

**Introduction** – Which question(s) are central for us? Are there any missing questions?

- 1) What does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage? Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to divorce? If so, what are the grounds for a legitimate divorce? (p.12)
- 2) If divorce does take place, what are the options for remarriage?
- 3) How should the church respond to those who have been divorced and remarried?
- 4) Jesus clearly rejected a lenient and cavalier attitude toward divorce (Mt. 5<sup>31-32</sup>; 19<sup>8-9</sup>), but how far did he go in forbidding remarriage? (p.14)
- 5) How did the early church interpret and apply Jesus' words? (pp.14-15)
- 6) How did the Protestant Reformers interpret and apply Jesus' words? (p.15)

**1<sup>st</sup> View: No Remarriage After Divorce** (Gordon Wenham)

**A) Four Points of Agreement About Marriage**

- 1) The Bible advocates lifelong, monogamous heterosexual marriage as best for human welfare
- 2) Marriage is an image of the relationship between God and Israel...Christ and the church
- 3) Divorce is a failure due to sin (Mt. 19<sup>8</sup>)
- 4) The present situation is catastrophic

**B) My Argument for No Remarriage After Divorce**

- 1) **The Early Church** – How did they interpret & apply the Bible on divorce & remarriage?
  - *“The witness of the early church thus points unequivocally to a no-remarriage understanding of the gospel texts.”*(p.23)
  - *“Could these Fathers have misunderstood the gospel divorce texts? ”*(p.24)
- 2) **The New Testament** (apart from Matthew<sup>1</sup>)
  - a) **Paul's** interpretation & application of Jesus' teaching (1 Cor. 7<sup>10-11</sup>)
    - *“Paul explicitly appeals to Jesus' own teaching to justify his instructions”*(p.24)
    - *“If it could be proved that he knew the sayings in their gospel form, the no-remarriage view would be unassailable. But...this is not so easy to demonstrate...”*(p.25)
    - *“couples should not divorce each other”*(p.24)
    - *“if one does leave...she/he should not remarry”* (p.24)
  - b) **Mark 10 & Luke 16**
    - *“Jesus introduces full reciprocity into marriage”* & *“polygamy is not permitted”* (p.25)
    - *“Divorce on its own is not equated with adultery, only divorce followed by remarriage”*p.26
    - *“What is striking about both forms of the saying is the implication that divorce does not break the marriage bond, so that sexual relations with anyone but one's first spouse is adultery.”*(p.26) *“[God] looks on remarriage after divorce as adultery.”* (p.27)
- 3) **Matthew 5 & 19**
  - *“The idea that Matthew allowed remarriage after divorce in some cases rests on the interpretation of two short phrases.”*(p.27)

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<sup>1</sup> Wenham: *“My case at this point rests...on the observation that nowhere outside Matthew 19 is there ever a hint that remarriage after divorce might be allowed.”* (p.25; cf. p.27 *“My interim conclusion is...no permission for remarriage...”*)

## Remarriage After Divorce In Today's Church – summary notes

- *“The early church understood [except for sexual immorality] to allow separation, but no remarriage.”*(p.27)
  - *“I want to examine which interpretation—the permissive...or the restrictive...—makes the best sense within the context of Matthew’s gospel and the flow of his thought.”*(pp.27-28)
- a) **Matthew 5:32**
- *How can divorce by itself cause adultery?*
  - *“He is condemning every kind of infidelity, not providing excuses for remarriage”*(p.29)
- b) **Matthew 19:9**
- *Does Jesus agree with the conservative Shammaites...or the liberal Hillelites?*(p.30)
  - *“the permissive interpretation...makes Jesus agree with one side in the Pharisaic debate, the Shammaite Pharisees...[But] ...his views are quite different from both Pharisaic positions.”* (p.31)
  - *“Jesus’ response [vv.10-12] should not be read as a concession to the disciples.”*(p.32)

### 4) **The Jewish Context**

- *“For those who allow for remarriage after divorce, the argument from the Jewish context is quite simple: All Jews in the first century permitted divorce in certain cases, and a Jewish divorce always entailed the right to remarry.”* (p.33)
- *“But does this mean that Jesus shared the same thinking? This seems implausible to me for three reasons:*
  - 1<sup>st</sup> – *Christians have always supposed that at some points Jesus did disagree with contemporary Jews.*
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> – *the Pharisees expected him to disagree with them about divorce* (p.33)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> – *apolyein means “to divorce” (permitting remarriage) in the mouth of the Pharisees...[but] means “to separate” (without remarrying) in the mouth of Jesus* (p.34)
- *“What on earth could have persuaded the whole church to adopt the strict discipline of no remarriage after divorce?...I believe that only our Lord could have persuaded his followers to make this immense change...and...break with both Jewish and classical tradition.”*(p.36)

### C) **Applying New Testament Teaching Today**

- *“my first point is...do not despair, but turn to our great high priest (Heb. 4<sup>16</sup>)”*(p.37)
  - *“Everyone can see that our society is suffering terribly as the result of marital instability... Jesus and Paul were willing to speak out...[we] should do the same.”* (p.37)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Priority = education.
- *“People today often spend more time learning how to drive than how to be married.”*(p.38)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Priority = caring.
- *“[Culturally] we are reluctant to get involved in other people’s affairs. But Scripture teaches us...that we have a duty to care for each other (1 Cor. 12:24-26).”*(p.38)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority = worship and church discipline
- *The care of divorced people and others singles would be just as important to stress as the restriction on remarriage.”* (p.40)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Priority = politics
- *“help get our laws changed in ways that will support marriage.”*(p.42)

**Divorce & Remarriage Issues**

Key Texts = Jesus' teaching (Mt. 5<sup>31-32</sup>//Lk.16:18; 19<sup>3-12</sup>//Mk. 10<sup>1-12</sup>) clarifying his interpretation of Deut. 24:1-4.

Matthew 5:31-32	Matthew 19:3-12	Mark 10:1-12
<p><sup>31</sup>“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>32</sup>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.</p> <p align="center"><b>Luke 16:18<sup>2</sup></b></p> <p>“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”</p> <p>[a] Deut. 24:1-4</p>	<p><sup>3</sup>Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”</p> <p><sup>4</sup>“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”</p> <p><sup>7</sup>“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”</p> <p><sup>8</sup>Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup>I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, <b>except for sexual immorality</b>, and marries another woman commits adultery.”</p> <p><sup>10</sup>The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”</p> <p><sup>11</sup>Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup>For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”</p>	<p><sup>2</sup>Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”</p> <p><sup>3</sup>“What did Moses command you?” he replied.</p> <p><sup>4</sup>They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”</p> <p><sup>5</sup>“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. <sup>6</sup>“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’<sup>7</sup> ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,<sup>8</sup> and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup>Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”</p> <p><sup>10</sup>When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. <sup>11</sup>He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup>And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”</p>

**Q<sup>1</sup>** – Why does the “except for” clause appear in Matthew but not in Mark? Should Mark’s version be taken as more original, reflecting an absolute prohibition which Matthew 19<sup>9</sup> tones down? Or should Matthew be interpreted in a way that makes his apparent “exception clause” no exception at all?<sup>3</sup>

**Q<sup>2</sup>** – What is meant by “sexual immorality” (Greek = *porneia*)? (“adultery” = *moicheuō*)

Matthew 19:9 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>9</sup>I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:9 English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>9</sup>And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”<sup>[a]</sup>

Matthew 19:9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup>And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”<sup>[a]</sup>

**Q<sup>3</sup>** – What is meant by “divorce” (Greek = *apolyein*)?

- a) Only separation? (so Wenham—pp. 34-35)
- b) Divorce with the right to remarry? (so Heth—p.46; Keener—p. 51)

**Q<sup>3</sup>** – Does “except for” modify both verbs (“divorces” and “marries another”) or only the first verb?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The phrase may seem like an isolated statement in Luke, but in context of Luke 16 it is a second example of Jesus raising the bar of God’s design—for wealth (16<sup>1-15</sup>) and now marriage—back to the level God intended.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC, 1992), p. 291.

<sup>4</sup> In this interpretation separation/divorce would be permitted but remarriage would not.

**2<sup>nd</sup> View: Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion** (William Heth)

**A) Marriage Is a Covenant, But Not An Unbreakable One (Genesis 2:24)**

- 1) Covenant Language: “Leave and Cleave”
- 2) Marriage Covenants Are Established by Vows and Include Obligations
- 3) Marriage Covenants Can Be Broken
- 4) Sexual Fidelity: A Crucial Covenant Obligation

**B) The Biblical Recognition That All Divorces Are *Not* Wrong**

- 1) Deuteronomy 24:1-4: Justifiable and Unjustifiable Divorces
- 2) Malachi 2:16 Does Not Say That God Hates All Divorce
- 3) The Deuteronomy 24:4 Prohibition is Not Directly Applicable Today
- 4) Deuteronomy 24:1 Was Read as a Command in Jesus' Time

**C) “Divorce” in the First Century Was Synonymous With the Right to Remarry**

- *“However, the reason we cannot say that he rejected all justifiable grounds for divorce and remarriage is that Matthew informs us otherwise.”* (p.68)

**D) Jesus' Teaching As Recorded by Matthew**

- 1) Jesus' Words Echo First-Century Legal Jargon about Divorce
- 2) Jesus Says Hillelite “Any Cause” Divorces are Invalid
- 3) Jesus' “Ground” Was the Same as Shammai's, But His Focus Was Redemptive

**E) Why Do Mark and Luke Omit the Exception Clause?**

- *“Some say that Jesus is using exaggeration or overstatement to make his point.”*(p.73)
- Or *“Mark and Luke's exceptionless saying = ‘a generalization which admits of certain exceptions.’*
- Or *“the exceptions were obvious and well known to the original audience....Matthew...makes this assumption explicit.”*(p.73 & p.74)

**F) Paul's Exceptional Situation in 1 Corinthians 7:15**

- [Given Jewish divorce language] *“The most natural reading...points to a valid or legitimate divorce.”*

**G) No-Remarriage Verses: 1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

- *“when Paul tells them to remain unmarried or else be reconciled (v.11), he must be assuming this is an invalid divorce. They should not consider themselves divorced at all.”*(p.77)

**H) Other Legitimate Grounds?**

- *“Some believe that physical and emotional abuse justifies divorce, and I am sympathetic with this position...common ethical sense dictates that Jesus would not require the oppressed party to stay.”*(p.77)

**I) Applying This View in Today's Church**

- 1) How long do I wait?
- 2) What my wife and I learned about who is at fault
- 3) Jesus and those who remarry after an invalid divorce
- 4) The sexual needs of divorced persons
- 5) Should divorced or remarried people serve in church leadership positions?

**J) Self-Actualization vs. Covenant Faithfulness**

- *“Those who have made promises before God should trust in God for grace sufficient to keep those promises, and they should expect the community of faith to help them keep faith, by supporting them and holding them accountable.”*(p.83)

### **3<sup>rd</sup> View: Remarriage for Adultery, Desertion, or Abuse** (Craig Keener)

- *“I have the more difficult, though important, task of arguing for the possibility of remarriage beyond the explicit New Testament exceptions”*
- *“all of these [texts] oppose divorce; yet it is noteworthy that four of these six texts allow exceptions.”*(p.104)

#### **A) The New Testament and Remarriage**

##### 1) Adultery Against One's Spouse

- *“Jesus' point is to prohibit breaking one's marriage, not to require permanent singleness for those already divorced.”*(p.105)

##### 2) The Character of Jesus' Saying (pp.106-109)

*“Five observations support the likelihood that Jesus meant this saying hyperbolically: <sup>1</sup>Jesus regularly used hyperbole...<sup>2</sup>the very context...<sup>3</sup>Jesus' other teachings assume the dissolubility of marriage...<sup>4</sup>Matthew twice specifies an exception for the innocent part...<sup>5</sup>Paul recognizes another exception.”*

#### **B) Which Exceptions?** (p.110)

- *“Refusing to qualify general principles by other principles would make nonsense of much of our Bible.”*

#### **C) Other Exceptions?**

*“If Paul had to reapply Jesus' teaching in a new way for a situation Jesus did not directly address, we may be called on to do the same...Yet our exceptions to Jesus' rule against divorce should be consistent with the character of the exceptions in the NT.”*(pp.111-112)

##### 1) Facing Some More Difficult Questions (e.g. Abuse)

- *“How do we evaluate the genuineness or extent of abuse [practically speaking]?”*(p.113)

##### 2) Extreme Examples

- *“The lack of absolute certainty on where best to draw the line in some cases is an admitted problem of my position.”*(p.115)

#### **D) Remarriage Without Exceptions?**

- *“What happens once the other spouse remarries, making reconciliation...impossible?”*(p.117)

#### **E) “Permitting” Remarriage**

- *“What do we mean by ‘permitting’ remarriage?”* (p.117)
- *“Under what circumstances would I sanction a remarriage?”*
- *“Are we called to break up second marriages as acts of adultery?”*(p.118)

#### **F) Remarried Persons in Church Leadership**

- *“In God's sight, condemning the righteous is no less sinful than justifying the guilty.”*(p.119)
- *“Does it fit biblical principles to treat this sin as less amenable to cleansing by our Lord's blood than any other?”*(p.119)<sup>5</sup>

#### **G) Summarizing the Case** (p. 119)

- *“I have argued that divorce is permissible for adultery, abandonment, and abuse (not, of course, for such contemporary claims as ‘incompatibility’ or ‘growing apart’).”*
- *“I have also argued that the primary point of Jesus' teaching is the exclusion of divorce, so we should recognize later remarriages as legitimate marriages (i.e. we should not seek to break them up), whether or not we concur with the grounds for divorce.”*

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<sup>5</sup> See “Flaws of Biblical Proportions” video clip [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34G\\_R0svxWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34G_R0svxWk)