

A Biblical Guide to Marriage and Divorce and Remarriage

By Joe R Wheeler

Introduction

As members of the church of Christ, we need to examine the Scriptures carefully in order to fully understand God's will for us.

Our pattern of life is to be based upon only one thing:...what does the Bible teach?

We have to look beyond the things that guide ordinary men because we have been brought out from among them to live in subjection to God.

Christians have always been considered a peculiar people because of this necessary devotion to a standard regarded as ridiculous by the world at large. Consequently, there have often been blatant attacks against the common faith we all enjoy. However, we also need to be aware that subtler forms of warfare are being waged against us.

False doctrine has always been a part of Satan's fight against the people of God. Old and New Testament alike are full of examples of this.

Those who advocate a form of living that is not based on Scripture are promoting error.

Whether they are doing this ignorantly or purposely ultimately doesn't matter.

Those who act based on their false doctrine are the ones who will suffer.

My prayer is that each individual will study the Scriptures for themselves. Don't take man's word for what is written, search the Bible for yourself.

I hope that you will find the answers to your questions about marriage and divorce within the Scriptures used here; but please become fully convinced only after you have thoroughly read all that the Bible has to say about this subject.

I. At the beginning...

Genesis 2:23-25: *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. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

This verse refers to marriage (note that woman is referred to as "wife" in verses 24-25).

Jesus spoke regarding this passage in Matthew, where He used it to show God's original intent for marriage.

Matthew 19:4-5 *"And He answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that He that made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh?"*

Matthew 19 shows us that God, apparently speaking through Adam, declared that a man and a woman should leave their parents, cleave to each other, and become one flesh.

In Gen 2:18, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, and after bringing all of the creatures He had created to be named by Adam in Gen 2:19-20, none was found that would suit Adam as a mate.

When He created Eve from the rib of Adam, in verses 21-22, Adam immediately recognized that she alone, and no other creature, should be his wife.

Hence was created in Adam a desire for a proper marriage. God did not provide Adam with multiple mates, only one, showing that He intended one man and one woman to become one flesh.

God introduced the marriage covenant before the fall from grace, which we read about in Genesis chapter 3. Marriage was intended for mankind from the beginning, it was not one of the results of his fall from grace.

We also see that God, from the very beginning, intended to have marriage be a prerequisite to the sexual act, and

to be the foundation on which to have children.

Adam and Eve had a covenant with God that was in existence before they had a sexual union. The marriage covenant was not a result of the sexual act of “becoming one flesh”; it preceded it, (the sexual act, outside of marriage, is always condemned by God).

After the fall of Gen 3 and removal of man and woman from the garden, their covenant as man and wife was still in force.

The only apparent change made in a husband's relationship to his wife is that she would go from a "help meet" to being ruled over by her husband (Genesis 3:16).

Now man has been corrupted by sin, and soon marriage will start to be corrupted by sin also.

II. Because of the hardness of your hearts...

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 *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. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.*

In Deut 24, the uncleanness mentioned as the reason for a divorce wasn't adultery. Leviticus 20:10 and Deut 22:22-24 required that adulterers be stoned to death, no divorce was allowed in such cases.

It was not based on a suspicion of adultery either, for Numbers 5:11-29 tells of the “Waters of Jealousy” whereby any suspicion of adultery could be miraculously confirmed.

The divorce mentioned in Deut 24, therefore was for some other cause.

Whatever the cause was is not detailed for us, we can only guess as to what it was. In the end, it doesn't matter because as Jesus revealed, this “bill of divorcement” was only tolerated because of their “hardness of hearts”.

The Israelites did not have a complete knowledge of God's Will.

The Law was enacted as a “schoolmaster” to lead them to Christ (Gal 3:24).

The Jews had miss-applied the "allowance" as a "law", but God had always expected them to uphold His original intent for marriage. They had found ways to rationalize divorce as acceptable to God, but He only temporarily "tolerated" it because of their hard heart's.

Jesus straightened out that miss-understanding in Matthew 19, consequently we are not allowed to follow their example today. Jesus has made His commandment clear, God will not accept ignorance as an excuse anymore, Acts 17:30 tells us that *“the times of this ignorance God winked at; but NOW commands all men everywhere to repent”*.

III. But I say unto you...

Divorce was freely practiced among the Jews in the time leading up to the arrival of Jesus.

They believed that God had authorized divorce through Moses, and that this section of Deuteronomy shows His divine approval of it.

In Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus instead condemns divorce, labeling it as adultery.

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

To illustrate the rule He here lays down, I will show the rule, and underline the exception to the rule:

Matthew 5:32 *"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."*

In Luke 16:18 we can see the rule by itself, the exception is not mentioned:

Luke 16:18 *"Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."*

That the "put away" woman has no right for remarriage is clear from these passages. For He says, "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery".

She was innocent of adultery while married, for He says that "putting her away" is what causes her to commit adultery.

How could it?

Obviously, only if she sexually involves herself with another man (We will see also in 1Cor 7:2-5 how her former husband puts this temptation in her path).

I believe that this applies equally to any "put away" person, either man or woman.

According to Matt 5, and Luke 16, "put away" individuals can NOT remarry. To do so would be an act of adultery (caused in part by the act of the one who wrongfully put them away).

The only person Jesus specifically gives permission to divorce, and subsequently remarry is the one who "puts away" their spouse for "the cause of fornication".

In Matthew 19, the Pharisees come to Jesus to tempt Him (Verse 3).

They ask Him *"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"*

This question required Jesus, at least in their minds, to either approve of their divorces, or publicly refute what was considered a right given to them under Moses.

That they would ask this question to tempt Jesus shows, I think, the possibility that they already questioned divorce in their hearts, and that they already suspected the answer! Although they meant to tempt Jesus to contradict His earlier teaching from Matt 5, they in effect showed their own sinful natures, because they had eagerly used this passage to allow themselves to engage in divorce over any pretense, while in their hearts doubting whether it was actually proper to do so.

At this time divorce had become an accepted practice among the people.

Many followed the interpretations of the great teachers of the Law, who had laid down differing opinions of Deuteronomy 24.

A. Rabbi Hillel, considered one of the greatest interpreters of scripture before the time of Jesus, taught that this scripture gave husbands the right to divorce their wives if they had any sort of displeasure with them. He even specified "scorching the bread" as a sufficient cause.

B. Rabbi Shammai taught that Deuteronomy 24 only allowed divorce for "marital unfaithfulness".

In view of the requirement of Lev 20:10, Rabbi Shammai was clearly wrong to teach people to allow divorce for unfaithfulness, God had commanded otherwise.

Rabbi Hillel is also wrong, asserting that they had a "right" to divorce.

The Pharisees have tried to put Jesus in a very awkward position. They see no way for Him to respond to their question without offending those in the crowd who have followed one course or the other.

Whether or not Jesus even considered the two opinions we can't know with full assurance, the only controversial divorce that we see mentioned at the time in Scripture, is that of Herod and Herodias (Mark 6:14-29).

John the Baptist had lost his head for condemning that divorce, and Jesus would also be potentially risking himself if His answer offended the wrong people.

Jesus responds to their question starting in verse 4. *"And He answered them, Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no longer twain, but*

one flesh. What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”.

As teachers of the Law themselves, He asks them if they had not read God’s original command of Genesis 2, which never gave any option of divorce.

He shows that they didn’t know the Scriptures properly, or they would have already known the answer to their question.

Jesus here issues His command “*what God has joined together, let not man put asunder*”, showing divorce as a willful human act of disobedience to God’s will.

They sinned when they failed to “cleave to their wives”. Their divorces had broken their covenant with God as well as their lawful wives.

They pursue Him further in verse 7, “*Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*”... Clearly trying to defend divorce as a commandment they have been observing that was given by Moses.

Verse 8 “*He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9: And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commiteth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*”.

Jesus says that Moses suffered (allowed, permitted) them to divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. They had hardened hearts towards God, and their mates, and this “allowance” was to prevent the cruelties that surely would have resulted from the continuance of their marriages. They were using divorce as a way to free themselves up to remarry, thereby committing adultery.

In Deut 24:2b it says: “*she may go and be another mans wife*”.

Most commentators, and many of the translations, have done a better job of translating this verse from the Hebrew than the King James translators did.

A more accurate way of translating it has it read, “*if she go's and becomes another mans wife*”. You can see the difference.

Improperly translated, it implies permission to remarry where no such permission was actually given. The actual intent of verse 2 was to show that putting away the wife would lead her to possibly seek remarriage.

This mis-application of Deut 24 had led to the situation the Jews now found themselves in. Jesus sets the record straight, He is bringing them from the infancy of the Old Covenant into the maturity that the New Covenant will require (Gal 3:24 and Acts 17:30).

He instructs them that divorce (except for fornication), and remarriage is an act of adultery (Greek word used for fornication is *Porneia*, used here when referring to adultery, but can also refer elsewhere to any illicit sexual activity).

Lets look at the passage again, this time with the rule Jesus made underlined for clarity (In verse 9, the exception is not underlined):

Matthew 19:4-9 “*And He answered them, Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no longer twain, but one flesh. What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”. They say unto Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away”? 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. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commiteth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”.*

He makes a command regarding the put away person at the end of verse 9, “*whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*”, but He doesn’t mention what redress the innocent party has, although they have clearly been wronged by the person divorcing them.

IV. All men cannot receive this saying...

God's view on divorce is clearly taught by Jesus in Matthew chapters 5 and 19. Man can no longer justify divorce based on Deuteronomy 24.

The accounts in Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18, refer to this same confrontation with the Pharisees. The account in Luke 16 is prefaced by a statement in verse 16 *"The Law and the Prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of heaven is preached, and every man presseth into it."*

Those who want to see the Kingdom of Heaven will have to follow His commands on divorce and remarriage. God had always considered divorce as a sin, and remarriage as adultery.

The disciples found the Lord's revelation about divorce and remarriage to be troubling (see Matthew 19:10-12 and Mark 10:10-12). After instructing the crowds and the Pharisees, His disciples wanted Him to further explain these "hard sayings" to them.

Matthew 19:10-12 *"His disciples say unto Him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry. But He said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs (eunouchos), which are born so from their mothers womb: and there are some eunuchs (eunouchos), which were made eunuchs (eunouchizo) of men, and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs (eunouchizo) for the kingdom of heavens sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."*

The word *eunouchos* in the original Greek is used when referring to unmarriageable men. Jesus is telling His disciples that for the kingdom of heaven's sake, some would choose to avoid marriage, some physically would be unable, but that some would be made unmarriageable by acts of others. In other words, this condition was not always chosen but could be forced upon those who would "press into the kingdom of Heaven".

How is it possible that acts of others could make them not eligible to marry? Jesus says in Matthew 5:32 *"and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commiteth adultery."* And also in Matthew 19:9 *"and whoso marrieth her that has been put away doth commit adultery."*

He states in Luke 16:18 *"and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."*

Clearly, it is possible to be made unable to marry by the act of another if you are "put away"!

When Jesus says marrying a person who has been "put away" is adultery, is He speaking about marrying someone who had been divorced for their unfaithfulness, or someone who was innocently divorced? I don't think it mattered either way to Him. He simply says marrying a "put away" person is adultery. He never made a distinction about their guilt or innocence, we are the ones who think there should be a difference depending on why the person was "put away".

Only the one who puts away their spouse for adultery is specifically allowed to remarry by Jesus. Those who marry a "put away" person are in an adulterous relationship according to Christ's teaching in these passages.

Matt 19:10 *if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry.*

The Disciples now understood the sanctity of marriage. They acknowledged that marriage was not something to engage in lightly.

Clearly, Jesus warns not to engage in divorce lightly, because remarriage is only an option for those who divorce their mates for adultery. Divorces under other circumstances clearly result in adultery for those who remarry.

The fact that those who are "put away" by their mates without their consent can not remarry shows that divorce is much more serious than many Christians today view it to be. I realize that this interpretation is a very unpopular one these days, but it was very unpopular when Jesus originally said it as well. Isaiah 5:13 *"Therefore my people perish for lack of knowledge"*.

V. Save to whom it is given...

The dilemma over remarriage after divorce has actually been made more confused by well-meaning Christians. Wanting to comfort a broken hearted, “put away” individual, by giving them the hope of marrying “someone better for them” sounds like the perfect thing to our ears.

A person who was married and is looking at a lifetime with no companion is sure to remember Gods statement; “*it is not good for a man to be alone.*” (Gen 2:18)

Combined with the false belief that God really only wants our happiness, and would “*never let us be tempted beyond what we can bear*” (I Cor 10:13).

Many today feel that remarriage is not only fine with God, but is a right. After all, if the other party instigated the divorce and had no scriptural cause, surely they broke the bond of marriage and a remarriage for the innocent party is perfectly acceptable to God. Doesn't He want us to be happy?

What if the innocent put away person waits until their former spouse remarries, or is obviously involved in another relationship? Can they remarry then?

Jesus specifically mentioned two parties in the Gospel accounts.

The man (or woman) who puts away, and the woman (or man) who is being put away.

He mentions remarriage as adultery, except for the person who puts away their spouse for unfaithfulness. He never mentions the one who is divorced “put away” by the other remarrying, without labeling it as adultery.

In fact, the only scriptural condition for re-marriage is as follows:

A. Matt 5:32...The one who divorced their mate for unfaithfulness, and

B. Romans 7:2-3...where it is shown that death severs the marriage bond, allowing re-marriage.

Many interpret these Scriptures very loosely when applying them to persons who have been divorced “put away” by a spouse for an unscriptural reason. However, if we look at what Jesus actually said, instead of what we may wish He said, He never tells the innocently divorced “put away” person that they can remarry.

I would strongly urge any Christian who may be in the process of a divorce, or who has become divorced, to examine closely Jesus's teaching in these passages.

Romans 14:5 “*...Let every man be fully convinced in his own mind*” like the Berean's who studied diligently everything Paul told them, to see if what he taught them was true (Acts 17:10-11), study God's Word diligently for yourself before you make decisions that will have eternal consequences.

Consider the following:

1Corinthians 10:12-13 *Wherefore let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*
Psalm 15:1-5 *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart...He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not....He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

To be safely within the confines of the Lord's teaching, you can only remarry if you are the one who “puts away” your unfaithful spouse. All other situations are outside of the boundaries of Scripture, and are therefore unsafe to practice or to teach.

VI. Concerning the things of which you wrote me...

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is writing in response to questions that the Corinthian church apparently had previously written to him about. From the answers he gives, it appears that the Corinthians had asked if Christians should marry or stay single. It would also appear that some wanted to know if they should stay married to unbelieving spouses or leave them for the sake of the Church.

1 Cor 7:1 *Now concerning the things of which you wrote me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*
Paul here affirms that celibacy has merit for those who can live that lifestyle.

7:2 *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her*

own husband.

Clearly, Paul is not commanding marriage for all, but only for those who don't have the "gift from God" allowing them to remain celibate.

7:3-5 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul here commands married individuals to recognize their spouse's sexual rights, saying that they must not deprive each other except for religious reasons. If a interruption of the sexual relationship should occur, it should only be by mutual consent, for a limited time, for fasting and prayer. Paul recognizes that the human sexual desires are very strong, and for those who are married, recommends that they give in to that desire, not try to resist it.

In view of Paul's teaching here, we see that one of the sins of wrongful divorce is that it deprives the innocent party of their sexual rights. Instead of being deprived for a season, to devote themselves to fasting and prayer, they are deprived for a lifetime.

7:6-9 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner (celibacy) and another in that (marriage). But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Verse 9 is often used to counsel those who are divorced that God allows re-marriage, but is Paul speaking to divorced individuals in this verse?

If you look at the whole context, I believe it is clear Paul is talking to eligible persons only. Paul means "never before married", or those who divorced their first mate for marital unfaithfulness, or those who are widowed.

If "Let them marry", included unlawfully divorced persons, then the command he gives in verse 11 "let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband", would be a contradiction.

7:10-11 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And the husband is not to divorce his wife.

Verses 10-11 address a situation that had apparently arisen at Corinth.

Some of those who had become Christians were wondering if it was proper to remain married to an unbeliever.

Others had perhaps been abandoned by their unbelieving spouse who didn't approve of their new-found faith. It appears that Jesus had given Paul the answer to these questions through some sort of revelation, as the earlier teachings of Jesus had not answered fully the Corinthians concerns in these matters.

Paul makes statements in these two verses that need to be carefully noted.

1. He states in verse 10 that this is a command from the Lord (not I but the Lord).
2. We know based on the Lord's earlier teaching, and Paul's statement from verse 5, that "departing" would be a sin.
3. The fact he says she should remain "unmarried" shows that divorce is what is meant by "depart".
4. He states that if she commits the sin of putting away her husband, she must reconcile with her husband or remain unmarried.
5. We must also note the instruction given to the husband as well. It is very likely Paul is telling the husband, whose wife does "depart" he is not to divorce her (simply departing from the marriage, even under legal means, is not in and of itself proof of adultery).
6. Paul is not removing the right to "put away" an adulterous spouse, he is only giving a further command from the Lord given in view of the possibility of abandonment.

7:12-17 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If a brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

While verse 10-11 are stated to be commands from the Lord, in verse 12 Paul states he did not receive a command from the Lord concerning what follows.

Paul had been given revelations from the Lord (2 Cor 12:7), and was therefore an inspired Apostle, but here apparently had not received any new commandment.

Divorce and remarriage is allowed by the Lord for adultery (Matt 5:32). Paul elsewhere writes, after the death of a spouse (Rom 7:2-3, and 1Cor 7:39) the widowed may remarry.

I underlined verse 15 because it is often taught as a third scriptural reason for re-marriage (the “Pauline Privilege”).

Desertion, in and of itself, is not adultery. The danger is that, as verse 5 warns, it can lead to temptation to commit adultery. Only if desertion leads to unfaithfulness would divorce become an option.

Paul never mentioned divorce or remarriage in verse 15, he simply says, “let them depart” for the sake of living in peace. *“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace...”* 1 Cor 14:33.

Although many believe and teach the “Pauline Privilege”, I don’t think Paul was discussing divorce or remarriage in this verse but abandonment.

Many commentators believe he is simply stating that the Christian is under no “bondage” to try to fulfill their obligations in verses 2-5, to the departed spouse.

In view of the controversy surrounding exactly what Paul did mean in verse 15, the only safe way to apply this passage is to use it only in harmony with Matt 5 and 19, not as an exception to them.

7:18-24 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Why did Paul change the subject from marriage to slavery in verses 18-24?

He returns to marriage in verse 25, so why not simply finish one subject before going to another?

Is it possible that verses 18-24 are written to prove a point about marriage?

If he did intend to make an application to married Christians using slavery as an illustration, what is he trying to show them?

I think Paul was trying to drive home a point, and inserted these verses on slavery to emphasize it.

The main message I see from these verses is to remain content in your present state.

Clearly, he is not saying to stay in a sinful condition, but to use “bondage” or “freedom” as a chance to serve the Lord.

Those who were married to unbelievers had already been instructed to remain with their spouses, and those who were single were advised to make use of that state as well.

Single (i.e. eligible) people who were struggling with impurity should marry, but those who felt no compulsion should stay “free”.

I think the idea of staying in your present condition helps explain verse 15 as well.

If a Christian was deserted by their spouse, they should remain married to them.

In Rom 7:2-3, as well as later in this chapter in verse 39, Paul teaches that a woman is “bound” by the law to her husband as long as he lives.

I believe that this bond would remain in effect even if he abandoned her (not put her away, simply left her), so

Paul would encourage her to make use of that condition instead of trying to find ways to escape it.

If her husband eventually did commit adultery (if they were still married, she could choose to put him away),

then verse 21 would correspond to that, *“Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it”*.

I don’t think Paul was saying that a slave who could somehow gain their freedom couldn’t avail themselves of that opportunity, he only tells them that they are free in the Lord to remain or go as they saw fit, but to be in the condition that best serves the Lord.

By the same token, the woman above could use the opportunity for divorce that arises when her husband commits adultery, or she could simply remain as a married woman, forgive the offense, and continue her life of service to Christ.

VII. Remain as he is...

7:25 *Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.*

Most commentators agree that virgins (parthenos in Greek) is here applied to women, although it can be applied to men as well.

Paul here states that, although Christ has given him no direct command, He has made him wise enough to give good advice.

7:26-31 *I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress-- that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.*

In verse 26, Paul again recommends that the Corinthians should try to remain in whatever state they are, here he is specifically speaking in regard to their marriage status.

Whether married or single, a crisis is coming that will severely test the faith of each of them.

Paul recognizes that married Christians will have greater difficulty because of their need to provide for their mates, instead of only for themselves.

Those who, contrary to Paul's advice, choose to marry are not sinning but are taking on extra burdens that could otherwise be avoided (He does not give unqualified parties permission to marry).

In verse 29, Paul says, "those who have wives should be as though they had none".

Most commentators feel that he is saying that those who are married, should not allow their marriages to come before their dedication to the Lord, not that they should live as celibates even though married (verses 2-5 would favor this interpretation).

In verse 27, He clearly says that even in the face of great trial and persecution, married Christians should not seek to be loosed from their "bonds".

Paul is warning the Corinthians that the time is short, that the form of this world is passing away (verse 31). Indeed, even two thousand years later, we are wise to heed this advice.

7:32-36 *But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please her husband*

(Paul is not saying that marriage is wrong, simply that it is preferred for the service of God that you remain unmarried if you happen to be in that state at the present. This would require that a person have their desires under control, "burning with passion" being an undesired condition in which to live)

And this I say for your profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly towards his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.

I have underlined verse 36 above because it is a verse that has been interpreted differently by the RSV and the NIV.

These two versions interpret "any man" as an unmarried man with a fiancé.

The KJV, NASB, and most other versions interpret "any man" to be the father of an unwed daughter.

If it is correct to say "let them" then the instruction would be to a father to "let them" get married.

Most translators and commentators have agreed that the NIV and RSV are incorrect in this instance, and I agree

with that opinion.

In any case, a casual reading of the NIV or RSV in this verse almost seems to allow for engaged couples to engage in pre-marital sexual relationships, provided they later marry.

Clearly, Paul is not teaching the idea that we can go ahead and have sex with our fiancé if the wedding is delayed for some unforeseen reason.

This is an example of a verse where comparing different Bible versions to each other is recommended.

Sometimes a Hebrew and Greek Lexicon will help to understand a particularly difficult passage, but if that is not available; a comparison between different Bible translations will sometimes make the true meaning clear.

Some of the modern language versions of the Bible are para-phrases, and this can mean that the religious opinions of that particular author will dictate the accuracy of the translation. Word to the wise!

7:37-38 Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

If the KJV and other like worded versions are correct on their interpretation here; Paul is talking to fathers with virgin daughters in these verses.

Paul is recommending that fathers keep their daughters as virgins if there is no necessity for marriage. If she is getting older, or doesn't have the will required to remain unmarried, it would be better to allow her to get married.

Marriages in those times were often arranged by the families, and before we pass judgment on the wisdom of this, we should look at the statistics on divorce in our "modern thinking" society.

Even if those who believe these verses are not addressed to fathers but to young prospective husbands are correct, the fact remains that Paul recommends abstinence for those who are able. He certainly does not allow for pre-marital sexual relations.

VIII. Only in the Lord...

7:39-40 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment-and I think I also have the spirit of God.

Paul also wrote about the law of marriage being for life in Romans 7:2-3 *...for the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.*

I believe Paul is completely in agreement with Jesus on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

These two verses speak to the "law" of marriage, we know that this law is from Genesis. God made this law along with the first marriage.

The passing of time does nothing to lessen the force of this law; in fact, the Scripture speaks just as loudly now as it did then. We have been given the Word of God in written form so we can know the truth, but we must read it to follow it.

In 1 Cor 7:39, Paul allows the widow to remarry if she wishes, but "only in the Lord". Is Paul saying she can only marry a Christian, or is he instead saying she can only marry in accordance with the Lord's wishes?

In light of what Paul wrote in verses 13-17, we see how difficult marriage between two such very different persons could be.

I think Paul answers this question elsewhere in 2 Cor 6:14-15 *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?*

Later, in 6:17 he quotes: *Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you".*

What's the big deal about marrying an unbeliever? 1 Cor 6:15-20 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he that is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two", He says, "shall become one flesh". But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

The idea from the above passage I want to stress is that uniting our bodies with unbelievers makes us one with them.

If we are God's children, why would we go outside of the body of believers to find a mate?

Wouldn't that unite your holy body with an unholy one?

Although Paul is speaking about fornication in chapter 6, he leads straight in to the discussion in chapter 7, where he speaks about marriage.

In 1 Cor 9:5 Paul writes, "*Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?*"

This statement would seem to suggest that, for Apostles at least; there was a requirement to be married to Christian wives if they were to be supported by the Church in their work.

The Christians Paul wrote to had often been already married when they became converted, and that is why they had unbelieving spouses.

Although many Christians have married unbelievers, and later converted them, wouldn't it be best to convert them before marrying them?

The idea of marrying someone who isn't a Christian, on the hope they may later decide to become one, seems to me a risky proposition at best. They may ultimately influence the Christian more than the Christian influences them.

A Side by Side Comparison: Deuteronomy 24, Matthew 5, Matthew 19

Deut 24:1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she find no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,

Matt 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery,

Verse 1 of Deuteronomy 24- If she committed adultery, she would have been stoned (Leviticus 20:10 still being in effect). Therefore, divorce was always for something besides sexual immorality (allowed because of their "hardness of hearts").

Jesus calls the husband who divorces his innocent wife an adulterer in Matthew 19, and now allows divorce only for adultery, taking away the death sentence for it.

Deut 24:2 When she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another mans wife,

Matt 5:32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Matt 19:9 and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

Verse 2 of Deuteronomy 24- She was not divorced because she was an adulterer, if she was an adulterer, she would have been stoned, therefore, this woman is innocent of adultery.

Jesus teaches that she will be an adulterer if she remarries, and in Matthew 5, He states that the husband has caused her to become an adulterer.

She would not be an automatic adulterer simply because her husband divorced her but would become one upon sexual relations or marriage with another man.

If she becomes another mans wife; she is an adulterer in the eyes of God who sees the first marriage as a permanent bond. (Some have reasoned that she would assume the undeserved reputation as an adulterer, simply because her husband had divorced her, and that is what Jesus means by “caused to commit adultery”, but I don’t think He is stating that).

Deut 24:3 If the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,

Verse 3 of Deuteronomy 24- the relationship with this latter husband has already been identified as adultery. She is now an adulterer in the eyes of God, although she wasn’t viewed by the public as one, or they would have been required to stone both her and the latter husband.

Her first husband had no cause to divorce her but did it anyway, and she engaged in another marriage therefore becoming an adulterer, and now the second husband is going to divorce her.

It is stated that even if the second husband dies she still can’t return to the first one.

In view of what Jesus has stated in Matthew, this woman is not pure in Gods eyes, and will be considered to be defiled, remarrying apparently being the cause of her defilement.

Deut 24:4 Then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

It is safe to assume that the latter husband and the woman are both defiled.

And what about the first husband? If he remarried after he divorced her he would be considered an adulterer, according to Jesus in Matthew 19 because he had no cause to obtain the divorce.

Now all three are guilty of adultery and none of them can remarry each other or anyone else.

Remarriage is the common denominator to all of them being guilty of adultery, and the first husband is also guilty for divorcing without just cause.

The only way they can be free from sin now is to live apart from each other and dissolve their marriages (Nehemiah 10, and Ezra 10).

The first husband caused all of this.

If the woman in Deuteronomy 24 hadn’t remarried, but had remained single, her first husband could have repented later on and taken her back, but she did remarry.

If you remarry in the way shown in Deuteronomy 24 and Matthew 5 and 19 where do you stand in Gods eyes?

Men today still widely practice divorce; in fact, some churches of Christ accept divorce almost as readily as society at large.

What about Gods will in the matter?

Do so-called Christians of today really think that they can ignore God like the Jews of Jesus day were doing and still be acceptable in His sight?

Jesus plainly taught God’s will. Those who wish to can obey Him.

Christians who want to find loopholes and technicalities for doing whatever they want to do, will quickly find themselves outside of the grace of God, just as those who refuse God’s plan of salvation. We must live our lives in accordance with the will of God if we want to be considered His children.

Genesis 2:24 *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh”.*

Jesus warned in Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

Also in Matthew 7:21-29 *“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.*

Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’

And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.