

# Divorce and Remarriage

*Navigating God's Fair and Reasonable Teachings*

*Through the Maze of Man Made Standards*

Draft

## Introduction

In God's foreknowledge, He saw the possibility of the entrance of sin, and He made provision to meet it. We see the evidence of this in the plan of salvation, in the design of the human body with its eliminative organs, immune system, its ability to repair wounds, etc. We see God's planning for accidents in the institution of cities of refuge, where a person could go in case he killed someone by accident. And God has adapted his law to meet man in his fallen condition.

After the transgression of Adam the principles of the law were . . . definitely arranged and expressed to meet man in his fallen condition. {God's Amazing Grace p. 131, par. 5}

An enslavement to men's ideas, on the subject of divorce and remarriage has created unnecessary burdens, stigma, a crippling of influence, and unmerited guilt for many people. The divergent views among Christians concerning it has in this author's opinion, been due, at least in part if not to a great extent, to a misinterpretation and a mistranslation of certain passages of Scripture.

The Scripture warns us against adding to, or taking away from God's Word, and this includes adding to or taking away the meaning.

Deuteronomy 4:2 Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish [ought] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

When we add to God's requirements what He has not commanded, we may think we are strengthening them, but we may be making the way so abhorrent or difficult, that people will throw it all out and give up, resulting in a taking away of God's requirements. This was taking place even in Christ's day.

Matthew 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay [them] on men's shoulders; but they [themselves] will not move them with one of their fingers.

In many Catholic countries, divorce for any cause has been forbidden, leading to many difficulties for both parties. A spouse is often abandoned by the other spouse, left with children to raise, educate and feed, with no recourse to be legally free to remarry and secure a father or mother to help support, train and educate the children for the Lord. The same situation has been brought on many people even in non-Catholic countries by the creeds of certain Christian faiths. While the latter class may not be legally prohibited to divorce and remarry, they nevertheless are forbidden by their church creeds or because of misinformed consciences.

In these Catholic countries, sometimes individuals that can afford the services of certain attorneys and various "fees", sometimes (usually only after some years), are able to obtain an **"annulment"**. Technically, according to the law, this would require proving to the court that the spouse is psychologically incapacitated, or that there was fraud or force in obtaining the consent of the partner, or that the partner is impotent or failed to consummate the marriage, etc. Often, these reasons don't really exist, but sufficient money can sometimes secure the annulment anyway, making remarriage a legal option. Wronged individuals (innocent spouses), sometimes seek recourse to such methods to find some respite to their plight, but those who can not afford the services of a capable attorney, or whose efforts fail, sometimes choose to live with a new partner, without having a civil marriage. This often comes with

stigma, guilt, and extra burdens, but they sometimes feel it is better than the alternative of living alone, and when there are children, having to raise them as a single parent. Either way, innocent spouses and children jointly suffer the consequences of these separations.

Do these conservative Christian faiths and Catholic countries have Biblical grounds for taking the position they do? Is divorce and remarriage prohibited under any circumstances? Is that the teaching of Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9, or Romans 7:2, 3?

In the following pages We will delve into this subject and try to find answers to what God really teaches in His word. In the process, the King James Version's (KJV) translation of certain words is questioned. By thus questioning the accuracy of a few words by no means constitutes an attack on the version. I believe it is the best version available overall, and based on the best Greek text, the Textus Receptus (TR). However, though I don't doubt that the translators were led of God, I don't believe they were infallible and incapable of erring.

It is the author's sincere desire that in the following pages the Biblical teaching on the subject of divorce and remarriage will be clearly revealed without faulty interpretations placing burdens on our shoulders that we are unable to bear, and obstacles in our path to heaven that our Lord did not place.

## 1 – The Old Testament Teaching

The ideal for the institution of marriage is clear:

Genesis 2:20-25 <sup>20</sup>And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. <sup>21</sup>And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; <sup>22</sup>And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. <sup>23</sup>And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. <sup>24</sup>Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. <sup>25</sup>And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Marriage was between one man and one woman. They were to be one flesh, joined together by God, and man was not to divide what God had joined together.

The teaching is further enforced by the giving of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”.

But we don’t live in a perfect world. There is sin, and circumstances beyond our control may cause us to find ourselves involuntarily separated or divorced. God never intended that sin should enter the world but He foresaw its entrance and made provision for it. As in the natural so in the spiritual world. God designed an immune system in the human body and an infinitely detailed blueprint of instructions in the DNA governing the immune system and functions of the body, for the varied circumstances that could arise in the event of injury or pathological invasion. In the same way, He made provision in numerous other ways for the entrance of sin.

In these texts quoted, there is no instruction as to what to do if sin enters the relationship, when the spouse decides to get out of the relationship, and when an unholy government sanctions it.

If we were to consider the subject from the standpoint of a legal contract to purchase a property, if the buyer after signing the contract to pay a certain sum, decided not to pay for the property, we would think the owner of the property had lost his reason if he were to follow through with the deal giving the title of the property to the buyer without the buyer giving him the money.

Likewise, it would be unreasonable to hold one party of a marriage liable to the spiritual vows and civil/legal contract of a marriage, when the other party has violated them, but this is exactly what some Christians try to impose on other Christians. I know people who have not even heard the whereabouts of their spouse for decades, but some hold them to their marriage vows. What does the Bible teach should be our response when these circumstances beyond our control take place? It is this question that demands our attention.

### **Old Testament Teaching on Divorce**

Deuteronomy 24:1, 2 <sup>1</sup>When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let

him write her a **bill of** divorcement, and give *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house.

<sup>2</sup>And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.

One principle that can be seen here is that, God, in addressing the subject of marriage after sin, and when confronting a wrong practice which was already going on, did not immediately treat the subject as if the people were living in the Garden of Eden under perfect circumstances. He did not immediately require of them the Edenic standard while they are living in a sin-defiled world. He tempered the evil by requiring the husband to write a bill of divorcement, thus mitigating its ill affects, without choosing at that time to abolish it. In fact, it may have provided a way for some having already made a bad choice to get out of the situation. For example, in the time of Ezra, the people determined to obey God, and step in that direction was to put away their foreign (unbelieving) wives in a civil/legal manner. This would not have happened if Biblical law did not allow for divorce

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

We find a similar situation when it comes to slavery. Slavery was not abolished in the old testament or the new testament, instead, laws making it more humane were instituted, and principles were laid down, which when understood would have eventually caused it to be abandoned.

Thomas Jefferson, in working for the abolishment of slavery, realized as few did, that it could not come in degrees. It could not successfully be accomplished in isolated cases or places. The experiment was tried in various places, with great loss of life, including Cuba, where the freed slaves ended up abetting the still enslaved people to regain their freedom by force of arms, and a blood bath ensued which caused the loss of scores of thousands of lives.

There is a principle in this. Evils must be eradicated very carefully and with proper planning and in some cases, with group cooperation.

Perhaps another more pertinent example will help. Where no fault divorce is allowed, any partner of a marriage can obtain a divorce without showing any fault, simply by declaring there are irreconcilable differences. That leaves the other party with no option. He/she is divorced whether he/she likes it or not. Is he/she Biblically required to stay single until he/she hears his or her former spouse has died? Is he/she Biblically required to stay single until he/she is able to hire a private detective to follow around the former spouse to try to catch him or her in the act of adultery, to be able to show pictures to his church to prove there is adultery so he/she can now be free to remarry?

This law that a person could get a divorce was given at the civil/ level. It was to be incorporated into the laws of the land and the provision of this law requiring that a bill of divorcement was to be given, was for the express purpose to allow the divorced person to get remarried. God was ensuring that someone who was a victim of being divorced by a spouse, would be able to remarry, if one desires to.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us it was for the hardness of the hearts that Moses gave them that commandment. They were thus given the civil/legal provision for divorce even if that was not God's ideal because of the hardness of their hearts. He was not speaking of the provision for remarriage that was given for the hardness of the hearts, but the permission to divorce. Take note: ***the provision for the innocent party to be able to get remarried when thus wronged, was a merciful provision of God to deal***

***with a less than ideal situation.*** “He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.” (Matthew 19:8)

Some claim that the provision for a husband to divorce his wife if she found no favor in his eyes or found some uncleanness in her means that he finds out after they are married that she was not a virgin. But Jesus is answering the question from the pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” He says: “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives:” Jesus clearly understood the Old Testament to teach a man could divorce his wife for “every” cause.

In the Old Testament, once again speaking to the civil laws of the land, God specified how cases of adultery should be legally dealt with?

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

### **Old Testament Teaching Expounded Upon in the New Testament**

Some have referred to Paul’s writings to try to make a case that the Old Testament Law never allowed for divorce or remarriage.

Romans 7:1-5 <sup>1</sup>Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? <sup>2</sup>For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. <sup>3</sup>So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. <sup>4</sup>Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

Paul says that the law binds a woman to her husband as long as he lives. But bear in mind that Paul is speaking of the law as revealed in the Old Testament, and we have just seen that this was in a society in which the civil law executed the guilty party in case of adultery. The law binding a wife to a husband until the death of the husband must also then be confined to a situation where the government enacts the death penalty for adultery. Furthermore, note that no mention is made of the exception, that was clearly stated in the law that a legal/civil divorce could be obtained by the husband for any cause, freeing both parties to be able to be remarried. He does not mention the exceptions because that is not his topic here. He is drawing from the law of marriage to make a point about the law of sin and our deliverance through Christ, and he mentions only that much which will make his point, just as I mentioned slavery above to make an example of the principle being discussed, but slavery is by no means my topic here and I do not wish to get sidetracked speaking more of it.

I mention this, because some organizations have made a doctrine based upon this passage in Romans, that remarriage is only permissible upon the death of the former spouse. Remember, however, that Paul

is not making a new revelation or instruction here. He is referring to an existing law, so we must look at the laws he is referring to, which we have already considered as stated in the texts we have quoted from Deuteronomy 22 and 24.

There is another passage in Paul's writings where he repeats the same thought.

I Corinthians 7:39 The **wife is bound by the law** as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

In this passage Paul's subject is marriage, so let's take a closer look at this passage and the law. Firstly this is speaking of the civil law as stated in ancient Israel when they were an independent nation. Under this law, the wife was bound to the husband, not the other way around. Only the husband had the right to divorce his wife, and if he did, the husband, and the divorced wife had the right to remarry. Paul goes on to mention some other exceptions to the rule in his day.

I Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

So Paul takes into account the possibility that your spouse (either husband or wife) may leave you (v. 15). In such cases he says you are not under bondage. What bondage does he mean? v. 39 quoted above tells us it is the bondage of the law to your spouse.

I Corinthians 7:27, 28 <sup>27</sup>Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. <sup>28</sup>***But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned;*** and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

In verses 27, and 28 he counsels the one divorced not to seek remarriage, but if they remarry, they have not sinned.

Once again we see that there is no prohibition for an innocent party in a divorce to be remarried, in fact we see in the chapter we have just looked at that it is ***not a sin for an innocent party who has been legally divorced to get remarried*** (also see appendix).

## 2 - New Testament Teaching

### Matthew 5:32 – Part 1

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

“It hath been said”. Jesus is referring to the Old Testament teaching, to the text already quoted, Deuteronomy 24:1, where a man could divorce his wife for any cause, but was required to issue a bill of divorcement so she could be another man’s wife. “But I say unto you... saving for the cause of fornication”. Here Jesus is narrowing down the permission to one cause. In this text Jesus still presents an exception whereby it is permissible to divorce, that is fornication.

Some who believe divorce and remarriage is not permissible for any cause other than the death of the partner, have defended their interpretation of Matthew 5:32 by saying that “*fornication*” means only acts of sexual immorality outside of marriage while the term “*adultery*” refers to immorality when one is married. Therefore, they interpret the exception clause quoted above to mean an “*annulment*” is permissible when the husband just found out after they were married that sexual immorality took place before marriage. They teach that this is just reiterating the law stated in Deuteronomy 24:1, 2. This interpretation can not be right. We have already seen the Old Testament teaching on this is that a man could divorce his wife for any cause. We have also seen that if one party is guilty of adultery, the punishment was death, not simply allowing the other to get an annulment. Furthermore, that interpretation is not consistent with the meaning of the word. Fornication is defined as follows in Strong's exhaustive concordance:

4202 πορνεία porneia *por-ni'-ah*

- 1) illicit sexual intercourse - 1a) **adultery**, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.

Clearly fornication is not confined to sexual intercourse before marriage, but rather is broader than the word adultery and includes any sexual immorality, including adultery itself.

So clearly there is an exception here in Matthew 5:32, “*saving for the cause of fornication...*” that when there is “fornication”, divorce is allowed

The next part of this verse remains to be closely examined.

Taking it at face value as translated in the KJV, it states as fact that the woman commits adultery when she is put away, and that the one marrying her also commits adultery. Secondly it would seem to say that if the husband divorces her for any cause other than fornication, he also is responsible for causing her to sin.



But is this really the meaning of Jesus? Jesus is addressing the question of whether the laws of Moses hold true that a man can divorce his wife for any cause, and yet, a superficial reading leaves the question not clearly answered and instead, charges the innocent spouse with sin for being put away.

That does not harmonize with the general attitude of the Scripture toward sin. A person does not commit sin by being a victim of someone else's actions. Neither does a person have to sin because of circumstances. Neither does it force the wife to get remarried. These contradictions to common sense and the general teaching of Scripture require us to dig deeper and see what the rest of Scripture teaches to see if we are understanding this text correctly.

### **Matthew 19:9**

In Matthew 19 we find a similar teaching as we find in Matthew 5.

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

This seems to be contradictory, making a double standard, one for men and one for women. It would seem to say it is alright for a man to divorce a woman in case of adultery and get remarried. But it seems to charge whoever marries a woman divorced of committing adultery, and obviously the woman as well for you can not commit adultery alone.

The passage in question was spoken at the time when Jesus had departed from Galilee and came to the border of Judea, and the Pharisees came to him asking if a man could divorce his wife for any cause.

**Matthew 19:1** “And it came to pass, [that] when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan;”

The same scene is presented in Mark.

**Mark 10:1** “And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.”

A close reading of the previous chapters in each of these gospels makes very clear that both gospels are speaking of the very same time. Yet Jesus' response as recorded in Mark presents a very different picture from the one presented in the translation we find in the King James version of Matthew 19:9. Here in Mark the same teaching at the same exact time is recorded as follows.

**Mark 10:11-12** “And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”

Mark presents the teaching of Christ on this occasion that, if the husband divorces his wife and marries another he commits adultery, and if the wife divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery. Mark however leaves out the exception clause that Matthew includes, that in case of fornication by the spouse, it is not committing adultery for the innocent spouse to obtain a divorce and

get remarried. However, there are many things one gospel mentions that another does not, and it doesn't mean they disagree with one another. Instead, they actually compliment one another and add to the information of one another. Furthermore, the exception mentioned by Matthew is already implied in the verse because the one that divorces the other and remarries is declared to be the guilty party. We believe that the teaching of Mathew 19 ought to be understood in the light of Mark 10, that whichever party divorces and remarries is the guilty party, unless the other has been guilty of fornication, and then he or she would be free to initiate the divorce and remarry.

We conclude that neither Matthew 19, nor Mark 10 condemn the innocent party, in cases of adultery, for divorcing or remarriage. The question in the context is about valid reasons for divorce, and not remarriage, and up until that moment in time, the Old Testament teaching on remarriage was that it was allowed, once a legal/civil divorce was obtained, and Jesus made no change in that teaching either in the instances recorded in Matthew, or at any subsequent time.

If the teaching in Mark is the correct way to understand Jesus teaching on this occasion, why does Matthew 19 and Mathew 5 seem to lay guilt on an innocent woman who was put away and whoever was to marry her? This leads us to examine the translation a little closer to see if we can find a harmony. If this next part is too technical for you, the conclusion we have reached in examining the original language is that the proper translation of Mathew 5 and Mathew 19 agrees perfectly with the conclusion we have just reached by comparing them to the parallel passage in Mark. For those who want to examine the technical aspects of translation with me, here we go.

### Translation

Here is the passage in its original language, Greek, with the accompanying literal meaning.

Matthew 5:32 εγω (I) δε (but) λεγω (I say) υμιν (you) οτι (that) ος (the one) αν (the) απολυση (looses) την (the) γυναικα (wife) αυτου (of him) παρεκτος (except) λογου (of the word) πορνειας (fornication) ποιει (makes, cause, do, bring forth,) αυτην (her) μοιχασθαι (adultery) και (and) ος (the one who (masculine)) εαν (if) απολελυμενην (to loose) γαμηση (marries) μοιχεται (adultery) (Textus Receptus: which was essentially the text used by the translators of the King James version, and the almost identical Byzantine text)

There are two verbs which I wish to especially highlight in this passage. The first is μοιχασθαι (moichasthai), which is translated as two words in English - (to) commit adultery. It is a verb - present tense, infinitive, either middle or passive voice (since middle and passive are not differentiated here).

Most Bible translators have translated this in harmony with the KJV, in the active voice. This seems to make no sense, because it makes the wife guilty of adultery if the husband divorces her, but I found two Bible translations that differed ***in this portion of the verse***, which in my understanding gives a more reasonable meaning of the verse.

Matthew 5:32 (New International Version – NIV) "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, ***makes her the victim of adultery***, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Matthew 5:32 (Berean Study Bible - BSB) "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, **brings adultery upon her**. And he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

This meaning is the opposite of what we find in other translations. I wondered if the text they followed made the difference, or if it was merely in the translation. Where there are differences between Greek texts, I have little faith in the Westcott and Hort Greek Text which is the source of the text followed by New International Version, but I determined to dig deep and see if I could find anything that would help me get some answers. Here is what I found. The following is the Westcott and Hort text, as it was edited and published in 2006.

Matthew 5:32, WH2006 Εγώ δε λέγω υμιν οτι πας ο απολυων την γυναικα αυτου παρεκτος λογου πορνειας ποιει αυτην **μοιχευθηναι**[, και ος εαν απολελυμενην γαμηση μοιχεται].

The verb in question is in a different form. "WH2006, has μοιχευθῆναι (moicheuthanai) instead of μοιχᾶσθαι (moichasthai). The former form is in the passive **ao**rist, (To have something done to one) which does not make good sense conceptually" according to Harry Foundalis. He believes that the text used by the Greek Orthodox churches in Constantinople (which is essentially the same as the Majority Text, Byzantine Text, and Textus Receptus) is the most accurate. I agree with him. I don't believe either that the text of Westcott and Hort or the manuscripts they used are more accurate than are the manuscripts representing the Textus Receptus used by the King James translators. But actually, in this Scripture, as in the majority of Scriptures, when properly translated, the meaning is the same as the meaning the Textus Receptus was intending to convey.

The BSB does not strictly follow a certain manuscript text type such as Eastern or Western but they made their own text deciding which manuscripts they would follow in a particular passage where there were variants, making their own choice in the matter. In this text they have adopted the readings of the Western Text type, largely followed by Westcott and Hort, and also translated it in harmony with the NIV and recognized the passive voice of this verb.

Coming back to the form of the word used in the Textus Receptus μοιχᾶσθαι (moichasthai). It is a present tense, infinitive, either middle or passive voice (since middle and passive are not differentiated here). For some time, students of Ancient Greek have grouped this word into a classification they have created, called deponents, or words that are middle or passive in form but are always to be translated into English as actives. The King James Version has done the same. One author who subscribes to the concept of deponents, in describing the concept says: "basically all you need to know is that if you are having trouble translating a middle or passive voice verb in a sensible way, you have license to make it active in English. However, in interpreting the verse, you should remain aware that the original Greek writer did not really have active voice in mind."<sup>ii</sup>

Seemingly, the concept of the existence of deponents has led the KJV translators to translate this verb in the active (... *her to commit adultery*), instead of in harmony with its form which is middle or passive (passive – *her to be a victim of adultery* – as appears in the NIV above). But there is a growing number of scholars today that believe that the classification of deponents is an arbitrary distinction created by students of ancient Greek failing to understand the thinking of the ancient people, and the practical difficulty in translating certain words in the middle or passive. They believe the classification of

deponents doesn't exist at all, and that a word that is in the middle/passive voice should be translated as middle/passive voice.

Basically the only differences in form between the Westcott and Hort Greek text and the Textus Receptus for this word is the tense. In the Westcott and Hort text it is an aorist, and in the Textus Receptus it is a present. Both are infinitives. But the present tense, as found in the Textus Receptus, does not differentiate between the middle and passive voice, whereas the Westcott and Hort reading – aorist, differentiates between them and the inflection of this word indicates it to be in the passive voice. Since both are infinitives the time element is not a concern, only the kind of action, and the aorist simply designates it as punctiliar action rather than continuous action. So the differences between the readings of the two different text types is really almost non-existent. The real difference in meaning arises when the translator makes a judgment call of his own and places this word in the category of a deponent, and decides to translate it as active instead of passive. Accepting the concept of the existence of deponents actually gives the liberty to the translator to make his/her own opinion the guide of whether to translate it in the active or the passive voice.

Since I make no claim to be a Greek scholar, I wanted further confirmation as to the correct translation of the text, so I decided to ask a scholar. I emailed Harry Foundalis, a Greek by race, who has a strong background in linguistics with a Ph.D. in cognitive science (also in computer science). He has started a project of translating Herodotus (ancient Greek historian) and Homer (ancient Greek poet). He has developed [dozens of web pages](#) explaining various issues about Greek that he claims you won't find in any other source, printed or electronic. So far, he has answered hundreds – if not thousands – of questions on the Greek language. Here is what he said:

"I'll get immediately down to the crux of the matter: the most important verb in Mat 5:32 is μοιχᾶσθαι. This is a present tense infinitive, of either passive or middle voice (the two voices, as you probably know, coincide in the present tense, and are differentiated only in the future and aorist tenses) of the verb μοιχάω (contracted: μοιχῶ) in the active voice, meaning "I commit adultery".<sup>iii</sup>

A subtle point is that seeing simply the form μοιχᾶσθαι, formally we cannot know if it is meant in the middle or passive voice. However, conceptually we know that μοιχᾶσθαι must be in the passive, for it is the woman (the sufferer of the action) who suffers the consequences of having been put away (divorced, ἀπολελυμένη) by her husband. The said infinitive cannot be in the middle voice because that doesn't make sense: the woman did not induce the adultery upon herself. So this is passive voice. Therefore the interpretation of NIV that you offered is the most sensible one in my humble opinion: the man **makes the woman the victim of adultery** through his action to divorce her. Alternatively, we can adopt the BSB wording: [the man] **brings adultery upon her**.<sup>iv</sup>

The bottom line is that your translation, stating that *the woman is a victim of adultery*, is **correct**. The KJV translation reads as if the woman is the one who commits adultery, which is nonsensical. (The man divorces the woman and **she** thus commits adultery?? By what logic?)<sup>v</sup>

As I mentioned previously, Harry Foundalis, believes as I do that the Byzantine text type, that the Textus Receptus is a representative of, is the most accurate, not the Western, of which the Westcott and Hort

text is a representative. Yet he concluded as I have, that the translation we find in the NIV of the Westcott and Hort text, for that portion of the verse, is an accurate translation not only for the Westcott and Hort text, but also for the Textus Receptus text.

### Matthew 5:32 – Part 2

Matthew 5:32 εγω (I) δε (but) λεγω (I say) υμιν (you) οτι (that) ος (the one) αν (the) απολυση (looses) την (the) γυναικα (wife) αυτου (of him) παρεκτος (except) λογου (of the word) πορνειας (fornication) ποιει (makes, cause, do, bring forth,) αυτην (her) μοιχασθαι (to commit adultery) και (and) ος (the one who (masculine)) εαν (if) **απολελυμενην** (apolelumenain - to divorce) γαμηση (marries) μοιχαται (adultery) (Textus Receptus and Byzantine text)

Concerning the remaining part of this verse, ( “...and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” KJV) if the proper translation of the first part makes the woman that is put away the victim, as we have just seen, then the way the KJV and other Bibles translate this second part also can not be right. How can the one who marries the innocent party be guilty, if the innocent party is not even guilty.

This brings us to the next verb we will consider in more detail. The Greek word, απολελυμενην (apolelumenain - her that is divorced KJV) is a perfect, participle, middle/passive, accusative, feminine, singular. The word literally means to loose, but is the word used for divorce. The inflection of the word used here does not differentiate in form between the middle or passive but it is usually translated as it is in the king James version, as a passive, “*her that is divorced*.” But we should remember that in the ancient Hebrew mind, it was thought of and usually expressed as the woman that was loosed/divorced, never the other way around. In the entire old Testament not once do we find even a single reference of a wife “*putting away*” (KJV translation), her husband. In fact, it was not lawful, but on the other hand, there are many references to the husband “*putting away*” the wife. As the Hebrews lost their sovereignty and came under the jurisdiction of other nations, Greek and Roman civilizations gained more influence upon them, it became more common to hear of wives divorcing their husbands. But in the Hebrew law, a wife was not allowed to divorce her husband, and she was the one considered bound to the husband. So, if one was loosed, put away, it would always have been the woman in the Old Testament times. It is not improbable, that Matthew, speaking from a Hebrew mindset, to a largely Hebrew audience, when speaking of the wife initiating the divorce, would still have used Hebrew terminology, and would have spoken of the wife as being loosed. This would have necessitated the use of the middle voice. So when speaking of the wife as the one that divorced the husband, as in the case of Herodias) it may be thought of and spoken of in the middle voice by the Hebrews, as the woman loosing/divorcing herself, “*the one having loosed herself*”, rather than “*her that loosed her husband*”.

In light of these facts, it makes the most sense to me to translate this participle απολελυμενην (apolelumenain) in the middle voice instead of the passive, meaning ***her that put herself away***, or ***her that loosed or divorced herself***. (thus she is not an innocent party but the initiator of divorce.) This may sound awkward in English, because we would normally say “*her that put away or divorced her husband*”, but translating this in the middle voice harmonizes with Hebrew thought, and harmonizes with what we have translated in the preceding portion of the verse, and harmonizes with Jesus teaching in collateral passages in Mark 10, which we which we have already considered. Thus it makes sense

logically and it does no injustice to the Greek grammar. Here are some quotes from emails with the Greek scholar I submitted my translation to:

**Harry:** "For, from the A.G. (ancient Greek) language grammatical perspective, the forms ἀπολελυμένην and μοιχᾶται do not shed any light. The former is a perfect participle, and the latter is present tense; so **none of the two differentiates between middle and passive voice.**"<sup>vi</sup>

**David:** So would it be accurate to say that there is nothing grammatically in the verse which necessitates it being translated as a passive as most Bible translators have done, but would merely be **their opinion and a decision to translate it that way?**<sup>vii</sup>

**Harry:** "... there is a very simple answer, and it is merely **"Yes"**— in my humble opinion."<sup>viii</sup>

Summarizing the thought once again, the King James Translators, in translating the last part of this verse in the passive voice were merely making a choice based upon their own opinion and it was not dictated by the grammar. It can be translated just as grammatically correct in the middle voice as I have done. Here is the translation that this author deems to be the most accurate:

**Matthew 5:32** "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, makes her a **victim of adultery**: and whosoever shall marry **her that divorced (put away) herself** committeth adultery.

Basically it is just saying that the same rule applies whether the husband divorces the wife and marries another, or whether the wife divorces the husband and marries another, unless their spouse is guilty of fornication, they are committing adultery.

### **Matthew 19:9**

Matthew 19:9 (KJV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Matthew 19:9 (Byz) "λέγω δε υμιν οτι ος αν απολυση την γυναικα αυτου ει μη επι πορνεια και γαμηση αλλην μοιχεται και ο **απολελυμενην** (apolelumenain – to divorce) γαμησας μοιχεται"

In the first part of this verse, we find that when the husband gets **remarried**, after divorcing his wife (other than for the cause of fornication on the part of the wife) he commits adultery. In the last part of this verse, we find the same thought expressed as in the last part of Matthew 5:32. The KJV renders the thought as, whoever marries the wife that has been put away by the husband is guilty of adultery.

The word used here for the woman that has been put away, is the same as the word used in Matthew 5:32 and has the same inflection. It is a perfect, participle, middle/passive, accusative, feminine, singular. We have already seen that this form of the word when used in Matthew 5:32 was best translated in the middle voice, as **the woman who put herself away from her husband**. Matthew 19:9 is a repetition of the

same teaching by the same teacher, recorded by the same author, using the same word and form of the word as we find in Matthew 5:32, thus we conclude that it ought to be translated in the same way. Thus the translation of this verse this author finds most reasonable is:

Matthew 19:9 (KJV) And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth ***her which put herself away*** (lit: loosed herself {from her husband}) doth commit adultery.

There is also contextual evidence that translating this word in the same way that we have translated the identical form of the word in Matthew 5:32, is accurate.

### **Summary**

Lets summarize what has been presented on the Biblical teaching of the subject of divorce and remarriage. Firstly we have seen that if there is a legal/civil divorce, the innocent party has the right to remarry (also see appendix ). This was a provision God especially instituted for the innocent party. Secondly, we have seen that there are causes that justify initiating a divorce: Jesus mentions fornication (which includes various kinds of sexual impurity, including adultery), and Paul mentions having an unbelieving spouse that is unwilling to stay together. (also see appendix) We have seen that the proper translation and understanding of the verses commonly used to condemn divorce for any cause or remarriage, are mistranslated and misinterpreted.

### 3 – Questions for the Church to Consider

Another point that I wish to address in these pages is how we as individuals and how we as a church ought to relate to various situations.

#### Situation 1

In the USA some form of a “*no fault divorce*” is obtainable in all states, where no guilt needs to be proven about the partner. A spouse can merely claim there are irreconcilable differences, and obtain a divorce, allowing both parties then to be legally remarried. How should the church deal with such an unbiblical situation? Shall we insist that the innocent party remain unmarried until the death of the former partner as the Catholics or certain other groups?

#### *Factors to consider in deciding the solution*

We have already seen God’s solution to a less than ideal situation. In the Old Testament the law of the land in Israel allowed for divorce for causes other than fornication, (Jesus said Moses allowed it for the hardness of the hearts). And in this situation which was not God’s ideal, God guarded the interests of the innocent party, insuring that they were given a bill of divorcement and could thus get remarried. It would seem that God allowed this situation to be as it was, for an example of how we should deal with similar situations in our day. Should we penalize the innocent party, demanding that they fulfill their half of the marriage contract when the partner has broken their part of the marriage contract? (Also see appendix)

1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

#### Situation 2

In some countries, a person is legally allowed to marry a dog, cat, tree, or a person of the same gender. Shall the church acknowledge that unbiblical marriage? Should the church allow into its membership or leadership, people that have such unbiblical marriages, even though they are legal?

#### *Factors to consider in deciding the solution*

Lu 20:25 And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.

The marriage institution belongs to God, not any government. God has given the enforcement of the last six commandments into the hands of government, but where they do not govern according to God’s principles, shall we not obey God rather than man?

#### Situation 3

In certain Catholic countries, divorce is not allowed for any cause. When, as sometimes happens, a family breaks up due to adultery on the part of one, oftentimes involving children, what should the church’s attitude be in such a situation? Is that innocent party to be perpetually prohibited from getting



remarried, from obtaining a mother or Father for their children, and obtaining the help and comfort of a partner in raising children, in ministry, and in life in general? What can the church even do about it when the government won't give them a divorce?

#### *Factors to consider in deciding the solution*

This raises the question whether the marriage institution is a God ordained institution or whether it is merely an institution of man and human government. Should the church bless and condone couples (one or both of which have been abandoned by the former spouse but are unable to get a divorce legally) that have decided (or desire) to live together as husband and wife? I have heard of this happening in both the mainstream and independent groups of those bearing the Three Angels' Messages, where the church blesses the union of a couple who do not have a civil recognition of their marriage, but living together with a second husband or wife after being left by the first spouse.

I know of a minister in the USA that normally does not perform state recognized services, rather, services that are recognized by the church.

#### **Situation 4**

There are people who seek admission in the church who are living conjugally with a partner yet do not have a civil/legal marriage. Should the church require them to separate until, if and when they can be recognized legally, or should they be accepted as they are, or should the church place some sort of blessing upon them, recognizing the union, or is there another option?

#### *Factors to consider in deciding the solution*

This may happen for a number of causes. They may have been abandoned by a partner, and unable to get a divorce in Philippines. Another situation is that among certain native tribes in Philippines, marriages are sometimes arranged by the parents when their children are very young. Children are sometimes even given to the suitor before they reach puberty. (The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 with a parent's permission.)

Another scenario is, single girls sometimes get pregnant before reaching 18, the legal age required to get married, and they and their parents seek for other ways to be accepted in society and to remove the stain to their reputation, so they seek a blessing from the church as a type of recognition of their marriage.

There are others who just don't have enough money to have what is considered to be a proper wedding.

These different classes often seek the church's blessing (this takes place in various denominations). It is considered to be essentially, a recognition by the church of their union. This gives them acceptance in the community and the church, though lacking the civil aspect, until such time, when possible, the parties are able to obtain a civil marriage.

#### **Situation 5**

There are yet others who come to Christ from heathen tribes in Africa and even among certain groups of natives or mountain people in Philippines, Muslims, etc. that have multiple wives, where it is normal,

traditional, and at times multiple wives even legally recognized. When they come to Christ, already being in a situation where they have more than one wife, what should the church require before they are baptized and received into the church? Does a second wrong (a divorce) correct a first wrong (the second marriage)?

#### *Factors to consider in deciding the solution*

In the Scriptures (either New or Old Testaments) we find no examples of exclusion from church membership for those with multiple wives. (see appendix also)

#### **Situation 6**

The church in Philippines has chosen not to incorporate or form any type of recognized civil entity and thus its ministers are not able to obtain a permit to perform legally recognized marriages. Should the church then have nothing to do with marriages, or should they insist that a legally recognized marriage is obtained through civil means if a church recognized marriage is to take place, or should the church be willing to conduct weddings and recognize marriages whether or not the couple want to obtain a civil recognition of their marriage.

These are all questions which it would be well for the ministers, elders and church leaders to study out, discuss, and make some decisions regarding, so the various local churches can act in harmony, with discretion, justice and mercy.

#### **Conclusion**

It is my heartfelt prayer that we may be set free from the bondage of man made tests and doctrines, and that we can rejoice in the truth revealed in God's word.

## Appendix – Quotations from Early Seventh Day Adventist History

*Second marriages took place in the early history of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and they were condoned in certain cases by Ellen White.*

I have tried to enable Laura to see and understand her duty. But as she has taken the course that she has, I cannot see that this new union should be disturbed. It is a serious matter to part a man and his wife. There is no Scriptural ground upon which to take such a step in this case. He did not leave her, she left him. ***He did not marry again until she had obtained a divorce.*** When Laura divorced herself from Walter he suffered most keenly, and it was not until Laura had married another man that Walter married again. The one he has chosen, I feel certain, will be a help to him, and he can be a help to her. {TSB 69.4}

Notice that the rationale for Walter's Biblical right to remarry was that his first wife obtained a divorce (Neither had committed adultery). As evidence of Walter's love for his first wife, she mentions that he did not marry again until his first wife had married again.

*A divorce for insanity and a subsequent remarriage was not condemned or broken up and the church membership was not affected.*

### 33. Stephen Belden

[W. C. White statement: "sister white did not sympathize with those who took the ground that a person who had separated from a companion on other than scriptural ground, and married again, that this second marriage must be broken up if they were to be accepted or retained in an sda church. {TSB 223.4}

"Sister White fully recognized that these people in most cases had sinned, that some had sinned grievously, and that they should not be accepted into fellowship of our churches unless that sin was repented of. Sister White did not accept the contention that such repentance could not be genuine without breaking the new bond, and making an earnest effort to return to former companions. she recognized the fact that in most instances a reunion with the parties formerly connected with in marriage would be either impossible or exceedingly unprofitable. she also recognized that the vows entered into in the second marriage called for such an action as was most merciful and kind to the contracting parties. {TSB 223.5}

"She sometimes referred to the teaching of Paul, who having reached a certain point in his experience, said, 'but I spare you.' he knew there were existing conditions that people were living in relations resulting from sin. he also knew that Christ would accept their genuine repentance, and that in many cases it would make matters worse if existing relations were torn up to prepare a way for a reunion with the parties who were incompañionable, so Sister White used to say, 'but I spare you.' {TSB 224.1}

"Sister White's next older sister, Sarah Harmon, was married to Stephen Belden and became the mother of five children. after her death, in pity for his children, he married a

woman who had many years been a faithful servant in his household. shortly after this, the measles visited the vicinity, and she with others had the measles in a severe form. The measles went to her brain, and she became insane, and had to be taken to the asylum. Brother Belden struggled along for some time, trying to care for his five children, then for their sake married a very good, efficient woman. She helped him make a home and bring up his children, and was with him in Norfolk Island when he died. At various times, individuals where brother Belden lived undertook to secure his exclusion from the church because he had married without separation from his wife on the charge of adultery. When appealed to in regard to this matter, Sister White said, 'let them alone.'"--W.C. White letter, February 21, 1927.] [TSB 224.2}

**Early SDA's saw no need to break up existing families that may not have been biblical.**

"If persons before embracing the message have entangled themselves, and afterward have repented, confessed their sins, received forgiveness of God, and won the confidence of their brethren, it is better for both ministers and laymen to leave them alone, enjoying the forgiveness and justification which have been wrought through Christ, without undertaking to tear up existing relations."--February 21, 1927. {TSB 220.3}

Elder White later added, "it has been my belief for a long time that our brethren make a serious mistake in their efforts to break up families by arguing that in the fulfillment of their vows, made unwisely in most cases, that they are continually, day by day, committing adultery."--W. C. White letter, January 6, 1931. {TSB 221.1}

**John Loughtborough addresses a question in these lines**

Q. - Can one be a church-member who has two living wives or husbands? {1907 JNL, COOD 164.3}

A. - A person might get into that unpleasant situation before accepting the truth, or before making any profession of religion, and, upon sincere repentance, be forgiven that sin as well as other sins. Again, a woman may have been left by her husband, who preferred some other woman, or the husband may have been deserted by his wife, who preferred some other man. In such instances the position has been taken that, according to Matt.19:9, the one thus deserted is free to marry again. In case of one having two living wives, a Testimony was given in the fifties that they should take a humble position in the church under a consciousness of their sin. {1907 JNL, COOD 164.4}

Analyzing the statement above, after mentioning an example of how someone may end up having two living wives, he says that upon sincere repentance, they could be forgiven. Then he says, "again", moving to a new situation, where one is deserted and is "free" to marry again, in other words, it is not a sin, and they have freedom in the eyes of the God's law to do so. Then he mentions a testimony that those with two wives should take a humble position in the church. This mention of the testimony must apply to those who sin in the matter, and not to those who were free in the eyes of God's law and were not sinning in remarrying, for why would they be disciplined if they did no wrong. One further point

concerning his statement is that no such testimony as he mentions can be found according to the White Estate.

Draft

- i Email from Harry Foundalis, a Greek by race, who has a strong background in linguistics with a Ph.D. in cognitive science (also in computer science). He has developed dozens of web pages ( <http://www.foundalis.com/lan/greek.htm> ) explaining various issues about Greek that he claims you won't find in any other source, printed or electronic. So far, he has answered hundreds — if not thousands — of questions on the Greek language.
- ii Annotated Grammar, Koine Greek, by Thor F. Carden, note 776
- iii Email from Harry Foundalis
- iv Email from Harry Foundalis
- v Email from Harry Foundalis
- vi Email from Harry Foundalis
- vii Email from Harry Foundalis
- viii Email from Harry Foundalis