

# Divorce and Remarriage

## A Position Paper

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### DISCLAIMER:

After years of reading both the Bible and books on the subject of divorce and remarriage, it must be concluded that there are many biblical interpretations. Most of these have solid Bible evidence and respected theologians who hold them. It is therefore not the goal of this paper to recognize the errors or veracity of any of the various views. Should one who seeks membership at SBGC have a view differing from the conclusion of this paper, he will be asked to read and study these conclusions. Should he continue to hold another view, he will be asked to defend it from scripture. If as a matter of conscience he feels he must hold another view, he will be received equal to all who hold the views of this paper. The goal of this paper is not to attack those who have been divorced, but to put forth what we believe concerning marriage.

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### **Doctrine:**

Reasons why all divorce and remarriage is prohibited while both spouses are alive

### **Reason No. One:**

Marriage above all else is to picture the marriage of Christ and His church.

1. It was true in the Old Testament.  
CF Hosea 11-3; Jer. 3; Ez. 16:26
2. It is true in the New Testament  
CF Matt. 22; Eph 5
  - *In Eph. 5:22-23 it is very clear Christian marriage is to illustrate Christ and His church. For example:  
v. 22 as to the Lord*

v. 23 as also Christ is the head of the church.  
v. 24 just as the church is subject to Christ  
v. 25 just as Christ also loved the church  
v. 27 a glorious church  
v. 29 just as Christ does His church  
v. 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

3. It is true that we are united to Christ forever, and that must be the picture given in Christian marriage.
4. It is true that He will not divorce us and marry another, and that must be the picture given in Christian marriage.
  - *God did not divorce Israel and remarry the church. He has kept His covenant with both.*

### **Reason No. Two:**

God hates divorce.

1. Malachi 2:16: “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence.”
  - *Sin adheres to such a one as a stain adheres to a garment.*
2. It is unreasonable God will in certain cases allow what He hates.
  - a. Did He not refuse their sacrifices for doing what He hates? Mal. 2:10-17
  - b. Did He not require one spouse for God-fearing children? Mal. 2:15
  - c. Did He not call divorce a treacherous deed? Mal. 2:11, 14, 15, 16

### **Reason No. Three:**

Divorce is out of the spirit of the whole scripture.

1. Divorce makes the Christian a liar, for he promised God and witnesses to cleave to his wife until death and for better or worse.

2. Divorce causes a believer to go to law against his wife who is a sister in Christ. Believers are forbidden to go to law against each other. I Cor. 6:1
3. Divorce is to reject scripture when it says all things work together for good for the called toward the purpose of being conformed to the image of Christ. Rom. 8:28-30
4. Divorce settles problems in a sinful way, not God's way. Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-3
5. Divorce is hate, not love, and Christians are to love one another.
6. Divorce is to oppose God who said, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."
7. Divorce is without faith. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

*Note: Reasons Four through Fourteen are taken word-for-word from the position paper of John Piper.*

**Reason No. Four:**

Luke 16:18 calls all remarriage after divorce adultery.

Luke 6:18: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

- a. "This verse shows that Jesus does not recognize divorce as terminating a marriage in God's sight. The reason a second marriage is called adultery is because the first one is considered to still be valid. So Jesus is taking a stand against the Jewish culture in which all divorce was considered to carry with it the right of remarriage."
- b. "The second half of the verse shows that not merely the divorcing man is guilty of adultery when he remarries, but also any man who marries a divorced woman."

- c. “Since there are no exceptions mentioned in the verse, and since Jesus is clearly rejecting the common cultural conception of divorce as including the right of remarriage, the first readers of this gospel would have been hard-put to argue for any exceptions on the basis that Jesus shared the cultural assumption that divorce for unfaithfulness or desertion freed a spouse for remarriage.”

**Reason No. Five:**

“Mark 10:11-12 call all remarriage after divorce adultery whether it is the husband or the wife who does the divorcing.”

Mark 10:10-12: “And he said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’”

- a. “This text repeats the first half of Luke 16:18 but goes farther and says that not only the man who divorces, but also a woman who divorces, and then remarries is committing adultery.”
- b. “As in Luke 16:18, there are no exceptions mentioned to this rule.”

**Reason No. Six:**

“Mark 10:29 and Matthew 19:3-8 teach that Jesus rejected the Pharisees’ justification of divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1 and reasserted the purpose of God in creation that no human being separate what God has joined together.”

Mark 10:2-9: “And some Pharisees came up to Him, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. And He answered and said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ And they said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are not longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’”

Matthew 19:3-9: “And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?’ And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh”? Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’ They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.’”

- a. “In both Matthew and Mark the Pharisees come to Jesus and test him by asking him whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. They evidently have in mind the passage in Deuteronomy 24:1 which simply describes divorce as a fact rather than giving any legislation in favor of it. They wonder how Jesus will take a position with regard to this passage.”
- b. “Jesus’ answer is, ‘For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you do divorce your wives.’ (Mt. 19:8)”
- c. But then Jesus criticizes the Pharisees’ failure to recognize in the books of Moses God’s deepest and original intention for marriage. So he quotes two passages from Genesis. ‘God made them male and female...For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ (Genesis 1:27; 2:24)”
- d. “From these passages in Genesis Jesus concludes, ‘So they are no longer two, but one.’ And then he makes his climaxing statement, ‘What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.’”
- e. “The implication is that Jesus rejects the Pharisees’ use of Deuteronomy 24:1 and raises the standard of marriage for his disciples to God’s original intention in creation. He says that none

of us should try to undo the ‘one-flesh’ relationship which God has united.”

- f. “Before we jump to the conclusion that this absolute statement should be qualified in view of the exception clause (‘except for unchastity’) mentioned in Matthew 19:9, we should seriously entertain the possibility that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 should be understood in the light of the absolute statement of Matthew 19:6, (‘let no man put asunder’) especially since the verses that follow this conversation with the Pharisees in Mark 10 do not contain any exception when they condemn remarriage. More on this below.”

**Reason No. Seven:**

“Matthew 5:32 does not teach that remarriage is lawful in some cases. Rather it reaffirms that marriage after divorce is adultery, even for those who have been divorced innocently, and that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of the adultery of her second marriage unless she had already become an adulteress before the divorce.”

Matthew 5:32: “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- a. “Jesus assumes that in most situations in that culture a wife who has been put away by a husband will be drawn into a second marriage. Nevertheless, in spite of these pressures, he calls this second marriage adultery.”
- b. “The remarkable thing about the first half of this verse is that it plainly says that the remarriage of a wife who has been innocently put away is nevertheless adultery: ‘Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her (the innocent wife who has not been unchaste) an adulteress.’ This is a clear statement, it seems to me, that remarriage is wrong not merely when a person is guilty in the process of divorce, but also when a person is innocent. In other words, Jesus’ opposition to remarriage seems to be based on the unbreakableness of the marriage bond by anything but death.”

- c. I will save my explanation of the exception clause ('Except on the ground of unchastity') for later in the paper, but for now, it may suffice to say that on the traditional interpretation of the clause, it may simply mean that a man makes his wife an adulteress except in the case where she has made herself one."
  
- d. I would assume that since an innocent wife who is divorced commits adultery when she remarries, therefore a guilty wife who remarries after divorce is all the more guilty. If one argues that this guilty woman is free to remarry, while the innocent woman who has been put away is not, just because the guilty woman's adultery has broken the 'one flesh' relationship, then one is put in the awkward position of saying to an innocent divorced woman, 'If you now commit adultery it will be lawful for you to remarry.' This seems wrong for at least two reasons."
  - 1. It seems to elevate the physical act of sexual intercourse to be the decisive element in marital union and disunion.
  
  - 2. If sexual union with another breaks the marriage bond and legitimizes remarriage, then to say that an innocently divorced wife can't remarry (as Jesus does say) assumes that her divorcing husband in not divorcing to have sexual relations with another. This is a very unlikely assumption. More likely is that Jesus does assume some of these divorcing husbands will have sexual relations with another woman, but still the wives they have divorced may not remarry. Therefore, adultery does not nullify the 'one-flesh' relationship of marriage and both the innocent and guilty spouses are prohibited from remarriage in Matthew 5:32."

**Reason No. Eight:**

"1 Corinthians 7:10-11 teaches that divorce is wrong but that if it is inevitable the person who divorces should not remarry."

1 Corinthians 7:10-11: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband

(but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) – and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

- a. “When Paul says that this charge is not his but the Lord’s, I think he means that he is aware of a specific saying from the historical Jesus which addressed this issue. As a matter of fact, these verses look very much like Mark 10:11-12, because both the wife and the husband are addressed. Also, remarriage seems to be excluded by verse 11 the same way it is excluded in Mark 10:11-12.”
- b. “Paul seems to be aware that separation will be inevitable in certain cases. Perhaps he has in mind a situation of unrepentant adultery, or desertion, or brutality. But in such a case he says that the person who feels constrained to separate should not seek remarriage but remain single. And he reinforces the authority of this statement by saying he has a word from the Lord. Thus Paul’s interpretation of Jesus’ sayings is that remarriage should not be pursued.”
- c. “As in Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12 and Matthew 5:32, this text does not explicitly entertain the possibility of any exceptions to the prohibition of remarriage.”

**Reason No. Nine:**

“1 Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:1-3 teach that remarriage is legitimate only after the death of a spouse.”

1 Corinthians 7:39: “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”

Romans 7:1-3: “Do you not know, brethren – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free

from that law; if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.”

“Both of these passages (1Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2) say explicitly that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. No exceptions are explicitly mentioned that would suggest she could be free from her husband to remarry on any other basis.”

**Reason No. Ten:**

“Matthew 19:10-12 teaches that special Christian grace is given by God to Christ’s disciples to sustain them in singleness when they renounce remarriage according to the law of Christ.”

Matthew 19:10-12: “The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.’ But he said to them, ‘Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.’”

- a. “Just preceding this passage in Matthew 19:9 Jesus prohibited all remarriage after divorce. (I will deal with the meaning of ‘except for immorality’ below.) This seemed like an intolerable prohibition to Jesus’ disciples: If you close off every possibility of remarriage, then you make marriage so risky that it would be better not to marry, since you might be ‘trapped’ to live as a single person to the rest of your life or you may be ‘trapped’ in a bad marriage.”
- b. “Jesus does not deny the tremendous difficulty of his command. Instead, he says in verse 11, that the enablement to fulfill the command not to remarry is a divine gift to his disciples. Verse 12 is an argument that such a life is indeed possible because there are people who for the sake of the kingdom, as well as lower reasons, have dedicated themselves to a life of singleness.”

- c. Jesus is not saying that some of his disciples have the ability to obey his command not to remarry and some don't. He is saying that the mark of a disciple is that they receive a gift of continence while non-disciples don't. The evidence for this is 1) the parallel between Matthew 19:11 and 13:11, 2) the parallel between Matthew 19:12 and 13:9, 43; 11:15, and 3) the parallel between Matthew 19:11 and 19:26."

**Reason No. Eleven:**

"Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not legislate grounds for divorce but teaches that the 'one-flesh' relationship established by marriage is not obliterated by divorce or even by remarriage.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and 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, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since 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 gives you as an inheritance."

- a. The remarkable thing about these four verses is that, while divorce is taken for granted, nevertheless the woman who is divorced becomes 'defiled' by her remarriage (verse 4). It may well be that when the Pharisees asked Jesus if divorce was legitimate he based his negative answer not only on God's intention expressed in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, but also on the implication of Deuteronomy 24:4 that remarriage after divorce defiles a person. In other words, there were ample clues in the Mosaic law that the divorce concession was on the basis of the hardness of man's heart and really did not make divorce an remarriage legitimate.
- b. The prohibition of a wife returning to her first husband even after her second husband dies (because it is an abomination) suggests

very strongly that today no second marriage should be broken up in order to restore a first one (for Heth and Wenham's explanation of this see Jesus and Divorce, page 110)."

**Reason No. Twelve:**

"1 Corinthians 7:15 does not mean that when a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving spouse he or she is free to remarry. It means that the Christian is not bound to fight in order to preserve togetherness. Separation is permissible if the unbelieving partner insists on it."

1 Corinthians 7:15: If the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace."

"There are several reasons why the phrase 'is not bound' should not be construed to mean 'is free to remarry.'"

- a. "Marriage is an ordinance of creation binding on all of God's human creatures, irrespective of their faith or lack of faith."
- b. "The word used for 'bound' (doulou) in verse 15 is not the same word used in verse 39 where Paul says, 'A wife is bound (deo) to her husband as long as he lives.' Paul consistently uses deo when speaking of the legal aspect of being bound to one marriage partner (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39), or to one's betrothed (1 Corinthians 7:27). But when he refers to a deserted spouse not being bound in 1 Corinthians 7:15, he chooses a different word (doulou) which we would expect him to do if he were not giving a deserted spouse the same freedom to remarry that he gives to a spouse whose partner has died (verse 39).
- c. "The last phrase of verse 15 ('God has called us to peace') supports verse 15 best if Paul is saying that a deserted partner is not 'bound to make war' on the deserting unbeliever to get him or her to stay. It seems to me that the peace God has called us to is the peace of marital harmony. Therefore, if the unbelieving partner insists on departing, then the believing partner is not bound to live in perpetual conflict with the unbelieving spouse, but is free and innocent in letting him or her go."

- d. “This interpretation also preserves a closer harmony to the intention of verses 10-11, where an inevitable separation does not result in the right of remarriage.
- e. “Verse 16 (‘For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?’) is an argument that you can’t know, and so should not make the hope of saving them a ground for fighting to make them stay. This supports the understanding of verse 15 as a focus on not being enslaved to stay together, rather than not being enslaved to stay single.”

\* “Paul did not see the single life as a life of slavery and so would not have called the necessity of staying single a state of being enslaved.”

### **Reason No. Thirteen:**

“1 Corinthians 7:27-28 does not teach the right of divorced persons to remarry. It teaches that betrothed virgins should seriously consider the life of singleness, but do not sin if they marry.”

1 Corinthians 7:27-28: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin.”

“Recently some people have argued that this passage deals with divorced people because in verse 27 Paul asks, ‘Are you free (literally: loosed) from a wife?’ Some have assumed that he means, ‘Are you divorced?’ Thus he would be saying in verse 28 that it is not sin when divorced people remarry. There are several reasons why this interpretation is most unlikely.”

- a. “Verse 25 signals that Paul is beginning a new section and dealing with a new issue. He says, ‘Now concerning the virgins (ton Parthenon) I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.’ He has already dealt with the problem of divorced people in verses 10-16. Now he takes up a new issue about those who are not yet married, and

he signals this by saying, ‘Now concerning the virgins.’ Therefore, it is very unlikely that the people referred to in verses 27 and 28 are divorced.”

- b. “A flat statement that it is not sin for divorced people to be remarried (verse 28) would contradict verse 11, where he said that a woman who has separated from her husband should remain single.”
- c. “Verse 36 is surely describing the same situation in view in verses 27 and 28, but clearly refers to a couple that is not yet married. ‘If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his virgin, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry – it is no sin.’ This is the same as verse 28 where Paul says, ‘But if you marry, you do not sin.’”
- d. “The reference in verse 27 to being bound to a ‘wife’ may be misleading because it may suggest that the man is already married. But in the Greek the word for wife is simply ‘woman’ and may refer to a man’s betrothed as well as his spouse. The context dictates that the reference is to a man’s betrothed virgin, not to his spouse. So ‘being bound’ and ‘being loosed’ have reference to whether a person is betrothed or not.”
- e. “It is significant that the verb Paul uses for ‘loosed’ (*luo*) or ‘free’ is not a word that he uses for divorce. Paul’s words for divorce are *chorizo* (verses 10,11,15; cf. Matthew 19:6) and *aphienai* (verses 11, 12, 13).”

**Reason No. Fourteen:**

“The exception clause of Matthew 19:9 need not imply that divorce on account of adultery frees a person to be remarried. All the weight of the New Testament evidence given in the preceding ten points is against this view, and there are several ways to make good sense out of this verse so that it does not conflict with the broad teaching of the New Testament that remarriage after divorce is prohibited.”

Matthew 19:9: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

- a. “Several years ago I taught our congregation in two evening services concerning my understanding of this verse and argued that ‘except for immorality’ did not refer to adultery but to premarital sexual fornication which a man or a woman discovers in the betrothed partner. Since that time I have discovered other people who hold this view and who have given it a much more scholarly exposition than I did. I have also discovered numerous other ways of understanding this verse which also exclude the legitimacy of remarriage. Several of these are summed up in William Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nelson: 1984).”
- b. “Here I will simply give a brief summary of my own view of Matthew 19:9 and how I came to it.”

“I began, first of all, by being troubled that the absolute form of Jesus’ denunciation of divorce and remarriage in Mark 10:11,12 and Luke 16:18 is not preserved by Matthew, if in fact his exception clause is a loophole for divorce and remarriage. I was bothered by the simple assumption that so many writers make that Matthew is simply making explicit something that would have been implicitly understood by the hearers of Jesus or the readers of Mark 10 and Luke 16.”

“Would they really have assumed that the absolute statements included exceptions? I have very strong doubts, and therefore my inclination is to inquire whether or not in fact Matthew’s exception clause conforms to the absoluteness of Mark and Luke.”

“The second thing that began to disturb me was the question, Why does Matthew use the word *porneia* (‘except for immorality’) instead of the word *moicheia* which means adultery? Almost all commentators seem to make the simple assumption again that *porneia* means adultery in this context. The question nags at me why Matthew would not use the word for adultery, if that is in fact what he meant.”

”Then I noticed something very interesting. The only other place besides Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 where Matthew uses the word *porneia* is in 15:19 where it is used alongside of *moicheia*. Therefore, the primary contextual evidence for Matthew’s usage is

that he conceives of *porneia* as something different than adultery. Could this mean, then, that Matthew conceives of *porneia* in its normal sense of fornication or incest (1 Corinthians 5:1) rather than adultery?”

“Isaksson agrees with this view of *porneia* and sums up his research much like this on pages 134-5 of *Marriage and Ministry*:

“Thus we cannot get away from the fact that the distinction between what was to be regarded as *porneia* and what was to be regarded as *moicheia* was very strictly maintained in pre-Christian Jewish literature and in the N.T. *Porneia* may, of course, denote different forms of forbidden sexual relations, but we can find no unequivocal examples of the use of this word to denote a wife’s adultery. Under these circumstances we can hardly assume that this word means adultery in the clauses in Matthew. The logia on divorce are worded as a paragraph of the law, intended to be obeyed by the members of the Church. Under these circumstances it is inconceivable that in a text of this nature the writer would not have maintained a clear distinction between what was unchastity and what was adultery: *moicheia* and not *porneia* was used to describe the wife’s adultery. From the philological point of view there are accordingly very strong arguments against this interpretation of the clauses as permitting divorce in the case in which the wife was guilty of adultery.”

“The next clue in my search for an explanation came when I stumbled upon the use of *porneia* in John 8:41 where Jewish leaders indirectly accuse Jesus of being born of *porneia*. In other words, since they don’t accept the virgin birth, they assume that Mary had committed fornication and Jesus was the result of this act. On the basis of that clue I went back to study Matthew’s record of Jesus’ birth in Matthew 1:18-20. This was extremely enlightening.”

“In these verses Joseph and Mary are referred to as husband (*aner*) and wife (*gunaika*). Yet they are described as only being

betrothed to each other. This is probably owing to the fact that the words for husband and wife are simply man and woman and to the fact that betrothal was a much more significant commitment than engagement is today. In verse 19 Joseph resolves 'to divorce' Mary. The word for divorce is the same as the word in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. But most important of all, Matthew says that Joseph was 'just' in making the decision to divorce Mary, presumably on account of her *porneia*, fornication."

"Therefore, as Matthew proceeded to construct the narrative of his gospel, he finds himself in chapter 5 and then later in chapter 19 needing to prohibit all remarriage after divorce (as taught by Jesus) and yet to allow for 'divorces' like the one Joseph contemplated toward his betrothed whom he thought guilty of fornication (*porneia*). Therefore, Matthew includes the exception clause in particular to exonerate Joseph, but also in general to show that the kind of 'divorce' that one might pursue during a betrothal on account of fornication is not included in Jesus' absolute prohibition."

"A common objection to this interpretation is that both in Matthew 19:3-8 and in Matthew 5:31-32 the issue Jesus is responding to is marriage not betrothal. The point is pressed that 'except for fornication' is irrelevant to the context of marriage."

"My answer is that this irrelevancy is just the point Matthew wants to make. We may take it for granted that the breakup of an engaged couple over fornication is not an evil 'divorce' and does not prohibit remarriage. But we cannot assume that Matthew's readers would take this for granted."

"Even in Matthew 5:32, where it seems pointless for us to exclude 'the case of fornication' (since we can't see how a betrothed virgin could be 'made an adulteress' in any case), it may not be pointless for Matthew's readers. For that matter, it may not be pointless for any readers: if Jesus had said, 'Every man who divorces his woman makes her an adulteress,' a reader could legitimately ask: 'Then was Joseph about to make Mary an adulteress?' We may say this question is not reasonable since we think you can't make unmarried women adulteresses. But it certainly is not meaningless

or, perhaps for some readers, pointless, for Matthew to make explicit the obvious exclusion of the case of fornication during betrothal.”

“This interpretation of the exception clause has several advantages:

1. It does not force Matthew to contradict the plain, absolute meaning of Mark and Luke and the whole range of New Testament teaching set forth above in sections 1-10, including Matthew’s own absolute teaching in 19:3-8.
2. It provides an explanation for why the word *porneia* is used in Matthew’s exception clause instead of *moicheia*.
3. It squares with Matthew’s own use of *porneia* for fornication in Matthew 15:19.
4. It fits the demands of Matthew’s wider context concerning Joseph’s contemplated divorce.”

“Since I first wrote this exposition of Matthew 19:9 I have discovered a chapter on this view in Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* and a scholarly defense of it by A. Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple* (1965).”

### **“Conclusions and Applications”**

“In the New Testament the question about remarriage after divorce is not determined by:

1. The guilt or innocence of either spouse,
2. Nor by whether either spouse is a believer or not,
3. Nor by whether the divorce happened before or after either spouse’s conversion,
4. Nor by the ease or difficulty of living as a single parent for the rest of life on earth,
5. Nor by whether there is adultery or desertion involved,
6. Nor by the on-going reality of the hardness of the human heart,
7. Nor by the cultural permissiveness of the surrounding society.”

“Rather it is determined by the fact that:

1. Marriage is a ‘one-flesh’ relationship of divine establishment and extraordinary significance in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8),

2. Only God, not man, can end this one-flesh relationship (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9 – this is why remarriage is called adultery by Jesus: he assumes that the first marriage is still binding, Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11,
3. God ends the one-flesh relationship of marriage only through the death of one of the spouses (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39),
4. The grace and power of God are promised and sufficient to enable a trusting, divorced Christian to be single all this earthly life if necessary (Matthew 19:10-12, 26; 1 Corinthians 10:13,
5. Temporal frustrations and disadvantages are much to be preferred over the disobedience of remarriage, and will yield deep and lasting joy both in this life and the life to come (Matthew 5:29-30).”

“Those who are already remarried:

1. Should acknowledge that the choice to remarry and the act of entering a second marriage was sin, and confess it as such and seek forgiveness
2. Should not attempt to return to the first partner after entering a second union (see 8.2 above)
3. Should not separate and live as single people thinking that this would result in less sin because all their sexual relations are acts of adultery. The Bible does not give prescriptions for this particular case, but it does treat second marriages as having significant standing in God’s eyes. That is, there were promises made and there has been a union formed. It should not have been formed, but it was. It is not to be taken lightly. Promises are to be kept, and the union is to be sanctified to God. While not the ideal state, staying in a second marriage is God’s will for a couple and their ongoing relations should not be looked on as adulterous.”

*Note: Reasons Four through Fourteen were taken word-for-word from the position paper of John Piper.*

**Reason No. Fifteen:**

Adultery brought stoning, not divorce.

Deuteronomy 22:13-30: “If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, ‘I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,’ then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman’s father shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her; now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, “I found your daughter was not a virgin,” and yet these are the evidences of my daughter’s virginity.’ And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He cannot divorce her all his days. But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house; so you shall put away the evil person from among you.

“If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die, both the man that lay with the woman and the woman; so you shall put away the evil person from Israel.

“If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil person from among you. But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin worthy of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter; for he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.

“If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

“A man shall not take his father’s wife, nor uncover his father’s bed.”

1. Those married who commit adultery were stoned. 22:13-22
2. Those betrothed who commit fornication were stoned. 22:23-27
  - *Betrothed is a married couple who have never lived together. Usually a year of preparation was given.*
3. Those not married or betrothed who commit fornication must marry and must never divorce. 22:28-30

**Reason No. Sixteen:**

The holiness code includes fornication.

1. Leviticus 18-20 was known as the holiness code.
2. Most believe that was what was referred to in Acts 15:20.

Acts 15:20: ... *“but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.”*
3. If that be true, Jesus was not allowing divorce for adultery, but for fornication.

Matthew 19:9:  
*“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”*

*\* Listed in Lev. 18-20 are immoral acts done with near to kin, homosexuality, and bestiality. Adultery is always between two married people.*

### **Reason No. Seventeen:**

Fornication involves an unmarried couple.

1. Betrothed couples were engaged or married without yet living together.
2. Should one be unfaithful before they came together, Moses allowed divorce, but only because of their hard hearts.
3. Should the betrothed maid lose her virginity by rape and she cried out but none heard her, Moses allows a divorce, for she was contracted to be a virgin. The divorce paper must explain why she was no longer his so should she marry and it be discovered she was not a virgin, she would be protected from stoning.

### **Reason No. Eighteen:**

God forgives and uses all kinds of people and does not require church discipline for penitent people who are divorced and/or remarried.

1. While we do believe the original marriage covenant is not to be broken and those who divorce are guilty of breaking God's command (Matt. 19:6), we do not believe it the unpardonable sin and/or worthy of excommunication.
2. Further, those who remarry after this sin are not unforgivable in God's eyes or guilty of the only unpardonable sin either (Mark 3:29).
3. Even further is the fact that many godly scholars and Pastors have differing views of this subject and we choose not to lack charity to those who hold another view than ours by imposing discipline or rejection of church membership on those who out of conviction would not hold it. We recognize that our conscience is not authoritative over others – we are not God, so we move carefully in these matters recognizing the thoughts and positions of others.
4. There are Biblical examples that tell us God not only does not excommunicate people guilty of breaking His covenant, but forgives and uses them. Further, God expects promises and covenants to be kept – even those entered into after a divorce, remarriage and in

situations where there is an unequal yoking. In short, people are no less obligated to keep promises when they are made under bad pretenses, outright sin, ignorance and/or misinterpretation of God's Word.

a. In Joshua 9 & 10 the Gibeonites worked craftily (and successfully) in order to trick Joshua to not destroy them in the conquest of Canaan. Joshua 9:16 says it only took three days to find out of the deception. For the purpose of this paper we bring attention to the fact that even though Joshua was deceived and he unintentionally was unequally yoked with those he should have destroyed, God held him to his vow of protection and expected him to honor it. We conclude that this is also true of marriages (albeit not officially the first marriage covenant) that are entered into under means not allowed in Scripture. This would hold true for divorced people and for those married with unbelievers. God does not require the believer to leave the second marriage. And further, He requires the promises made – even under possibly sinful conditions – be kept. So serious was this requirement in the case of the Gibeonites that God chastened Israel years later when Saul failed to honor it in 2 Samuel 21:1ff. God did not punish the Gibeonites, nor did he tell Joshua to break the covenant. God actually protects the liars (Gibeonites) and those who were fooled (Israel). Surely His grace also extends to the divorced and to those who remarry.

b. Joshua is not the only example of someone in an unlawful relationship that God expects to be honored. We must note that even the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel who will be the Twelve Tribes – even promised in the future Kingdom of Christ came from two mothers. Two mothers in a polygamous relationship mess no less! Should we conclude God must exclude the Sons of Rachel born to Jacob because she is a second wife? Joseph was born of Rachel and used to save the nation. Obviously God forgives and uses people who do not do things His way. He did not exclude Rachel or her children from blessing, nor are we required to exclude divorced or remarried people from the Church.

c. It is even more striking that the Lord actually forgives and uses the offspring of an adulterous affair! This is directly related to this discussion. In asking the question of what we do in light of an unlawfully married person(s) we can actually find no greater example than King David himself the man after God's own heart. Would anyone say he ought to be disciplined or excluded from blessing when God speaks of him in this way? God not only forgives and uses David, but He uses the son of this adulterous and murderous relationship with Bathsheba (Solomon) to build His Temple! Remember, David himself prior to this was already a polygamist. Even more striking is this is the line of David's family the Messiah, Jesus comes from (Matthew 1:6,7)! God does not exclude him from blessing and fellowship, nor his wives, nor his children born from them given David's clear repentance (Psalm 51).

d. Obviously the sinful actions of the above-mentioned people – whether believers or unbelievers – are never condoned. But it is not a stretch to say that God is not required to exclude people who act sinfully from blessing or membership in His Church. On the contrary, He extends great forgiveness for those who need it and in repentance ask for it. This includes those who sinfully divorce and those who sinfully remarry.

5. The simple conclusion of this section: While God does not allow divorce or divorced people to remarry, there is forgiveness for all who acknowledge their sin before God and repent. Repentance and confession ensure fellowship with God. And further, repentance does not mean it is necessary to separate from the second marriage as God requires those second promises to be kept. So, we do not believe church discipline is required for those who have repented before the Lord for He will 'by no means cast them out'.