're not supposed to break your promises to people, even if they're non-Christians. I've been amazed how many people have told me that they separated and divorced from their wives before they were saved. And now they're saved.

They're not remarried yet, but they're thinking about remarriage. And they're thinking that because their divorce took place before they got saved and because the Bible says, if any man is in Christ, he's new creation. Old things are passed away.

All things become new. Somehow that verse means I don't have to keep my commitment to the spouse that I left wrongly when I was unsaved. Well, wait a minute here.

If you make a deal to buy a car on time payments before you're saved, and then you get saved, are you released from that commitment? I don't think so. If anything, you should be more conscientious to keep your commitments after you become saved than you would have been if you hadn't gotten saved. If you made a promise to a woman in good faith and she to you before you were saved, that you'd forsake all others, leave only to her, you know, until death do you part.

That's a promise. That's a legitimate promise that God holds you to. The fact that you got saved afterwards doesn't give you the right to abandon her or him just because they're not saved.

That's what Paul's saying. No, you have no right to divorce them unless they give you grounds, of course. That's a different story.

He's just saying that if you are a Christian, your spouse is non-Christian, and you're getting sick of the persecution, you're getting there and the mockery and so forth, you might think, well, God never was into this marriage anyway, because that guy's a

heathen. So I'm just going to bail. Should I, Paul? Paul says, no, you shouldn't.

You who are the Christian do not leave the spouse who is a non-Christian. But that doesn't mean you're stuck for life necessarily. There can be some things that can change that.

He says in verse 15, but if the unbeliever departs, that is, the believer does not initiate the divorce. But if the unbeliever does, if they're not content to dwell, if the unbeliever initiates the divorce, let them depart. And then here we have a very important statement to pay attention to because different Christians understand differently.

Paul says, a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. If you are a believer, you're married to a non-believer. The non-believer leaves you, divorces you, abandons the marriage.

You, the believer, are not under bondage in such cases. To what? What's it mean to be not under bondage? Now, there are some who say, well, you're just not under bondage to the marriage, but you're not free to remarry. There are many who say that.

There's many who will acknowledge that there are times when you can actually be divorced without sinning, but you can't remarry because that would be adultery, they say. That's not what Paul says. Paul says you're not under bondage.

He can't possibly mean you're free not to live with that person. How could it be otherwise? They left you. They're not giving you that choice.

How could you not be free to not live with them? Obviously, you can't be required to live with someone who won't live with you, who leaves you, abandons you. What does it mean not under bondage? Well, let me point out to you something back there in verse 39 of the same chapter. We already looked at it.

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives. But if her husband dies, she's at liberty. Bound and at liberty.

What does at liberty mean? She is at liberty to marry again. That's what Paul says. Being bound to her husband means she can't take another husband.

But if she's at liberty, she can. What does not under bondage mean? Does that mean bound or at liberty? Sounds to me like it means at liberty. Sounds to me like Paul is saying this marriage, because the unbeliever has departed, you are free.

You can act as if it never happened. Just like a woman whose husband has died. She's at liberty to remarry.

So, as I understand it, the believer whose unbelieving partner abandons them, that believer is free to remarry and there's no stigma upon it. It's the same as if they were a

widow and their husband had died. Now, some people say, well, seems like there's a lot of different scenarios here, but my situation kind of falls between the cracks and doesn't fit any of these quite right.

What do I do? For instance, suppose I am married, I'm a Christian, and my spouse is a Christian or professes to be a Christian, and my spouse does not commit adultery and I don't commit adultery, so there's no grounds for divorce there. And yet, my Christian spouse leaves, breaks up the marriage, takes the kids or whatever. What then? It's not a case of a Christian marriage to a non-Christian in this case.

Is there any way out? For the abandoned party in this case? There is. Jesus said in Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, if your brother sins against you, go to him between him and you alone. And if he hears you, you've won your brother back.

If he doesn't hear you, go with two witnesses. If he won't hear them, take it before the church. If he won't hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen or a tax collector.

Now, what's that mean? Here's a couple, they're both professing Christians. They don't fall into the others, the rest category that Paul talks about. They're in the category of those who are Christians, married to Christians.

But one party abandons the marriage or in some other significant way, violates all the rights of the other party. Says the drunkard and beats him up and so forth. He's a professing Christian.

Well, does the Christian wife in a case like that just have to grin and bear it? Well, not necessarily. She can confront him about his sin. He's sinning against her.

Jesus says, confront him between the two of you. If that's already been done, he hasn't repented, take another witness. Maybe a pastor, an elder or some other friend of the family.

If he won't listen to them, take it to the church. If that doesn't change him, he's a pagan. At least as far as you're concerned.

Jesus said you must regard him as a heathen. If he won't repent after all those confrontations, he's to be regarded as a heathen. Well, what if he leaves then? Well, then you are the Christian married to a non-Christian.

Never mind that your spouse professes to still be a Christian and ends up in another church in town. If they don't repent of the sin after those confrontations, Jesus said whatever the churches may say, whatever the person may say about himself, as far as you're concerned, that person's a heathen. In which case it seems to me that the believer would be not under bondage in such cases.

The point is, of course, we're not supposed to be looking for ways out. Even if we're in very hard marriages. We did say, after all, for better or for worse.

Maybe this is the worst we were talking about. But, there are times when in fact, the Bible itself allows that a marriage can be so destroyed by the actions of one, that the other party is not under bondage. Is at liberty.

Which apparently in Paul's usage seems to mean free to remarry. There's one other New Testament passage about this I want to talk about, that I want to talk, I want to look closer at this fornication exception. Because there's a lot of dispute about it.

And that is found in 1st Timothy 3.2. This is where Paul is giving the qualifications for elders. 1st Timothy 3.2. Among other important qualifications, a bishop must be the husband of one wife. Now, the husband of one wife is a term that many people feel, would exclude a man who is divorced and remarried from being an elder.

It is obvious that they understand the expression, the husband of one wife, to mean in a lifetime he can only have one wife. There are others who believe that what Paul means is only one at a time. Because polygamy was not unknown in the Roman Empire, nor even among the Jews.

It was not a common practice among the Jews in Paul's day. But the Talmud indicates it was still practiced by some. And the Romans allowed it as well.

There were polygamists. Some of them got saved and joined the church. Now, what does a person who is a polygamist do when he joins the church? Well, some people say, well, he'd better divorce all but his first wife.

Well, the Bible doesn't say that. He's made commitments to all of them. He's entered into legal agreements with all of them.

Is he supposed to become a covenant breaker to three of his four wives? That's what missionaries used to require in the old days, a century or a few generations ago. You go to Africa. The tribal chief has 18 wives.

He gets saved. Missionaries made him divorce all his wives except the first one. That's simply not biblical.

The Bible does not anywhere command that polygamists divorce some of their wives. Now, the Bible does indicate that polygamy is not something Christians are supposed to enter into. But once it's been done and they get converted, the Bible does not say they're supposed to break up any of those marriages.

And therefore, it would seem that there might have been in the church from time to time men who had more than one wife. Not because as Christians they married multiple

wives, but because they were already married to multiple wives when they got saved. They should not be elders.

That's what some people think Paul's saying. Now, the question is this. When Paul said the husband of one wife, did he mean only one at a time or only one in a lifetime? If this is going to apply to people who are divorced and remarried, let's say legitimately divorced, biblically legitimately divorced and remarried, if we're going to say, well, they can't be elders because husband and one wife, then what we're suggesting is Paul means only one wife per lifetime.

And yet the expression Paul uses in the Greek literally means a one woman man. The word wife and woman are the same word in the Greek. And many believe that the statement should best be understood, the man must be a one woman man.

Now, if a man was a faithful husband in one marriage and against his will, the marriage was destroyed by adultery and so forth and was ended, and he later was a faithful husband to another woman, is he not a one woman man? Now, some say no, but let us think this way. Well, let's pose another scenario. Suppose a man's wife dies and he remarries.

Would anyone suggest that he's obligated to stay single? After his wife has died or that there's any stigma upon him of any kind if he remarries after his wife has died? Of course, there's nothing in the scripture to place such a stigma on a man. And yet if one husband and one wife means only one in a lifetime, that would mean it would exclude from the eldership as much men who were widowed and remarried as men who are legitimately divorced and remarried because both have had more than one wife in their lifetime, but only one at a time. It seems to me much more likely, though I can't say with certainty, that Paul is here saying that a man who has more than one wife at a time or who is not faithful to his one wife, he's not a one woman man.

He's got a wife, but he, you know, plays the field too. That man is not at all to be considered for eldership. I think it does matter to me because I don't really, if you were here when we were talking about the church, I don't really think that appointment of elders is essential in every congregation anyway, and it's never mattered to me which way this was taken.

Certainly it doesn't matter to me because I don't ever intend to be an elder in any church, so it doesn't affect me in any way that matters. But just looking at it as objectively as I know how, it seems to me that what Paul is saying is the man has to be faithful to one wife at a time. There may be any number of misfortunes that befall him in his lifetime which lead to him having additional one wife at a time.

And there is no stigma in the Bible against this. The man is not the worst for it. Now some people would say, well, we allow people divorced and remarried into the church,

but we don't let them into the pulpit because of elder.

Well, elders are just exemplary Christians, that's all. Everything that it says about elders is what really should be said about Christians in general. Not a striker, having a good testimony with those who are outside, having his children in subjection.

Every Christian should fit that description. Not all do, but they all should. There is nothing about an elder that he is required to be that all Christians aren't supposed to be.

If we suggest that a man can be a good Christian in the church in good standing, though he is divorced and remarried, but he can't be in the ministry, then we are adding to the Word of God and putting a strange wall of division between the ministry and the pew. The Bible nowhere does. After all, what if we said if someone denied the faith could he be in the ministry? Peter denied it three times.

But he repented, he was forgiven. But I mean, just because there have been some things in the past, once a man is restored to God, Jesus didn't think there was anything wrong with sticking him in the ministry. Some people say, well, what a bad testimony it will be to the world if they see in the church leaders who have been divorced and remarried.

Well, why would it be a bad testimony if they were innocent of it? Would it not be a worse testimony to the world if we communicate to them that even when you are innocently the victim of divorce and you have done nothing wrong and the church even acknowledges it by letting you be a member, yet you are not really fully restored inside of God. What if Jesus had said to Peter, you know, you denied me three times, I forgive you, but I am not going to let you preach. I don't want to give the world the impression that I am soft on this kind of thing.

Now, there Peter had actually done something wrong. Many people who are divorced have not done anything wrong. Now, I think that is traditions of men, and while it doesn't affect me since I never intend to be an elder, I think that it is a misunderstanding to say that an elder could never be a divorced and remarried person.

But if someone wishes to hold to that view, it is one possible meaning of the words. Now, I want to take just the few minutes I have left here to talk about the authenticity of the exception. When Jesus said, except for the cause of fornication, and the reason I do is because, as we pointed out, Mark and Luke have the same statement of Jesus, but without the exception mentioned.

Whereas, Matthew has the exception mentioned in both places, in chapter 5 and chapter 19. Now, we have to conclude one of two possibilities, especially since Mark chapter 10 is parallel to Matthew 19, and Mark 10 doesn't have the exception, and Matthew 19 does. We have got the same statement, but one gospel records the exception, one does not.

One, Jesus did give the exception, as Matthew says, but Mark and Luke, for some reason, declined to record it. The other possibility is that Jesus did not give the exception, as per Mark and Luke's version, and Matthew, for some reason, added it. Those are the only two possibilities.

There is no way around this. Either somebody added it, and Jesus didn't say it, or Jesus did say it, and someone left it out. There are no other options.

Now, which should we take? If we say, okay, Mark and Luke recorded just the way Jesus said, no exception mentioned, but Matthew stuck it in there. Then we have, what are you going to say? Matthew is dishonest? Matthew's gospel is unreliable? We should throw it out of the Bible? It wasn't inspired because Matthew added things that weren't there? Or maybe, maybe Jesus didn't say it, but Matthew knew by inspiration that Jesus did allow that one exception, just like Paul doesn't mention it, but there's reason to believe that he acknowledged its legitimacy. You don't always mention the exceptions every time you talk about a thing.

I don't know which it is, but I will say this. Unless the exception is authentic, then the gospel of Matthew is inauthentic. That's all that's at stake, really, is the inclusion of the gospel of Matthew in the canon of Scripture, because if that exception is not valid, then Matthew's gospel is an unreliable witness of the life and teaching of Jesus and does not belong in our Bible.

However, Matthew is one of the 12 apostles. Neither Mark nor Luke were. Matthew heard Jesus make the statement both times.

Neither Mark nor Luke did. Now, I'm not going to cast aspersions on the authenticity of Mark or Luke, either. I'm just saying that if we're going to say, okay, which of these guys is giving it more exactly? How about the guy who heard it? Maybe he got it closer.

Or it may well be that Luke and Mark have deliberately abbreviated Jesus' statement for some reason, but they knew that the church would know that, although they're stating the statement more or less without mentioning the exception, that in extreme cases, such as fornication, there are exceptions. That can be the case. I pointed out, I think, last time that in Mark chapter 8 and verse 12, Mark 8, 12, Jesus said, A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given to this generation.

Period. But the very same statement in Matthew 12, Jesus says, no sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now, it's interesting.

Same statement, two different gospels. One does not mention any exception. No sign will be given to this generation.

The other one has the same statement. No sign will be given to this generation except for the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now, shall we decide that since Mark didn't mention

that, that Jesus didn't say anything about the sign of the prophet Jonah? Or would it be more wise to suggest that Matthew records accurately what Jesus said, and Mark, as gospel writers sometimes do, abbreviated.

It's much less, to my mind, it's much less damning to a historian that he leaves a thing out or two than that he adds things that never really were said or done. I mean, that a historian would fabricate out of whole cloth statements and attribute them to the character they're writing about is dishonesty. For a person not to mention everything someone said is not dishonesty.

It's simply a matter of editorial liberty, especially in the case where an exception might be granted whether it's mentioned or not. It doesn't have to be mentioned all the time. There's many times when statements in the Scripture are made in an absolutist sort of way, but exceptions are implied.

Jesus said in Luke 6, verse 30, Give to everyone who asks you. That sounds pretty absolute. Are there no exceptions? Shall I give my children everything they ask for? Would that be a good parent? Give to everyone who asks you? That would include my children.

Everything they ever ask for, I'm supposed to give it to them. Is that right? Is that what the Bible teaches? What about the guy who won't work? Didn't Paul specifically say something about that? 2 Thessalonians 3, 10, He that will not work, let him not eat. What if he asks me for money? I'm under command of God not to give him any.

What am I supposed to do then? I'm supposed to understand that some statements are made in an absolute way that are not intended to be as absolute as they sound. The exceptions to them are stated elsewhere in Scripture. And therefore, although the statement about divorce and remarriage sounds very absolute in Mark and Luke, it doesn't sound as absolute in Matthew.

It's found there. And we should allow the fuller passage to supplement the briefer passage. That's at least my approach to Scripture in general.

Not just these passages about divorce. That's just the way you harmonize accounts that are not quite the same. You recognize the fuller passage is giving more detail than the other is.

If you want to handle it a different way, that's up to you. But that's how I do it, and I think it's the responsible way to do this kind of thing.