

SHEPHERDS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL AND EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF DIVORCE AND
REMARriage

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INTRODUCTION

The current discussion surrounding the bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage has led to much confusion. Undoubtedly, the most difficult hurdle to clarity is the lack of scholarly consensus on either matter. Furthermore, even those who would claim to be in the "same camp" have a long list of their own disagreements. Of course, the fact that these issues can become highly emotional in nature only leads to more confusion. The goal of this paper is to extract a coherent biblical-theological understanding on divorce and remarriage. The method of this paper is to conduct a biblical-theological survey of all the relevant passages on divorce and remarriage.

Having already completed the research and written the content, this paper offers the following six conclusions: 1) scripture consistently upholds God's creation ideal of monogamous lifelong marriage, 2) both Jesus and Paul condemned divorce for invalid grounds, 3) valid grounds for divorce are *πορνεία* and abandonment, 4) Jesus and Paul favored forgiveness and reconciliation over divorce, even for valid grounds, 5) a believer is never to initiate a divorce, and 6) both Jesus and Paul condemned remarriage after an invalid divorce, but not after a valid one.

Note that the outline of this paper will not be the six conclusions listed above, but rather a survey of all the relevant passages of scripture, beginning first with the Old Testament and then moving on to the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The biblical-theological survey of divorce and remarriage properly begins by looking to the Old Testament, for it forms the very foundation upon which the New Testament writers stand. Since, therefore, the New Testament writers would have been highly influenced by Old Testament teaching, it goes without saying that the Old Testament should serve as the point of departure for anyone seeking to understand this complex issue. Two passages will be analyzed: Genesis 2:24 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Genesis 2:24

Arguably, the most important verse in the discussion of divorce and remarriage is Genesis 2:24. The reason for this importance is twofold. First, it records the very institution of marriage. Secondly, when the religious elites asked Jesus of the morality of divorce and remarriage, Jesus appealed to Genesis 2:24. If this text was at the fore of Jesus's mind, it should be of importance in the present, as well. The verse reads, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh" (Holman Christian Standard Bible).

From the passage, it is clear that marriage was instituted in the context of creation, making it an ordinance that applies to all.¹ Through marriage, God (1) satisfies the aloneness experienced before the institution, (2) establishes a pattern of faithful, monogamous relationship for the fabric of society; and (3) establishes the one flesh relationship.² It is this third and final

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, "Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage," *GTJ* 3:2 (Fall 82), 177.

² *Ibid.*

quality that becomes the focus of the present discussion regarding this passage. Two phrases in 2:24 are pivotal and deserve attention.

The Meaning of “Cleave,” (דָּבַק),

First, regarding the word “bond,” often rendered “cleave,” (דָּבַק), Earl S. Kalland understands the term to be referencing, “clinging to someone in affection and loyalty.”³ This becomes clear with a brief survey of the word’s usage. Man cleaves to his wife (Gen 2:24). Ruth clave to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). The men of Judah clave to David during Sheba’s rebellion (2 Sam 20:2). Shechem clave to Dinah because he loved her (Gen 34:3). Solomon clave in love to his wives (1 Kgs 11:2). Finally, if God’s blessing was to be the Israelites, they were to cleave to the Lord in affection and loyalty (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh 22:5; 23:8).⁴ Cleaving, therefore, has the idea of attaching oneself to another in deep devotion.

The Meaning of “One Flesh” (בֶּשֶׂר אֶחָד).

A second important phrase in this passage concerns the meaning of the term, “one flesh” (אֶחָד בֶּשֶׂר). What does this mean? Raymond Ortlund Jr. posits that while it is not less than sex, it certainly is more. He writes, “It is the profound fusion of two lives into one, shared life together, by the mutual consent and covenant of marriage. It is the complete and *permanent* giving over of oneself into a new circle of shared existence with one’s partner” (emphasis mine).⁵ God, thus,

³ Earl S. Kalland, “dābaq,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 1:178.

⁴ Ibid.

designed marriage to be an infusion of two people at the deepest level, with no intention of separation.

Didactic Usefulness on Divorce and Remarriage

After examining this important passage, in what ways does it inform a biblical-theological understanding of divorce and remarriage? In sum, this passage lays out the paradigm of lifelong monogamous marriage. The Hebrew term rendered “bond,” suggests that the bond cannot easily be broken.⁶ Further, the “one flesh” union “is a description of the relationship between close relatives (cf. Gen 29:14), which endures whatever changes occur to the related individuals.”⁷ While debate surrounds the intricacies of what “bond” and “become one flesh” mean, there is no question that God designed marriage to be permanent.⁸ It is not difficult to conclude, then, that the concepts of divorce and remarriage were foreign to the first man and woman. Divorce and subsequent remarriage, except for death, were never intended to happen.

⁵ Raymond Ortlund Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 101.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, “No Remarriage After Divorce,” in *Remarriage After Divorce in Today’s Church: 3 Views*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 20.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, (2ed.; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 34. This is especially illustrated in Jesus’s citation of Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:4-6.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

J. Carl Laney warns that it is critical to understand that this passage does not institute or approve divorce, but merely treats it as a practice already known and existing.⁹ Increased laxity concerning divorce and remarriage among the Hebrews demanded legislation in order to deal with this matter.¹⁰ While, then, Deuteronomy 24 permits divorce, Wenham points out that this was only a concession to the 'hardness of heart', and to human weakness.¹¹ There prove to be two critical points in this passage regarding the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage, both of which are found in verse 1. The verse reads, "If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds *something improper* about her, he may write her a *divorce certificate*, hand it to her, and send her away from his house."

Something Improper (עֲרוּהָ דָבָר)

The first critical point concerns the expression "something improper" (עֲרוּהָ דָבָר, pronounced 'ervat dāvār). Within the context, this phrase proves to be the specific grounds for divorce and thus, extracting its true meaning is essential to developing a biblical understanding of divorce and remarriage. In fact, this phrase was a major point of dispute between the two most prominent schools of Jewish thought during Jesus's ministry.¹² The debate between these two schools of thought were recorded (in a highly abbreviated way) in the Mishnah:

⁹ J. Carl Laney, "No Divorce & No Remarriage," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, (ed. H. Wayne House; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990), 21.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, "Gospel Definitions of Adultery and Women's Rights," in *Expository Times* 95 (1984): 330. See also, Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 224.

The School of Shammai say: A man should not divorce his wife unless he found in her a matter of indecency (עֲרוּהָ דְבָר), as it is said: “For he finds in her and indecent matter” (דְּבָר עֲרוּהָ). And the School of Hillel say, Even if she spoiled his dish, since it says, “For he finds in her an indecent matter” (עֲרוּהָ דְבָר).¹³

The schools of Shammai and Hillel offered differing interpretations of *‘ervat dāvār*. Reading the phrase woodenly produces “indecency of a matter,” or perhaps “nakedness of a matter.”¹⁴ On the one hand, the Hillelites concluded that the strangeness of the phrase suggested that some extra meaning was hidden in it, a common technique found in early rabbinic exegesis.¹⁵ They concluded, therefore, that the phrase referred to two separate grounds for divorce: 1) “indecency” and 2) “a matter.”¹⁶ This expected that one could base a divorce on an act of “indecency” or on “a matter,” which they took to mean “any matter.”¹⁷ Thus, because “any matter” encompasses all

¹² William A. Heth, “Remarriage For Adultery or Desertion,” in *Remarriage After Divorce in Today’s Church: 3 Views*, (ed. Paul E. Engle and Mark L. Strauss; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 63.

¹³ *Mishnah, Gittin* 9.10.

¹⁴ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 111.

¹⁵ David Instone-Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE*, (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 30; Tübingen J.C. Mohr, 1993), 20, speaking of rabbinic exegesis states, “Unusual form refers to an unusual spelling or grammatical construction to some interpretation...it is based on the assumption that the divine legislator would not have made elementary mistakes in spelling and grammar, so that anything which might otherwise be regarded as a mistake must indicate a deeper or hidden meaning.”

¹⁶ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

other grounds for divorce, this single ground could be, and was, used by anyone seeking a divorce,¹⁸ even for something as trivial as burning the toast.¹⁹

The Shammaites, on the other hand, understood “a matter of indecency” to mean adultery. To bolster their view, the Shammaites often reversed the order of *ervat dāvār* “indecency of a matter,” to *dāvār ervat* “a matter of indecency,” though they also quoted the text in its normal form as well.²⁰ The Shammaites, thus, allowed divorce only on the grounds of adultery.

It appears the interpretation offered by those from the school of Hillel was more prominent among Jesus’s contemporaries. For, by the first century, the Hillel view was more common²¹ and the Shammaite school was dwindling in number and had almost all disappeared by the second century.²²

While the debate surrounding *‘ervat dāvār* continued, it can be concluded that the expression most likely was not restricted to only adultery, for the Torah prescribed the death penalty for adultery (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22).²³ Peter Craigie comments that the term might possibly refer to a physical defect, such as a closed womb, although this lacks biblical support.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, (trans. Neil Tomkinson with Jean Gray; Lund: C.W.K Gleerup, 1965), 44.

²⁰ Instone-Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis*, 111.

²¹ Ibid, 113.

²² Ibid, 112.

²³ R. Stanton Norman, “Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Reflections on Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seminary Professor: A Modest Proposal,” in *JBTM* 1:1 (Spring 2003), 80. He adds, “it is unclear whether the death penalty for divorce was regularly administered” (p. 80).

Isaksson posits that the expression denotes a wife exposing herself either voluntarily or involuntarily and that the “indecent” here may have included any promiscuous, immoral behavior that was sexually deviant and short of intercourse.²⁵ There appears to be, then, a Mosaic permission to divorce for a sin against a spouse that is sexual in nature. Note that divorce is not required here, but merely permitted.

Divorce Certificate (כְּרִיתוֹת סֵפֶר)

The second salient expression concerns the meaning of the “divorce certificate” (כְּרִיתוֹת סֵפֶר), often called the *get*. What is this document? What does it mean? What implications does such a bill have? According to later Jewish tradition, in order to carry out a divorce, two actions were required: 1) the husband was to provide the wife with a bill of divorce; and 2) he must send her out of his home (cf. Hos 9:15; Isa 50:1).²⁶ Clearly both actions are prescribed in this passage in the very first verse.

The bill of divorce, now known as the *get*, which is Aramaic for “legal document,” is a formal legal document permitting the woman to leave the husband. The primary reason for such a bill seems to be twofold.

²⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 305.

²⁵ Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, 45.

²⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 671.

First, the bill was for the protection of the woman. As Daniel Block writes, “Moses’s concern [here] is to protect the wife from abuse by men, specifically her first husband.”²⁷ Block further comments that Moses is insisting that when a husband divorces his wife, he is relinquishing his authority over her.²⁸ This Mosaic legislation, therefore, seeks to protect women by requiring the husband to produce a severance document as legal proof for the dissolution of the marriage. Without this formal document the husband could demand to have his wife back at any time. Further, if she remarried without a formal document of severance, he could accuse her of adultery.²⁹

A second reason for the requirement of a bill seems to be the formal permission of remarriage. Jeffery H. Tigay writes concerning the purpose of the bill explaining, “the certificate was probably a statement by the husband that the couple is no longer husband and wife (as in Hosea 2:4; which is quoted in Karaite divorce certificates) and that she is free to marry whoever she wishes.”³⁰ The Mishnah comments that after a bill of divorce has been properly issued, “You are hereby permitted to (marry) anyone.”³¹ The bill, therefore, seems to be a formal documents that allows the wife to remarry.

²⁷ Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 165.

²⁸ Ibid., 166.

²⁹ Ibid. See Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, “Should she remarry, she would need proof that her former marriage was terminated, otherwise she could be charged with adultery,” (p. 673).

³⁰ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 222.

³¹ *Gittin* 9:3.

The passage resumes, explaining that if a man divorces his wife and the divorced wife remarries, then he is not allowed to ever take her back, whether she divorces again, or her new spouse dies (Deut 24:2-4). For, to do so would bring an abomination on the land. While other questions remain concerning this passage, the focus now becomes the impact of the passage on one's understanding of divorce and remarriage.

Didactic Usefulness on Divorce and Remarriage

What can be concluded from this passage in regards to divorce and remarriage? Concerning divorce, four concluding observations prove useful. First, it is important to recall that this passage does not offer divine approval of divorces but rather of regulating them. Commenting on Jesus's remarks on this passage in Matthew 19, James Hurley writes, whereas the Pharisees had taken Moses's concession of divorce as God's design, Jesus took it as a regulatory measure to deal with the result of sin.³²

Second, it can be deduced that while divorce was not divinely approved, it does seem to be divinely provided for man's hardness of heart. Contrary to those who hold a "no divorce" stance, this passage does seem to assume and regulate divorce practices without wholeheartedly condemning them, given the grounds of the divorce are valid. As established, valid grounds for divorce seem to be sexual in nature and committed against one's spouse. As will be seen, this coheres perfectly with Jesus's allowing divorce on the grounds of *πορνεία* in Matthew 19. Is it too difficult, then, to conclude that there is at least some sort of legitimacy to divorce? One would tend to think not.

³² James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 101.

Third, divorce was not required in this text. Theoretically, the husband could either continue in the marriage, or he could even remarry her, if neither had already remarried. An example of this can be found in the book of Hosea.³³

Lastly, this passage serves as a warning not to divorce too quickly.³⁴ For, upon the wife's second marriage, the door would be completely closed for remarriage. For, per this passage, to remarry a spouse who has already remarried brings an abomination on the land.

Two concluding remarks concerning remarriage prove to be obvious. First, and most obvious, this passage teaches that remarrying an ex-spouse who has been remarried is forbidden, since it is an abomination. What does it mean when it says, "It is an abomination?" One possible way to understand this abomination is that her second marriage is adulterous, since she is the party of guilt. Thus, to enter marriage as either the new husband, or to re-enter, after she has already remarried, as the original husband, would only place one into the adulterous situation.³⁵ This reading, however, is regarded by some to be conjectural. Lundbom provides a second option for the prohibition. He hypothesizes that if the second husband were to die, the woman would get the inheritance, which would explain why the first husband would want her back.³⁶ Furthermore, there is always the chance that the first husband, wanting his wife back with or without an inheritance, might conspire with the wife or act on his own, to accelerate the second

³³ Norman, "Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Reflections on Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seminary Professor, 81.

³⁴ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 225.

³⁵ Norman, "Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Reflections on Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seminary Professor, 81-82.

³⁶ Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 673.

husband's death.³⁷ This, as well as a number of other scenarios, provide good reason that this prohibition was enacted to prevent such intrigues.

Second, the certificate of divorce seems to allow the remarriage of a woman who has been divorced. Recalling Tigay's comments, he writes "the certificate was probably a statement by the husband that the couple is no longer husband and wife (as in Hosea 2:4; which is quoted in Karaite divorce certificates) and that she is free to marry whoever she wishes."³⁸ This, coupled with the assumed remarriage in the passage, lead to the conclusion that remarriage is not wholly condemned, as some believe.

Nondidactic Old Testament Passages

Divorce and remarriage are mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. The Pentateuch, for example, elsewhere references these two issues in passages like Leviticus 21 and Deuteronomy 22. Divorce and remarriage surface in other places such as Ezra 10:3, Isaiah 50:1, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 44:22, and in Malachi 2:16. While these passages are certainly present, they do not prove themselves to be didactically useful. Attention, therefore, will not be given to these references. Interestingly enough, however, all of these passages present divorce as a distorted reality of God's creation ideal.³⁹ Subsequently, this upholds God's standard of marriage in Genesis 2:24 and further reveals God's opposition to divorce.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 222.

³⁹ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 225.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The issue of divorce and remarriage has become a topic of much debate among evangelical scholars in the modern era. So much so that a modern reader may be surprised to find that much of the New Testament remains silent on the matter. The subject, for example, is totally absent from the writings of John, Peter, James, and Jude.⁴¹ This limits the salient information to only two places in the New Testament: several passing remarks by Jesus in the Synoptics (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18) and two occasions in the Pauline Corpus (Romans 7:1-4; 1 Cor 7:10-16, 39).⁴²

Matthew 19:1-12

As previously discussed, although divorce was regulated as a provision for hard heartedness, the Old Testament is resoundingly clear that divorce falls short of the creation ideal. In this section of Matthew's gospel, the account begins with Jesus taking the first steps of his final trip to Jerusalem by leaving Galilee for Judea.⁴³

The Test of the Pharisees

In verses 3-12, Matthew reminds readers of the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees in an exchange of the latter testing the former with a question on divorce. Of course, their desire to

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 226.

⁴³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 699.

show that Jesus contradicts Moses recalls the religious leaders' opposition to the Lord, which has been consistent ever since Jesus began ministry.⁴⁴

Jesus's Answer

In good rabbinic fashion, Jesus takes his hearers to the very beginning to make his case, in response to their question. For, in Jewish hermeneutics, the further back one went in the Torah, the more authority it contained.⁴⁵ In fact, Jesus's response here "borders on incredulous, implying that these Pharisees have not really read the creation account."⁴⁶ Jesus then proceeds to reference both Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 in order to uphold God's standard of monogamous, lifelong marriage.

First, Jesus reminds his hearers, in verse 4, that God created man both male and female, by drawing attention to Genesis 1:27. From here, Jesus concludes that God created men and women to be together, not divorced.⁴⁷ But he is not finished with his argument. Second, in verse 5, Jesus recalls Genesis 2:24 in order to infer that marriage, not divorce, was God's desire in the beginning. Jesus concludes his argument in verse 6 beginning with the inferential ὥστε.⁴⁸ He deduces, "Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."

⁴⁴ c.f. 12:14, 24, 38; 15:1, 12; 16:1; 22:18, 35.

⁴⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 703.

⁴⁶ David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, 2008), 459. Further, the question Jesus asks begins with the negative particle οὐκ, expecting a positive answer.

⁴⁷ Osborne, *Matthew*, 704.

⁴⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Pillar; Eerdmans, 1992), 481, says "ὥστε, which Matthew has used 15 times, more than in any other New Testament writing, indicates the logical sequence, 'for this reason,' 'it follows that—.'"

The Pharisee's Rebuttal

The response of Jesus's hearers in verse 7 reveals their erroneous emphasis on Mosaic provisions rather than God's initial creation mandate. Moreover, they are convinced that they have caught Jesus in a grave legal error and thus they begin to press further into the reason for which Moses permitted divorce.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the Pharisees read more into Moses's words than what is actually there. Morris comments, "They go beyond Scripture, for Moses did not *command* divorce. He [only] pointed to current custom and did something to regulate it."⁵⁰

Jesus's Conclusion

In verse 8, Jesus continues to show the Pharisees that their basic error was their assumption that what God permits is actually a command. Albright and Mann point out that in Jesus's response, "There may be a deliberate contrast in the wording here, between *prescribe* in vs. 7 and *allowed* here [vs.8]" (emphasis original).⁵¹ In sum, Jesus is demonstrating to his hearers the error of the Pharisees. Namely, that they have taken the regrettable, but necessary, Mosaic provision as the starting point for their ethical discussion in preference to the original purposes of God.⁵²

⁴⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 704.

⁵⁰ Morris, *Matthew* 482.

⁵¹ W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1971), 226.

⁵² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 720.

The Reaction of the Disciples

In the chronological sequence of the narrative, the much debated “exception clause” of verse 9 presents itself next. For the purpose of emphasis, however, it will be overlooked at this time and returned to shortly, where it will be given due attention. Thus, the response of the disciples in verse 10 is next. The disciples’ response shows that they themselves had overlooked the permanence of God’s creation ideal of marriage. They reason that under such tight constraints, a life of celibacy may simply be the better life.⁵³

Some have taken the response of the disciples as proof that Jesus’s view was extremely high, allowing no divorce and no remarriage once the marriage had begun. But is this necessarily where the text takes the reader? Perhaps not. Köstenberger comments that a “no divorce, no remarriage” conclusion from the disciples’ reaction is largely conjectural.⁵⁴ Furthermore, with a dominant Hillelite presence, it is likely that the disciples were more influenced by the liberal interpretation than they might like to admit. Moreover, Köstenberger notes that while modern Judaism *required* divorce in the case of sexual immorality, Jesus is merely *permitting* it.⁵⁵ The implication, therefore, may be one of highly encouraged forgiveness, even in the case of adultery by one’s own spouse. This seems to adequately account for the reaction of the disciples.⁵⁶

⁵³ Turner, *Matthew*, 463.

⁵⁴ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 227.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The “Exception Clause”

While scholars have debated the meaning of the pericope of Matthew 19:3-12, the major point of contention proves to be verse 9. After reaffirming God’s creation ideal in verses 3-6, followed by an appeal by the Pharisees to Mosaic stipulation, Jesus comments in verse 9 saying, “And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, *except for sexual immorality*, and marries another, commits adultery.” Several difficulties contribute to much of the confusion and misunderstanding that surrounds this verse. Upon further research, three such difficulties become evident in interpreting this difficult clause: 1) Textual difficulties, 2) the meaning of *πορνεία*, and 3) the exegetical difficulty of the exception’s scope.

Textual Difficulty

First, there is a textual difficulty. In other words, the exception clause appears in Matthew but is absent in Mark and Luke. Some scholars simply deny that Jesus ever said the exception clause in Matthew, claiming that it was added later by Matthew or a redactor. Robert Stein, for example, in an attempt to explain the omission of the exception clause in both Mark and Luke, reasons that Jesus never actually uttered the exception, but that it was added by Matthew or someone else.⁵⁷ This approach, however, is to be rejected. For, what is at stake here is inerrancy. As Köstenberger notes, “we are not at liberty to set aside biblical teaching because it is given *only once*” (emphasis original).⁵⁸ Furthermore, Instone-Brewer makes a sound case that whether

⁵⁷ Robert Stein, “Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife,” (*JETS* 22, June 1979), 116-120.

⁵⁸ Köstenberger and Jones, *God Marriage and Family*, 277.

Mark, Luke, or Matthew had the exception clause or not, the hearers would have mentally supplied it anyways.⁵⁹

The Meaning of Πορνεία

Second, there is an issue concerning the meaning of “sexual immorality” (πορνεία). Ben Witherington III understands πορνεία as incest, thus limiting the exception of divorce to cases of incestuous marriage.⁶⁰ Keener sees πορνεία as more broad and not necessarily limited to extramarital sexual activity, thus leading him to a more Hillelite reading.⁶¹ Other scholars such as Mark Geldard understand πορνεία as premarital sexual unfaithfulness.⁶² Finally, others contend that the term refers to adultery⁶³, thus making divorce permissible on the grounds of a wife who is an unrestrained and unrepentant adulterer.

What, then, does πορνεία actually mean? Good evidence⁶⁴ suggests that πορνεία was a more inclusive term that could mean adultery, incest, prostitution, bestiality, homosexuality,

⁵⁹ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 153.

⁶⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 363. Also, Joseph A Fitzmeyer, “The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some Palestinian Evidence,” (*Theological Studies* 37, 1976): 208-211.

⁶¹ Criag Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 467-469.

⁶² Mark Geldard, “Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce,” (*Churchman* 92, 1978), 134-143. Also, Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, 135.

⁶³ Donald A. Shaner, *A Christian View of Divorce* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 107; Also, Thomas V. Fleming, “Christ and Divorce,” (*Theological Studies* 54, 1963), 109.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, “πόρνη, πόρνος, πορνεία, πορνεύω, ἐκπορνεύω,” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.6, eds. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Freidrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 579-595.

premarital sex, and more. Πορνεία, then, should not be forced into a single category unless context dictates. Stanton recalls Matthew's previous usage of μοιχεία earlier in 15:19 thus showing that Matthew was well aware of his semantic options.⁶⁵ This would seem to suggest that, while Jesus may have not meant less than adultery, Jesus most likely did mean more than adultery, at least in scope and not necessarily degree.

Exegetical Difficulty

A third and final difficulty is an exegetical one. Concerning the exception clause (μή ἐπί πορνεία), what is its scope? The question is whether the exception applies to both divorce and remarriage or to divorce alone from Jesus's strictures against divorce.⁶⁶ Heth and Wenham argue that Jesus objected to remarriage in every instance, even when divorce may have been permissible.⁶⁷ Those who hold to this view tend to understand Matt 19:11-12 as requiring celibacy for those who have been divorced.⁶⁸ Heth and Wenham's conclusion, however, is not as clear as they might like to admit. Ambiguities make their case largely one of an inferential leap. Blomberg, on the other hand, states an obvious blow to Heth and Wenham when he argues that Greek speakers desiring to convey that "all remarriage is wrong even if divorce is permitted following adultery" would, and could, say precisely that.⁶⁹ Furthermore, they could have simply

⁶⁵ Norman, "Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Reflections on Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seminary Professor" 83.

⁶⁶ Turner, *Matthew*, 462.

⁶⁷ William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 234.

⁶⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 462.

done it in two completely distinct clauses. This becomes even more clear when one further recognizes that remarriage upon divorce was viewed as a fundamental right by virtually all Jews in antiquity (m. Git. 9:3).⁷⁰

In sum, if Jesus had wanted anyone in his audience to understand that he was forbidding all remarriage, he would have had to be less ambiguous.⁷¹ Concerning this exegetical difficulty, it is best to conclude that Jesus is permitting both divorce and remarriage in the case of sexual infidelity.⁷²

Didactic Usefulness on Divorce and Remarriage

While Jesus's teaching here has been a longstanding platform of debate, it has been concluded that the traditional Protestant view remains the most persuasive. What does this persuasion offer for biblical-theological understanding of divorce and remarriage? Instone-Brewer in his fantastic work, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, offers several pedagogical principles that were taught by Jesus, in the Matthew 19 pericope.⁷³ Five of Instone-Brewer's principles will be used here.

⁶⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," (*TrinJ* 11:2, Fall 1990), 179.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 180.

⁷² Turner, *Matthew*, 462.

⁷³ I am indebted to Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 178-183 for these six principles.

First, Jesus is clearly teaching monogamy. In other words, an individual can only be married to one person at a time. Jesus teaches this when he references Genesis 2:24. Second, marriage is to be lifelong. This is made explicit when Jesus says, “what God has joined together, man must not separate” (vs. 6). Third, Jesus taught that divorce is not to be compulsory, even in cases of adultery. Whereas the standard of Jesus’s contemporaries was a mandatory divorce in cases of adultery, Jesus was only permitting divorce, leaving room for forgiveness and reconciliation. Fourth, after Jesus upholds God’s creation ideal, he allows divorce when a spouse is living in habitual, unrepentant adultery. Instone-Brewer writes,

The consequence of this teaching is that the followers of Jesus could divorce their unfaithful partners. Forgiveness could and should be offered, but it should follow repentance. An unrepentant and consistently adulterous partner could be divorced, although such action was still not compulsory.⁷⁴

Fifth, and lastly, divorce for “any matter,” like the School of Hillel believed, is invalid.

Remarriage after this kind of illegitimate divorce, therefore, is adulterous.

Romans 7:1-4

In making the journey through the New Testament, searching for salient information on divorce and remarriage, one comes to a passage that is often overlooked. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he writes in chapter seven,

Since I am speaking to those who understand law, brothers, are you unaware that the law has authority over someone as long as he lives? For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. So then, if she gives herself to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then, if she gives herself to another man, she is not an adulteress (7:1-3).

⁷⁴ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 181.

Several advocates of a “no divorce, no remarriage” view often direct attention to this passage, exclaiming that Paul is teaching that remarriage on any basis other than the death of one’s spouse is adulterous. Ryrie, for example, writes concerning this passage,

In this passage Paul develops the concept that death releases the believer from his obligation to the law. He then illustrates this principle with marriage, stating that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives (and no exceptions). When and only when he dies is she released from the marriage relationship. If a woman is joined (that is, actual marriage, not illicit intercourse, since the same word is used in both parts of v 3) to another man while her husband is alive, she will be called an adulteress. A second marriage while the first mate is living is adultery.⁷⁵

How is this passage to inform a biblical-theological understanding of divorce and remarriage? Is Romans 7:1-3 as conclusive as advocates of a “no divorce, no remarriage” view claim? Perhaps not. What, then, does this passage didactically offer?

Didactic Usefulness on Divorce and Remarriage

Moo is correct in establishing, as a priority, authorial intent.⁷⁶ In other words, was Paul here intending to provide the Romans teaching on divorce and remarriage? In all probability, no. Paul is not here teaching about remarriage but rather citing an example to prove a point.⁷⁷ Moo writes, “In such a situation, one often generalizes to what is usually true in order to simplify the analogy.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ryrie, “Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” 189.

⁷⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 413.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

For the sake of argument, however, since Paul never mentions divorce in the context, the reader can assume that this hypothetical remarriage has taken place without a legitimate divorce, or a divorce of any kind for that matter.⁷⁹ Moreover, because Paul is writing to those who, “know the law” (7:1), his readers would have known that whatever body of law Paul was making reference to—Roman or Old Testament—allows for remarriage on grounds beyond the death of a spouse.⁸⁰ In sum, one should refrain from establishing primary doctrine from what was only peripheral to the biblical writer.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39

A final passage in the New Testament is also found in the Pauline Corpus, in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Paul’s comments prove to be a critical text in the discussion of divorce and remarriage. Paul writes,

¹⁰ I command the married—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. ¹¹ But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to leave his wife. ¹² But I (not the Lord) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not leave her. ¹³ Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her, she must not leave her husband. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is set apart for God by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is set apart for God by the husband. Otherwise your children would be corrupt, but now they are set apart for God. ¹⁵ But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace. ¹⁶ For you, wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Or you, husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?... ³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Scholars differ on the meaning of this passage, as well as its implications for divorce and remarriage. For those who hold a “no divorce, no remarriage” view, or a “divorce, no remarriage” view, this passage is frequently presented as conveying two options in the case of a separation⁸¹: 1) remain unmarried, or 2) be reconciled to the original partner. In this same vein, Wenham argues that this passage clearly communicates three points.⁸² First, Wenham says, Paul’s teaching is based on Jesus’s. Second, couples should not be allowed to divorce each other. Lastly, Wenham reasons that if one spouse does leave the other, the woman is not to remarry. Wenham also reasons that while Paul never explicitly states that a husband who divorces his wife should not remarry, it is certainly implied.

Other scholars, however, interpret the passage in conjunction with 7:39, thereby allowing the innocent party the freedom to remarry.⁸³ Advocates of this view claim a correlation between δεδούλωται (“bound”) in verse 15 and δέδεται (“bound”) in verse 39. Perspectives aside, two interpretive issues arise when dealing with this passage, all of which have bearing on the issue of divorce and remarriage.

The Meaning of Χωρίζω and Αφῆμι

First, much debate has surrounded the meaning of χωρίζω. Does it mean “divorce”? Or could it mean “to separate,” as a distinct action from divorce, much like the phrases differ today? Paul writes, “I command the married—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave (χωρισθῆναι) her

⁸¹ Ryrie, “Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” 189.

⁸² Wenham, “No Remarriage After Divorce, 24.

⁸³ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 234.

husband. But if she does leave (χωρισθῆ), she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to leave (ἀφίεναι) his wife.”

In determining the meaning of χωρίζω and ἀφίμι, two facets need to be explored: 1) lexical usage and 2) historical context. First, it is highly probable that the two terms are synonymous and refer to divorce. Much has been made of Paul’s use of the verb “to separate” (χωρίζω), in distinction from the later verb “to divorce” (ἀφίμι).⁸⁴ The evidence, however, suggests that the terms could be used interchangeably to refer to the disavowing of the marriage.⁸⁵ Instone-Brewer warns against exaggerating the differences between these two terms, claiming that there most likely is no significance in their use other than stylistic variation.⁸⁶ Moreover, he strongly rejects the notion that ἀφίμι is a legal divorce and χωρίζω is just a separation.⁸⁷ Instone-Brewer argues, “There were more than fifty words used for divorce in Greek marriage and divorce contracts, and it was common to use several in a single document.”⁸⁸

Second, understanding the meaning of these terms can be largely informed by the historical context. Instone-Brewer argues that the kind of divorce Paul is referring to here is the

⁸⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistles to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev ed., 2014), 324.

⁸⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Pillar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 292. See also, David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), who says, “In the context of Greco-Roman practice, the verb means to divorce and is synonymous with the verb ἀφίμι in 7:11b, which Paul uses to command the husband not to send away his wife” (p. 281).

⁸⁶ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 198-99. He further comments, “in the English one might use both “divorce” and “dissolution” in the same paragraph without intending any difference in meaning” (p. 199).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Greco-Roman divorce by separation.⁸⁹ The words chosen by Paul fit this situation perfectly.⁹⁰ In this type of divorce, Instone-Brewer explains, “The house owner would ‘dismiss’ (αφημι) his or her partner from the house, whereas the nonowner would “separate” (χωρίζω) himself or herself from the household.”⁹¹ To enact this kind of divorce, the owner of a house could simply tell his spouse to leave, or the spouse could move out.⁹² No warning was required, and neither had the power to prevent the divorce.⁹³

Through all the historical data, Instone-Brewer’s main point is that this Greco-Roman divorce by separation is strikingly similar to the “any matter” Hillelite divorce.⁹⁴ In other words, this kind of divorce was too flippant and lacked proper grounds to break a marital union. Thus, if Paul was only condemning this certain kind of divorce, his teaching coheres with Jesus’s teaching, which condemned Hillelite “any matter” divorces.⁹⁵

By reviewing both the lexical domains of χωρίζω and αφημι, it can be established that the terms are synonymous and thus interchangeable. Furthermore, Instone-Brewer demonstrates

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 190.

⁹³ Ibid. Instone-Brewer provides two examples of such flippant divorces. He writes, “One person divorced a partner who became blind in one eye, and another said that he was divorcing his wife because she had grown old and was not pretty anymore” (p. 190).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 200.

that Paul is writing with a specific kind of divorce in view, one that very closely resembles a Hillelite “any matter” kind of divorce.

The Meaning of Δουλοω

There surfaces a second critical phrase in this passage. In verse 15, Paul writes, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister *is not bound* (δεδούλωται) in such cases. God has called you to live in peace.” Δεδούλωται comes from the lexical form δουλοω. Many different interpretations of this word have been suggested. Many suppose the phrase implies that the believer is free from the marriage commitment, when abandoned by the unbeliever, and is free to remarry.⁹⁶ Still others argue against this interpretation, often pointing back to Paul’s prohibition of remarriage in verse 11 when Paul says, “But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to leave his wife.”

What, then, could Paul mean when he writes, “A brother or a sister *is not bound*” (δεδούλωται)? In what way is the person “not bound”? Some possible options include: 1) freedom to separate and remain separated (i.e. not required to reconcile), 2) freedom to divorce, and 3) freedom to divorce and remarry. Two arguments can be put forth in favor that δουλοω refers to the believer’s freedom to remarry, upon being deserted by an unbeliever.

First, this interpretation is the only one that makes sense of the historical context of the Greco-Roman world. The phrase cannot simply mean “you are free to remain separate.” For, it would be meaningless to declare the person free to remain separate since there is nothing that

⁹⁶ Some adherents to this interpretation include Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (trans. J. Leitch, Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 123; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 107; Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*.

one can do, but to be separate.⁹⁷ A case may be made for this view, but contextually other options prove to be more viable. Furthermore, the phrase cannot mean that the believer is free to divorce, since, in Greco-Roman law, a divorce had already been completed.⁹⁸ Thus, the only meaning of δουλοω that makes sense of the historical context is that the believer is free to remarry. This is only emphasized by the many Jewish divorce certificates, as well as most Greco-Roman ones, which frequently contained the words, “you are free to marry any man you wish,” or something similar.⁹⁹

A second argument for δουλοω meaning “freedom to remarry” is made on contextual grounds. Later on in the passage Paul writes in verse 39, “A wife is *bound* (δέδεται) as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord.” Δέδεται, from the lexical form δέω, means “bound.” Admittedly, the word δέω, in verse 39, is slightly different from δουλοω, in verse 15. The words, however, have the same semantic domain and are, in all probability, synonyms in the context. Using verse 39 as a point of departure, just as the death of a spouse leads to the freedom (δέω) to remarry, so abandonment by an unbelieving spouse leads to the freedom (δουλοω) for the believer to remarry, after attempts at reconciliation have been made.¹⁰⁰ In sum, in addition to the historical context, the immediate literary context of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians leads the reader to understand “A brother or a sister *is not bound*,” as “they are free to remarry.”

⁹⁷ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 202.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 234.

Didactic Usefulness on Divorce and Remarriage

Upon surveying the relevant data in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 and verse 39, the passage proves itself to be highly useful in the discussion of divorce and remarriage in the Bible. First, Paul condemns “any matter” divorces that are too flippant. Similar to the way Jesus condemned “any matter” Hillelite divorce, Paul seems to have a specific type of divorce in view in this passage. By way of principle, therefore, it can be inferred that for divorce to be legitimate, it must be based on sufficient grounds, namely *πορνεία* and spousal abandonment.

Second, this passage places, as its highest aim, the goal of reconciliation. In verses 10-11, Paul states, “a wife is not to leave her husband. But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to leave his wife.” Paul is here exhorting the Corinthians that if divorce by separation occurred, believers are to do everything within their power to reverse it. They are to attempt reconciliation and even remain single for a season in order to remain available for reconciliation.¹⁰¹ Köstenberger adds that the remarriage ought only to occur after prolonged attempts at reconciliation.¹⁰²

Third, Paul seems to be teaching that a believer is not to initiate a divorce. When Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriages in verses 12-16, even if the couple is religiously incompatible, Paul does not want the believer to seek a divorce. It is only when the unbelieving spouse persistently seeks a divorce that the believer is free to let them leave.

Lastly, Paul allows for divorce and remarriage in the case of spousal abandonment. If an unbeliever is persistently pursuing a divorce to a believer, the believer can let them leave. In this

¹⁰¹ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 200.

¹⁰² Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 236.

case, Paul pronounces that the believer is free (δουλω). In keeping with both the historical context and the literary connection to verse 39, it was argued that this phrase is best taken as “free to remarry.”

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to develop a coherent biblical understanding of divorce and remarriage. The method of this paper was to approach the issue from a biblical-theological vantage point, surveying all the relevant passages on divorce and remarriage. The survey began in the Old Testament at Genesis 2:24 where two phrases were analyzed: 1) the meaning of the term, “one flesh” (בֶּשֶׁר אֶחָד) and 2) the meaning of “cleave,” (דָּבַק). The passage led to the conclusion that God’s creation ideal is lifelong, monogamous marriage.

Following the exegesis of Genesis 2:24, an analysis of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was conducted. Two expressions in the passage proved to be essential in understanding its teaching on divorce and remarriage: 1) the expression “something improper” (עֲרֻה דָּבָר, pronounced ‘*ervat dāvār*’) and 2) the meaning of the “divorce certificate” (פְּרִיטוֹת סֵפֶר). Several principles emerged from the study of this text regarding divorce and remarriage.

Concerning divorce, four didactic principles were extracted. First, it was argued that this passage does not offer divine approval of divorce. God’s creation ideal still stands. This passage does, however, seem to be regulating divorce in a broken world, tainted by sin. Second, it was deduced that while divorce was not divinely approved, it does seem to be divinely provided for man’s hardness of heart. Third, divorce was not required in this text. Lastly, this passage serves as a warning not to divorce too quickly.

Concerning remarriage, two conclusions arose. First, this passage teaches that remarrying an ex-spouse who has been remarried is forbidden. This was so for a number of reasons, one of which, as Lundbom pointed out, was the protection of the second husband. A final conclusion, from both a literary and historical context, the certificate of divorce almost conclusively allows for the remarriage of a woman who has been divorced on valid grounds.

Subsequent to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, various Old Testament passages were considered and surveyed. Little attention was given to these texts since they are not didactic in nature. Following, three New Testament texts were surveyed: 1) Matthew 19:1-12, 2) Romans 7:1-4, and 3) 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39. Matthew 19:1-12 was surveyed first. After reviewing the context, an analysis of the much debated “exception clause” was conducted. Three issues became critical in the interpretive decision: 1) the textual problem of why Matthew includes the exception, whereas Mark and Luke do not. 2) Much debate has surrounded the meaning of *πορνεία* thus a lexical and exegetical analysis was conducted. 3) Lastly, a difficulty concerns the scope of the exception *μὴ ἐπὶ πορνεία*. Does it refer to divorce, remarriage, or both?

From the analysis, five conclusions became evident: 1) Jesus is clearly teaching monogamy. 2) Marriage is to be lifelong. 3) Jesus taught that divorce is not to be compulsory, even in cases of adultery. 4) After Jesus upheld God’s creation ideal, he allows divorce when a spouse is living in habitual, unrepentant adultery. 5) Lastly, divorce for “any matter,” like the School of Hillel believed, is invalid. Remarriage after this kind of illegitimate divorce, therefore, is adulterous.

Next, the biblical-theological survey was brought to the Pauline Corpus where two texts were examined, the first one being Romans 7:1-4. Advocates of a “no divorce, no remarriage” view, or a “divorce, no remarriage” view often point to this passage to make their case. It was

argued, however, that because of authorial intent, “silver bullet” arguments using this text ought to be avoided. For, Paul was not here teaching on divorce and remarriage, but rather freedom in Christ from the law. In sum, one should refrain from establishing primary doctrine from what was only peripheral to the biblical writer.

The last text in the biblical-theological survey was 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39. Two exegetical issues were examined: 1) the meaning of χωρίζω and ἀφίημι and 2) the meaning of δούλω. It was argued that χωρίζω and ἀφίημι are synonymous and can be used interchangeably. Furthermore, the historical context leads the interpreter to believe that the kind of divorce Paul had in view was a Greco-Roman divorce by separation, a kind of divorce that parallels the Hillelite “any matter” divorce condemned by Jesus. Concerning the word δούλω “not bound”, the question became one of “not bound” to what? By way of logic it was deduced that the only explanation that makes sense is that the believer is free to remarry. Furthermore, taking into consideration the parallel reference in verse 39 of chapter 7 only strengthens the conclusion.

Four teaching points arose from the survey of 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39. First, Paul condemns “any matter” divorces that are flippant in nature. Again, this coheres perfectly with Jesus’s condemnation of Hillelite “any matter” divorces in Matthew 19. Second, this passage places, as its highest aim, the goal of reconciliation. Third, Paul seems to be teaching that a believer is not to initiate a divorce. Lastly, Paul allows for divorce and remarriage in the case of spousal abandonment.

In closing, through a biblical-theological survey of divorce and remarriage, this paper offers the six following conclusions: 1) scripture consistently upholds God’s creation ideal of monogamous lifelong marriage, 2) both Jesus and Paul condemned divorce for invalid grounds, 3) valid grounds for divorce are πορνεία and abandonment, 4) Jesus and Paul favored

forgiveness and reconciliation over divorce, even for valid grounds, 5) a believer is never to initiate a divorce, and 6) both Jesus and Paul condemned remarriage after an invalid divorce, but not after a valid one.

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