

CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, KUMASI
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY



DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: AN
EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 19:5-9.

PROJECT WORK
(LONG ESSAY)

BY

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JULY 2015.

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A long essay submitted to Christian Service University College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology with Administration.

JULY, 2015.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Long Essay has been prepared by myself, that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree, that the work it is record has been done by myself, that all quotations have been distinguished by either quotation marks or indentation and all the sources of information have specifically been acknowledged by means of footnotes.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work mostly to God Almighty and to my deceased grandma, the Late Aunte Akua Manu of Akrokeri –Adansi who trained and nurtured me in the Lord, to my parents and beloved siblings and my church Head office for their immense support, all well wishers and divorcees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God be the glory and praise for bringing me this far. Unto him who is able to provide, guide and assist us in all dangers of live, in His name I praise and thank for His goodness, immeasurable mercy and grace upon me. Again for giving me knowledge and wisdom to pen down this deeper truth by leadership of His Spirit and also guidance for three(3) years in Christian service university college.

My special thanks also go to my lecturers whom God have used to impart an immeasurable wealth of knowledge and wisdom into my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In recent times, concern has been raised in connection with the increasing rate of divorce in Ghana. Most of these concerns emanate from religious circles which hold a belief that marriage is supposed to be lifelong commitment and mutual intimacy experience. From the Christian perspective marriage is a God designed and ordained institution supported by Genesis 1:27-28 .This text presupposes that marriage is good and that should be sustained. The second chapter of Malachi tells us that God hates divorce. The Holy Bible leaves no doubt that marriage is for life; separation and divorce are contrary to God's Order.¹

However, some societies perceive marriage as a contract between two individuals, which can be dissolved if there is Sufficient Cause. With such a limited view of marriage it is natural for society to find all kinds of excuses to dissolve marriage relationship and even to enter into marriage on a trial basis to see how it will work out.

Undeniably, marriage is the most basic and influential societal unit in the world. It is difficult to rate divorces in Ghana, yet each year statistics roughly shows that there are about half as many divorces as marriage. In view of this, it behooves us to consider the biblical basis for divorce and remarriage.

Marriage occurs when a man and a woman decides to bond themselves to live together for the purpose of procreation, unification, companionship, protection, mutual support

¹ G. Edwin Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church 1973* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973), 32.

for each other and Sexual intimacy. Much as this is the ideal situation, however, there seen to be some problems that militate against this ideal.²

1.2 Statement of the Problem

God is the author of marriage thus it derives its authority from the one who created this divine institution. However it is worrisome and dishearten to many serious Christians about the series of divorce cases often captured in our print and also forming major headlines of radio discussions especially those involving Christian Couples. Nothing is more disturbing than those cases involving members and leaders of churches.

There have been countless reports of renowned pastors and heads of churches who unfortunately are caught up in the web of divorce; causing both the believing and unbelieving in the communities to question the integrity of such pastors: thus throwing the credibility of the Gospel and the church into disrepute. However some are of the view that whereas divorce is not desirable the Bible somehow allows it and even remarriage for some reasons. One of the contentious reference points is Matthew 19:5-9.

1.3 Research Question

Thus the question that this essay poses is:

Does Matthew 19:5-9 allows divorce some reasons and how do such reasons apply to remarriage of the divorcee.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to find out the debates around some New Testament texts as grounds for divorce and the possibility of remarriage for the divorcees.

² R. Lofton Hudson, *Till Divorce Do Us Part* (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 1973), 42.

1.5 Research Questions

Due to the massive prevalence of divorce and remarriage in our contemporary Christianity, it has become imperative that the researcher wishes to expose the implications of divorce that have ruin down many livelihoods and families.

1.6 Research Methodology

This is primarily textual work. It examines the context and the content of Matthew 19:5-9 to find out whether the passage allows for divorce and remarriage. Thus the Bible is use as the primary tool and other relevant publication like books, journal and internet source are used for the research.

The researcher also interviewed pastors, church leaders Old married couples and some young couples about their experience before marriage, in and outside the church to enriched the work.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Some New Testament passages on divorce and remarriage are examined but these served as complimentary. The primary focus is on Matthew 19:5-9.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The study is very important in that it will go long way to secure and safeguard marriages since it will enable up and coming counselors, ministers and aspiring marriage couples to understand thoroughly the implications associated with divorce and remarriage. Also, the study seeks to bring to light the enormous challenges in the marriage as an institution.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study was organized as follows:

Chapter one deals with general introductory issues which cover areas such as introduction, Background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, Research questions, researcher methodology, scope of study, significance of the study, Literature review and Finally, the organization of the study. Chapter two entails the biblical, especially the Old Testament, view of divorce and remarriage. Chapter three reviews the current discourse on divorce and remarriage. Chapter four examines and analysis data, which is the key text. Chapter five which is the final lapse of this work covers introduction, Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2.1 Introduction

The Old Testament serves as background to divorce and re-remarriage in the New Testament. Thus it is necessary to describe what pertains in the Old Testament to help us to understand the issue better. Therefore, section 2.2 looks Mosaic Legislation. Section 2.3 entails Cultural Considerations of Old Testament notions of divorce and re-remarriage. Section 2.4 discusses the legal grounds for divorce in the Old Testament while section 2.5 expounds on remarriage after divorce. Section 2.6 concludes the discussion.

2.2 The Marriage Ideal

Adultery and fornication are sexual relationships that society does not recognize as constituting marriage. This definition is necessary to show that in the Old Testament polygamy is not sexually immoral, since it constitutes a recognized married state; though it is generally shown to be expedient.

Marriage is regarded as normal, and there is no word for ‘bachelor’ in the Old Testament. The record of the Creation of Eve (Genesis 2 18-24) indicates the unique relationship of husband and wife, and serves as a picture of the relationship between God and His people. Jeremiah’s call to remain unmarried (Jeremiah 16: 20) is a unique prophetic sign, but celibacy can be God’s call to Christians.³

Monogamy is implicit in the story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam. Yet polygamy is adopted from the time of Lamech (Genesis 4.19), and is not

³ W. W. Davies, “*Divorce in the Old Testament*,” *International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 42.

forbidden in scripture. It would seem that God left it to man to discover by experience that His original institution of monogamy was the proper relationship. It is shown that polygamy brings trouble, and often results in sin (1Kings 11: 1-8).

Before we focus on the biblical passages that speak expressly to the breaking of the marriage vow, we need to review the institution and plan of marriage.

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

From God's perspective, a marriage is instituted when a person leaves his parents with intent of cleaving to his spouse. In this union they become one flesh. When a person leaves his childhood home he modifies his relationships with his parents and home, and he cleaves to another person in whom fulfillment is found.

John R.W. Stott points out that in the leaving and cleaving process, a person replaces one human relationship (child-parent) by another (husband-wife). Striking similarities appear in the relationships which Stott set forth. He says, "both are complex and contain several elements – physical (in one case conception, birth, and nurture in the other, intercourse), emotional ('growing up' being social (children inheriting an already existent family unit, parents creating a new one))."⁴

The term "one flesh" is translated from Hebrew (enchad basar) and comes from a primary root word which carries the connotation "to be fresh, i.e. full (rosy, fig., cheerful)"⁵. Probably no meaning can be derived from the words "full, rosy, or cheerful" that would indicate that these descriptions have special significance for this particular relationship, since this Hebrew word is the general one used for the flesh body of any person.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Divorce* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 1973), 56-62.

⁵ Linden M. Wenger, "*Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament*" (Unpublished manuscript, 1961), 2.

We understand from this passage that God's intention was that marriage be a union of one man and one woman for life. i.e. permanent and monogamous. Our saviour also confirmed this clearly in Matthew 19.

Marriage was also set forth as being an intimate relationship in which human beings find its satisfaction and fulfillment. Along with these we see mutuality in marriage as G.W Peter sets forth. "Marriage is for mutual supplementation and complementation as expressed in the words, 'help meet' - Genesis 2:18".⁶

Without the words "monogamous", "Permanency," "intimacy" and "mutuality", marriage loses all its meaning and fulfillment. If, for a moment, we compare marriage to a chair from these characteristics to a leg which keeps the chair from falling over, we see that each must play its part in maintaining the relationship. When any one of the legs is pulled out, the chair is immediately thrown off balance.

Conceivably, three legs can hold up a four-legged chair, but there is more chance of its toppling over with one leg missing. These four characteristics mentioned above are deeply woven into the fabric of marriage.

Marriage was intended to be enduring relationship of one man and one woman for life. This divine ideal was created and instituted by God Himself. However, even in this early institution of a basic relationship in life, the biblical narrative does not set forth a marriage law. The passage does not seem to be set in legal or contractual terms. It does not say, "therefore, I command that a man must leave his father and mother and must cleave to his wife..." but instead, "therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife." The account reflects the natural union of man and woman for their mutual enjoyment and fulfillment.

⁶ John R. Martin, *Divorce and Remarriage, A Perspective for Counseling* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald press, 1974), 20.

The concept of “one flesh” brought into focus a complementary relationship. Life became an integrative whole. The “one flesh” concept is taken many times to refer most specifically to the physical expression of sex.

However, “one flesh” brings together all the personal components of life. It refers to “two people living together in mutual respect, love, growth, and helpfulness....

It is spiritual and emotional....It is more the feeling flow between two people...”⁷ It has to do with both man’s spirit and his body.

God’s divine ideal is that marriages maintain the consistency of this oneness. But with the fall (in God’s written revelation only a few verse away from His divine ideal for marriage) came separation, estrangement, incompatibility and hatred. Before the fall, God set up no provision in case disruption came into the “oneness” to cause twoness”. But after sin entered the world a whole new set of complex conditions and circumstances arose. Sins take its toll. It was inevitable that trouble would be fall the most intimate and demanding of life’s personal relationships-marriage.

Of the four “legs” of marriage mentioned earlier, we are especially concerned with the permanency “leg” Jesus indicates in Matthew 19:8, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (emphasis mine). The original intention was the indissolubility of the marriage bond. But now we find ourselves in the disorder of fallen world. Sin with all its trial of selfishness, mistrust, and brokenness abounds. One must ask, “Are there now conditions under which marriage can be dissolved with divine sanction and authorization”? Is it possible that room has been made for God’s perfect will to be conditioned by man’s weakness and failure? Does the ray of evangelical light we find in Genesis 3:15 apply equally to the disobedience of the first family in eating from the tree in the midst of the garden

⁷ James Strong, “*Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*,” *Strong’s Concordance* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), 15.

(Genesis 3:6) and to twentieth-century persons who because of failure in marriage found themselves caught, trapped and guilty? Can the church refrain from mediating grace, love and forgiveness when Christ became that figure who bruised the head of the serpent and brought to mankind the gift of redemptive love?

2.3 Mosaic Legislation

In the Pentateuch we are unable to discover that God expressly laid down a law prohibiting divorce. It seems as though a divine law of prohibition would have been written somewhere within the Mosaic legislation if divorce were to be regarded as an absolute prohibition among Israel.

Without questions we find even in these early words of revelation from God to man, in the Torah (Law) as it is called, the beginning of God's grace. We discover this first in the proto-evangelism (Genesis 3:15) as it relates to promise of salvation for all mankind. In mosaic legislation on family relations, we see God's grace mirrored by His realism as He makes concessions to man's weakness and failure.

Concessions regarding marital relations seem to allow several options for man since he is no longer bound by proscriptions and unalterable law. However, these are not enjoyable to work through. Divorce is always a regrettable development and the process of divorce creates pain and anguish. The Pentateuchal law in the Old Testament does not provide for quick and easy divorce.

2.4 Cultural Considerations for divorce in the Old Testament

Marriage among Hebrews, as among most Orientals tended to be more a legal contract than the result of love or affection. Even though in many cases (as in biblical historical narratives) deep love did exist between married couples, according to W.W. Davies. In

the last analysis it was, nevertheless, a business transaction”⁸ through the payment of a dowry by the family of the husband, the wife many times was regarded as a good trade, and therefore a piece of property. And so without much difficulty, if the husband were so inclined, he could rid himself of this comparison if he did not mind forfeiting the “mohar” which he had paid for her. This brings into focus the subordinate position of women which was quite prevalent among most nations of antiquity. Although the marriage was looked upon largely as a business affair, the wife in most homes in Israel was still the husband’s “most valued possession. However, the husband was unconditionally the head of the home in all domestic relationships. In the matter of divorce he exercised his rights and prerogatives.

Polygamy seemed to be permissible throughout the Old Testament period. Thus, a Hebrew might have two or more wives or concubines, or with comparative impunity use of sexual gratification. According to Jewish law, only when his action involved the free wife of a fellow Hebrew did the full sanction of the law of adultery fall upon him.

Again, women had no such liberties in the Jewish economy. A woman was bound strictly to one husband and any deviation fall under the full penalty of the law. With this backdrop regarding the Jewish marriage and home, let us make study of Old Testament divorce law which is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

2.5 Old Testament legal grounds for Divorce

The ground of divorce under the condition stipulated in Dt. 24:1 is that the man has found in his wife “*erwat dabar*”, (an unclean thing). The word “*erwat*” in Lev. 20:18f refers to illicit sexual intercourse, and in Dt. 23:14 and (Matthew 15) it refers to human excrement. It is used in other forms for “nakedness” in Exodus 28:42; 1J. 20:30; Isa.

⁸ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 34-37.

47:3; Lam. 1:8; 4:21; Ezk 16:8, 36f, and for “shame”, referring to Egypt, in Isa. 20:4. However, the words, “unclean thing” in Deuteronomy 24:1 cannot mean the adultery or sexual uncleanness of a spouse, because adultery was punishable with death.⁹

Neither can they apply to suspected adultery, for such cases there were prescribed procedures (Num. 5:11-31, Dt. 22:13-21). Just what the phrase denotes cannot be stated with certainty, although it is clear that it is behaviour that the husband finds shameful, immodest, or unclean in his wife.

Even though the Old Testament is silent concerning the woman as plaintiff in a divorce proceeding, it does not follow that there was no provision for this. In the code of Hammurabi, a woman granted permission to leave her husband and go to her father’s house, taking her dowry with her if it was proven she was not at fault.¹⁰ There is no intimation of any prior proceeding on the part of the husband.

The bill of divorcement (Heb, *Seper Krihut*) was a legal document certifying a divorce on the grounds specified with no reflection on the wife’s marital faithfulness.

It thus afforded protection for the woman’s reputation and guaranteed her freedom to remarry¹¹ other beneficial provisions for the divorced wife and her children were legalized in Bible times; thus the dowry was to be returned and arrangements were made for income for herself and children

Again, Mishnah adds three other situations which protect the wife and discouraging divorce.

⁹ Caverno, “Divorce in the New Testament” *The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* ed. James Orr, 179.

¹⁰ Caverno, “Divorce in the New Testament” *The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* ed. James Orr, II, 865.

¹¹ John Murray, *Divorce* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1953), 9.

Such an interpretation is based Deuteronomy 24:1-4. George Buttrick Capsulate this thought well when he says

We infer from this law that a man could divorce his wife: a) only for a good cause b) the case must be brought before some public official; c) a legal document prepared and placed in the wife's hand. These formalities involving time and money would act as a deterrent to hasty or rash action, which ends the present law would further serve".

2.6 Remarriage after Divorce?

According to Old Testament law, remarriage seems to have been acceptable. When one realizes that polygamy was tolerated during this era, restricting remarriage was not a very realistic practice. And the Deuteronomy Code says that the woman to whom a bill of divorcement has been written is free to remarry.

However, Wenger points out that the Mishnah placed certain restrictions on the woman's right to remarry. This Jewish rule book said

1. She must observe a three-month waiting period.
2. She may not marry the man with whom she is suspected of having adulterous relations
3. She may not marry the man who delivered to her the "get" or bill of divorcement.¹²

As noted earlier in the study, remarriage of the divorce parties to each other could take place only before remarriage on the part of the woman. However, the Rabbins added five cases under which remarriage of the divorced parties were forbidden irrespective of the formulation of any subsequent union.

¹² Wenger, *"Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament"*, 2.

1. If the divorce was for suspicion of adultery,
2. If the divorce was on account of religious vows,
3. If the divorce was for barrenness,
4. If a third party had guaranteed the return of the dowry,
5. If the husband's property were consecrated to religious uses subject to his wife's dowry.

2.7 Conclusion

On the basis of the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, we see that marriage was to be a permanent union between one man and one woman. However, as Civilization developed, marriages were broken and divorce was happening. We find nowhere in the Pentateuch a law where God prohibits divorce. It seems, instead, that He tolerated and permitted it, and also gave permission for remarriage once a woman received a bill of divorcement. Even though divorce was tolerated, it was not the divine plan of God, but was allowed because of the immaturity and hardness of the people.

We must conclude that the resumption of the first marriage following a second marriage was strictly forbidden. Again from the later prophetic writings we see this idea set forth.

For instance, the Prophet Jeremiah says;

“If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not the land be greatly polluted?” (Jeremiah 3:1). This confirms the Law of Moses that teaches that to resume a first marriage after the contracting of other unions greatly pollutes the land.

Because women in this era suffered distress as second-class citizens, the Old Testament guidelines provided their physical and social needs. These laws were designed to relieve the inferior status of women in this culture which left them unhappy victims of a dual standard of marriage ethnics. And, these laws were set forth to discourage divorce by making it difficult and undesirable.

CHAPTER THREE

CURRENT DISCOURSE ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

3.1 Introduction

The subject of divorce is intensely discussed among scholars; indeed it has always been a paramount problem. It was in Noah's day, in Moses' day, in Christ's day and most certainly it is uppermost in our day. Even though it is true that all Christian denominations use the Bible as their basis for guiding denominational polity, diverging beliefs on divorce-remarriage question have abounded through church history.

This chapter focuses on current discourses on some Denominational Guidelines to divorce and Remarriage, can a Christian divorce? Can a Christian remarry after divorce and conclusion?

3.2 Some Denominational Guidelines to Divorce and Remarriage

The writer has selected some denominational thoughts and given a brief summary on divorce and remarriage. These selected denominations may include among others following:

a) **The Roman Catholic Church**¹³

A. In its official position, the Roman Catholic Church has not wavered from nor compromised with its traditional view of marriage as a Sacrament and divorce as sin. To provide some understanding of the basis for the Roman Catholic position, I set forth here an extended quote from a catholic professor and write:

¹³ H. F. Davies, *Marriage as a Sacrament" Catholic and Divorce*, ed. Patrick .J O' Mahoney (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1959), 27.

Marriage between Catholics should lead to a deep sense of reverence between the partners, when they understand what it means. As has sometimes been said, there are three partners to every marriage contract, the husband and wife and God.

It is the third partner who forbids the contract; once undertaken, ever to be dissolved. The same third partner watches over the married life of the other two, is ever present giving His graces when they are needed, and will give His blessing of their common life. Though they now belong to each other and, as St. Paul says their body, with their bodies and souls and whole lives, belong to God. Something of a sacrament survives throughout the common life of the partners. St. Augustine would have said that “the sacrament” remains. Certainly the sacrament does remain to all intents and purposes for the marriage bond, which results from the sacrament, remains a permanent means of grace.

Permanently, it signifies the unbreakable union between Christ and His church. And permanently it continues to be pledge of the future union and glory of the married partners”¹⁴

In summary, then we see the following features being silent in Roman Catholic Polity:

- 1) Marriage is looked upon as a sacrament and, therefore, indissoluble.
- 2) The exception clauses in Mathew 5:32 and 19:9 are seen only as allowing separation from bed and board and not permitting divorce. The same can be said for 1 Corinthian 7:15, traditionally looked at as the exception of desertion. On the basis of neither of these situations can remarriage take place.

¹⁴ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 80.

- 3) As a bishop's office in a particular diocese reviews a specific divorce case, the 'marriage' has a possibility of being pronounced defective and therefore it can be annulled. In such a case it is said that no true marriage existed in the first place, and therefore the parties can enter into a marital state each without partners.¹⁵

b) Anglican

The Anglican laws on divorce grew out of the Roman Catholic Statements. For many years in England, the laws of the Catholics were followed, and it was only during the reign of the first Elizabeth that matrimony ceased as one of the sacraments. Until recently the Anglican position has been strict in its treatment of those involved in divorce. Within the last few decades, according to the formulation of the Lambeth Conferences, a more person-centered approach has emerged. And yet in many cases the church does not actually perform the ceremony for those seeking remarriage.¹⁶

The church may counsel with them, and if the bishop, upon his evaluation, feels that each of the members in this proposed new marital union is living in good faith with the church, he may give them his approval. But then the couple still is not married in a church ceremony, but by civil authorities, after which the ecclesiastical body recognizes the validity of the marriage. By remaining aloof from the actual ceremony, the church attempts to demonstrate that it is keeping the biblical standard clear.

It needs to be said, however, that remarriage has been allowed in the case of adultery and for the innocent party. This position goes back at least to the eighteenth century. Possibly, the latest word that can be included in this research is by John R.W. Stott who, as a member of the Church of England, comments. It is disappointing that in marriage,

¹⁵ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 81.

¹⁶ Arthur Robert Winnett, *Divorce and Remarriage in Anglicanism* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 273.

Divorce and the church¹⁷ the Biblical study is relegated to an appendix regard their conclusion as “compatible with reason, the Word of God in scripture, and theological tradition” in that order.¹⁸

c) Christian And Missionary Alliance

The Christian and Missionary Alliance church takes a firm stand in its opposition to divorce. Their official manuals show little change of position over the years.

The 1975 manual of the Christian missionary Alliance compares its current statement to previous rulings

We express our unalterable opposition to divorce on any other than positive scriptural grounds (council 1921, 1949, 1967, and 1974)

Divorced persons who are remarried should not be elected or appointed to national offices or be given the Christian and Missionary Alliance Credentials or workers Certificates.¹⁹

In local churches divorced persons who are remarried shall not be elected or appointed to the position of Elder or deacon. Pastors of the Christian and Missionary Alliance should not perform the marriage ceremony for divorced persons.

d) Conclusion

The Christian church today must discover its call of ministry to men and women everywhere in our call of ministry to men and women everywhere in our secular age, remembering that their needs are not only spiritual and physical, but also social and psychological. Not to minister to those caught in the web of divorce is to limit Christ's commission to less than two thirds of the married or formerly married persons living around us.

¹⁷ The Archbishop's Commission Report, SPCK 1971.

¹⁸ Stott, *Divorce*, 4.

¹⁹ Manual of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, (1976), 17.

3.3 Can a Christian divorce?

The question “can a Christian divorce? Keeps on tormenting and perplexing many Christians. It is very significant that we thoroughly dive into this controversial theological topic to the biblical authoritative stands on this issue that keeps ringing in the minds of married couples.

In fact, there is no universal agreement among Christians on divorce. Hence, it is difficult to be dogmatic on this topic. However, there are some areas of general agreement among Christians about divorce. There are three (3) schools of thought that all Christians calmly adhere to on divorce.

To begin with, divorce is not God design, in Malachi 2:16, God even said to Malachi, “I hate Divorce”. From this declaration by God, it is clear that God did not design divorce. Similarly, Jesus said that God permitted (C.E.P 303) but never intended divorce (Mathew 19:8). God created one man for one woman and desired that they both keep their vows until death parts them. Jesus emphatically said, “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mathew 19:6) so whatever divorce is, it is not God’s perfect design for marriage. It falls short of the ideal. It is not a norm or a standard. Besides, divorce is not permissible for every cause.

Christians also generally agreed that divorce is not permissible for just any cause. Indeed, Jesus was asked this very questions; “is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” His answer is emphatic no, and he responded “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality (fornication) and marries another commits adultery (Matt. 19:9 NASB). Whatever disagreements Christians have about the exception her it is absolutely clear that He did not believe that one could obtain a divorce for any reason.

Finally, divorce creates problems. Even those who believe that divorce is sometimes justifiable for Christians recognize that whatever problems it may solve, divorce also create problems. Once God's design is forsaken, it is only natural that problems will emerge. Although divorce seems to avert difficult for some, it is not without its problems for most. There are usually prices to pay for the partners, for the children and in family and societal relations. Divorce leaves scars that are not easily healed.

Beyond their agreement on the proceeding points, there is little unanimity among Christians on the topic of divorce and remarriage.²⁰

There are three basic views:

- a) There are no grounds for divorce
- b) There is only one ground for divorce
- c) There are many grounds for divorce

There are no grounds for divorce: The strict view claims that there are no biblical grounds for a divorce. There are seven primary arguments in favor of the position that divorce is never justified.

- 1) Divorce violates God's design for marriage (Matt. 19:6, Rom. 7:2)
- 2) Divorce breaks a vow made before God. (Prov. 2:17, Mal 2:14)
- 3) Jesus condemned all divorce. (Mark 10:1-11, Luke. 16:18)\
- 4) The Apostle Paul condemned divorce (1Corin. 7:10-11)
- 5) Divorce disqualified an Elder (1Tim. 3:2)
- 6) One's first partner is the true partner (John 4:17-18)
- 7) Divorce violates a sacred typology (Eph. 5:32)

²⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Option* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 303.

In summary, this view argues that there are no grounds for divorce. The “exception” in Matt. 19:9 refers to premarital intercourse (fornication), not to adultery after marriage. Since there are no grounds for divorce, then divorce is sin and remarriage of a divorced (man) or divorcée (woman) is wrong.

There is only one ground for divorce: Many Christians believe that there is only one justifiable ground for divorce: Adultery. Remarriage of a divorced person is not permitted, since they would be living in sin (Matt. 5:32). This view is based on several conditions.

- 1) Jesus explicitly stated that adultery is grounds for divorce. (Matt. 19:7, Acts 15:20, Roman 1:29)
- 2) Jesus repeated this exception in a parallel passage (Matt. 5:32)
- 3) Paul agreed with Jesus’ view on divorce (1Corin. 1:10)

In summary, according to this view, there is only one biblical ground for divorce: Adultery. Divorced persons cannot remarry; if they do, they are living in adulterous relations. Those who marry a divorced person are causing them to sin, since the divorced person is really married to another in God’s eyes.²¹

There are many grounds for divorce: “Many” here means two or more; some proponents of this position hold to only biblical grounds for divorce: Adultery and the unbelievers’ desertion. Others believe that abuse, infectious diseases, and even neglect are also justification for divorce. The root of their arguments is the following:²²

- 1) Paul approves of desertion (1Corin. 7:15)
- 2) The Bible recognizes human frailty (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)
- 3) Even God “divorced” Israel for unfaithfulness (Jere. 3:8, Isa. 50:1)

²¹ Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 305-306.

²² Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 307.

- 4) Marriage is a mutual vow between two parties, a covenant. As such it is a conditional covenant (1 Corinthians 7:15)
- 5) Failing to allow divorce is legalistic. (Mark 2:27)
- 6) Repentance changes the situation (Jer. 3:1 VV 11-14, 22)

3.4 Can a Christian Remarry after Divorce?

The questions of divorce and remarriage are logically distinct. Just because divorce is always wrong as such does not mean that remarriage is never right. Lifetime marriage is God's ideal, but the ideal is not always achievable. We live not in an ideal world but in a real one, even a fallen world. In such a world, God's ideal is not always realizable. When it is not, then we must do the next best thing.

Just as God allowed the children of Israel to observe the Passover on the second month (when they could not observe the first month because of uncleanness) even so remarriage is not God's ideal either. But it is a realistic accommodation to a less-than-ideal world.

Jesus recognized the difference between the ideal and the real when He distinguished between God's command not to divorce and His permission of divorce in the Old Testament. He said, "Moses permitted you to divorce" (Mathew 19:8), but God never intended it that way. For "it was not this way from the beginning"

Likewise, while God never committed remarriage of divorced couples, this does not mean that He never permits it. Forgiveness can change one's status before God. According to the prophet Jeremiah, God called upon the Israelites whom He had "divorced" to repent and "return" to Him (Jer. 3:1, 11, 14). This means that repentance canceled their divorced status. If so, then why cannot repentance cancel the adulterous

status of the divorced who remarry? Jesus did say that anyone who was divorced and remarried was living in adultery (Matt. 5:32).²³

But He did not say that divorce was an unpardonable sin. Jesus actually said there is one unpardonable sin; the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32). To make divorce a second unpardonable sin goes beyond scripture, which affirms that “if we confess our sins (God) in faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (John 1:9).²⁴

3.5 Conclusion

God intends marriage to be a lifetime commitment between one male and one female. Though the marriage relationship does not extend into eternity, it is meant to last the entirety of their time together on earth. Divorce as such is a sin, and God approves neither of sin nor of the dissolution of marriage. What God has joined together, he does not want humans to put asunder. (Mathew 19:6).

Sometimes permissible and always forgivable, hence, those who recognize the sin of the divorce, and their responsibility for it, should be allowed to remarry. But their remarriage should be for life. If they fail again, it would be unwise to allow them to continue to repeat this error. Only those who are inclined to keep their lifetime commitment should be married, to say nothing of remarried. Marriage is a sacred institution and should not be profaned by divorce, especially by repeated divorce. The epidemic proportions that divorce has reached in our society are a sober warning about how the sacredness of

²³ Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 308.

²⁴ Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 309.

marriage has been profaned. Christians should do everything in their power to exalt God's standard of monogamous lifetime marriage.²⁵

²⁵ Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues & Options*, 312.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 19:5-9

4.1 Introduction

We need first of all to find out those passages in the gospel that speak to the issue of divorce and re-marriage and evaluate their differences and similarities. The passages are these; Mathew 5:32, 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18. Here let us consider Mathew vs. Mark and Luke. The main issue that emerges as we examine these passages is the “exception clause”, as it has come to be known which we will discuss more in detail later. These Gospel writers differ on the use of this exception clause. Whereas Mathew includes it twice, Mark and Luke exclude it entirely.

4.2 Background to the Text

The fullest report is given to us in Mathew 19. This passage seems to contain everything that is included elsewhere, and so we will concentrate on it. The exception clause “except for fornication” has triggered endless controversy. As we note the reasons for its exclusion in Mark and Luke and its inclusion twice in Mathew, we shall discover whether these words have more authenticity or less validity, and whether we should give credence to them today. Many writers, scholars, and preachers have for years ruled out all divorce, even in the case where a partner is guilty of adultery, because Luke and Mark do not record the exception. W.W. Davies sets forth a very clear explanation of some of the differences.²⁶

It is a different matter to invade the psychology of writers who lived nearly two thousand years ago and tell why they did not include something in their text which someone else

²⁶ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 34.

did in his. Neither Luke nor Mark was personal disciples of the Lord. They wrote second hand. Matthew was a personal disciple of Christ and has twice recorded the exception. It will be a new position in regard to judgment on human evidence when we put the silence of absentees in rank above the twice expressed report of one in all probability present-one known to be a close personal attendant. And the write also goes on today, “Mathew’s record stands in ancient Manuscript authority, Greek and also the version”

Others disgrace. William Cole says “Many New Testament Scholars regard Mathew’s addition as much later, edited by someone seeking to soften a too harsh dictum. Both Mark and Luke were closer to the spirit of the Jesus ethnic, which was absolutist throughout”

Emil Brunner says specifically, “it is my definite conviction, which I hold in common with many other scholars, that this phrase, ‘saving for the cause of fornication’, was not uttered by Jesus Himself but that is an interpolation by the early church, which had already misunderstood the saying of Jesus, a legalistic way, and therefore needed such a corrective.”²⁷

Matthew 19: 5-9: The Pharisees’ Question and Jesus’ Response

a) The Context

The Pharisees brought the question to Jesus, “it is lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (RSN). Very likely the Shammai–Hillel debate regarding the controversial “unseemly thing” of Deuteronomy 24:1 was the case the Pharisees were attempting to try Jesus out on.

²⁷ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 39-41.

Shammai took the conservation position stating that Adultery and moral misconduct are the only acceptable ground for divorce.

Rabbi Hillel held that all kinds of reasons, even quite trivial ones, were sufficient grounds for legal divorce.

E. Schillebeec Kx, in his book, marriage: Human Reality and saving Mystery, is quoted as saying this: “the Pharisees wanted Jesus to force choose between these two schools so that on the basis of His answer they could accuse Him either of laxity or of shortsighted and narrow rigorism, and thus inflame the people against Him...”²⁸

However, Jesus at this point did not defensively take side. He began His answer by calling attention to take sides. He began His answer by calling attention to the original plan of God in creation, almost chiding them for their myopic view of Old Testament Law.

He questioned them concerning their knowledge of the Genesis account where God made both male and female and instituted marriage as being a one-man-one-woman relationship. And since this is the divine plan no human scholar, Rabbi Common folk should do away with this sound family set-up.

b) The Content

But Jesus is questioned further: “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”(Mathew 19:7 RSV). it is then that Jesus Clearly comes out on the side of Shammai and rejects the easy divorce system to which Mosaic legislation gave concession. Jesus replies, for your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mathew 19:8 RSV).

²⁸ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 44-45.

Another consideration regarding the nature of the text must also be kept in mind. Were the Pharisees specifically interested in what the Law of Moses allowed? In this case, as in others, the Pharisees seemed to be out to trap Him; their intent was to challenge His interpretation of the law.

Devight Small says; “The demand upon Jesus is equally clear: He is bound to answer them in strict accordance with their question, giving neither less than they ask, not more.”²⁹ As Guy Duty puts it, “the Pharisees had Jesus answer to their questions, as presented by them and as understood by them.”³⁰ If all the questions about divorce and remarriage today could fit into this Pharisees’ question, which was set tightly in the matrix of the first century and reflected on the Mosaic Law as mutually understood by Christ and the Pharisees in this historical context then our modern-day puzzles could be easily solved. Although addressing Himself to a question on this subject then, Jesus did not, in this situation, bring to us today answers to all the questions persons in our churches are raising. Jesus and the Pharisees were content to stay within the ethical context of the law.³¹

Dissolution or separation

We now get into the heart of Jesus’ response. He said, “And I say unto you; whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whose married her which is put away cloth commit adultery (Mathew 19:9). The Greek verb root used her is $\alpha\pi\omicron\lambda\upsilon\omega$ ($\alpha\pi\omicron\lambda\upsilon\omicron$) which means to loose from sever by loosening, undo.

²⁹ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 39.

³⁰ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 66.

³¹ James Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), 14.

According to Thayer,³² it is used in the sense of divorce as $\alpha\text{polu};\omega\ \text{th};\nu\ \text{gunatka}$ ($\alpha\text{polu}\bar{o}\ \text{t}\bar{e}\nu\ \text{gunaika}$) to dismiss from the house, to repudiate, and then he lists all the references which we are using for our study.

Strong's Greek dictionary for the New Testament defines ($\alpha\text{polu}\bar{o}$) as "to free fully, ie. (Lit) relieve, release, dismiss, or let die, pardon, or divorce, let go, set at liberty."³³

Guy Duty, who has done an extensively study in recent years on the subject of divorce and remarriage cites the many original sources which he has studied carefully. He relates that $\alpha\text{polu};\omega$ ($\alpha\text{polu}\bar{o}$) is the exact equivalent of the Old Testament *Kerithuth*, which is the word we looked at the Deuteronomy 24 passage, and he says that it has the same precise meaning of absolute dissolution. He points out that it signifies "to set free; to loose; liberate, radically dissolved; cut loose, as a ship at its launching; discharge, as a soldier from the army; undo a bound; cut apart; to free, as a captive, i.e. to loose his bounds and give him liberty to depart"³⁴

Another work, *A Greek and English lexicon to the New Testament* by Pankhurst, defines $\alpha\text{polu};\omega$ ($\alpha\text{polu}\bar{o}$) as "to divorce a wife, discharge or dismiss her by loosing the bond of marriage. All these definitions support the view that "putting away" means dissolution, not merely separation. One of the definitions given by Parkhurst is to "dismiss her by loosing the bond of marriage". This would mean that if the bond of marriage is broken, there is not merely separation, but a dissolving of the marriage altogether as the previous state.

To set forth a historical parallel of this, Duty Cites Barabbas the word $\alpha\text{polu};\sigma\epsilon\text{n}$ ($\alpha\text{polu}\bar{s}\epsilon\text{n}$) is used regarding this prisoner who was set free in Mark 15:6-15. He was

³² Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 66.

³³ Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, 14.

³⁴ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 39.

bound, but Pilate released him.³⁵ This bound-released idea is the same in marriage and divorce as expressed by “Put away”. The power of a Roman governor set Barabbas free. The prison doors opened, his (D.P 40) chains were loosed, and the prisoner was free. So also in marriage and divorce (D.P 41). In a Christ-authorized divorce, the wedding chain is broken and the nuptial captive is released. The marriage law has no further claim on the one released as the Roman law had no further claim on Barabbas.³⁶

It seems quite clear on the basis of my study that the word (Apoluō) refers not just to separation, but dissolution with the prerogative of remarrying. Lexical works seem to point this out, as do other writers who have done research into the historical background of these verses in which this idea has its setting.

The exception clause³⁷

The exception clause, “except it be for fornication” (Matthew 19:9) or “Saving for the cause of fornication” (Matthew 5:32). Mark 10:12 and Like 16:18 do include it, neither does Romans 7.

One possible explanation for this is suggested in the International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia which says

The scripture doctrine of divorce is very simple. It is contained in Mathew 19:3-12... In Mathew, we have the fullest report, containing everything that is reported elsewhere and one or two important observations that the other writers have not included ... Luke’s verse is in no necessary connection with the context... We seem to be justified them in saying that the total doctrine of scripture pertaining to divorce is contained in Mathew 19... There is the issue stated so plainly that “the way faring man need not err therein”³⁸

³⁵ W. M. Foley, *Marriage Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* ed. James Hasting (New York: Scribner 1953), VIII, 438.

³⁶ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 41.

³⁷ C. Caverno, “Divorce in the New Testament” *The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), II, 865.

³⁸ Caverno, “Divorce in the New Testament” *The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* ed. James Orr, II, 865.

The reason the Evangelists Mark and Luke omitted the exceptive clause in their writings could be that no Jew, Roman, or Greek ever doubted that adultery constituted grounds for divorce. There was no need then to mention this exception since it was understood. Also, Paul in Romans 7:1-3, referring to Roman and Jewish laws, ignores the possibility of divorce for adultery which both of these laws provided. Let us look next at the original rendering of this phrase.

According to the Nestle Greek Text, Matthew 5:32 reads $\text{parekto};\epsilon \text{ lōgou porueia}\epsilon$ (parektos logou porneias) (apart from a matter of fornication). Matthew 9:19 reads $\text{mh}; \text{ e};\text{pij pornei};\text{a}$ (mē epi porneia) refers to illicit sexual intercourse in general. It is distinguished from.....which is used of adultery. The Interpreter Bible points out that “the word translated” unchastity is *porneia* (porneia).

It may refer to pre-marital unchastity, or it may also include adultery (*moikeia* – *moikeia*). Heras (mandates IV 1.5) use the two words indiscriminately to refer to the wife’s sin.³⁹ Some exegetes have held that fornication refers to only sexual sin between unmarried persons, and adultery connotes extramarital relations. We will see later in this research exegetical evidence that such a view is not valid.

Fredrich sets forth a wide variety of meanings for this word. It is related to the verb $\text{pornh};$ (*pornē*) and $\text{pornh};\text{mi}$ (*pornēmi*), to “sell slaves. The word (*porneia*) itself refers “fornication”, “licentiousness”, or even homosexuality.⁴⁰

³⁹ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 42.

⁴⁰ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 43.

In discussing the passage in Mathew, the Kittel work points out that:

In both verses *porneia* refers to extramarital intercourse on the part of the wife, which in practice is adultery...
... the drift of the clauses, then, is not that the Christian husband, should his wife be unfaithful, is permitted to divorce her, but if he is legally forced to do thus he should not be open to criticism if by her conduct his wife has made the continuation of the marriage quite impossible".⁴¹

However, at this juncture, it is important to discern just what this phrase “unless it be for fornication” really refer to Baker’s Dictionary Christian Ethics cites three different Interpretations.

- 1) This may mean unchastity before marriage that is if fornication is discovered during the married state is, if fornication which took place before the marital union, then the husband may dismiss his wife. However, this does not appear to stand up. In Deuteronomy 22:13 the Mosaic Law explicitly commands that in this kind of situation divorce cannot take place.
- 2) The “sexual impurity” may refer to marrying a close relative, which would make the union incestuous according to the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 18:6-18 refers to having intimate physical relationship with family members. It is doubtful, however, that this is the meaning in Mathew 5:32 and 19:9 since the solution of a situation like this would be annulment, not divorce. The marriage should not have been solemnized in the first place.⁴²

This “sexual impurity”, or “unchastity” may be viewed as an act of adultery, since, as we shall see, *porneia* (*porneia*) refers to various kinds of sexual behaviour, and not just sexual sin before marriage. This may be used to indicate a variety of sexual immorality such as sexual intercourse with an unmarried person, or even homosexuality or bestiality.

⁴¹ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 43.

⁴² Roger R. Nicole, “*Divorce Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 189-190.

Since sexual intercourse results in the partners becoming one flesh, there is something about adultery which dissolves the marriage bond. Therefore the “innocent party” may first legalize the break of marriage and then may contract another union without adultery on his/her part. Or the other who has remained faithful may choose to forgive and continue the relationship with his/her spouse. It should also be reemphasized in this context that the scriptures through this exception clause in no way command a man to divorce his unfaithful wife.

Similarly, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does no command divorce if a man has found indecency in his wife. Forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation can take place, and the marriage union can be restored. To hold separation or dissolution as a command from God would be inconsistent with the total teaching of scripture. (D.P. 45)

a. Fornication and adultery

The section above alluded briefly to the fact *porneia* (*porneia*) and *moikeia* (*moikeia*), both of which refer to immoral conduct, need to be explained.

(*Porneia*) generally is translated fornication and (*moikeia*) has the connotation of adultery. However, these really are synonymous terms and are often used interchangeably. This is also true of other Bible words like “soul” and “spirit” or “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven”. The meaning is determined by the context.

The Hebrew word for fornication is (*Zanah*). In Jeremiah 3:1 it is used when telling about the conduct of a married woman and in Amos 7:17 a married woman is a fornicatress (*Zanah*).⁴³

⁴³ Foley, *Marriage 'Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics ed. James Hasting, VIII, 438.*

Fornication is defined in the international standard Biblical Encyclopedia with Zannah and means “to commit adultery, especially of the female, and less frequently of mere fornication seldom of involuntary ravishment” and it is also used figuratively in the sense of idolatry, the Jewish people being regarded as the spouse of Jehovah. Every form of unchastity is included in the term “fornication”. How stringently or loosely can we interpret porneia? Is it applied only to sexual promiscuity? It is true that adultery- sexual relations with another who is not one’s spouse-affects the marriage relationship more crucially than any other offense, and yet there are other situations that can also make married life intolerable.⁴⁴

Remarriage

Allusions have been made in the foregoing sections concerning remarriage. Briefly, we noted that no declarative statement is given to us about. Thus, the New Testament does lay down fundamental principles upon which we can build. The implication of the grammar in Mathew 5:32 and 19:9 is that the innocent party may remarry without sin.

Obviously there is much divided opinion concerning this. The Roman Catholic Church holds that the exception clause sanctions separation but does not permit remarriage. But, as seen earlier, it is difficult to exclude “permission to remarry” from this clause.

Some may ask “why is the Bible so silent on this? “In a sense, its silence is not surprising. We do not find the Bible commanding or legislating on such sub ideal behaviour, as Peter calls it. He points out that the scripture regulates, expects to find commands and permission for remarriage.

⁴⁴ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 47.

The God who promulgates the highest and noblest ideals cannot legislate lower and lesser ideals, though He may permit live and to operate on a sub-ideal level. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God gives commands, not advice. God says, “Thou shalt do this rather God gives commands, not advice. God says, “Thou shalt do this” rather “. It is better to do this”. His perfection demands something absolute.

Further, Christ is speaking specifically to questions addressed to Him issuing out of the context of the Mosaic Law. Christ was fitting into the legal ethic of the Pharisees and yet not laying down in these words addressed to them any fixed rule which must be adhered to by His followers at all times in the future.⁴⁵

4.3 Conclusion

It has been God’s divine provision from the beginning that marriage be a permanent, lifelong union between one man and one woman. From the Genesis passage and Christ’s affirmation of the creation account, “the putting asunder” of the marriage union is against God’s plan and contracting of another marriage is a breach of God’s unconditional will.

The Deuteronomic Code which allow divorce does so only as a concession to man’s sinfulness, and is not God’s answer to marital problems. When approached by the Pharisees regarding Mosaic legislation, Jesus allows for dissolution of the marriage union where there is fornication or adultery on the part of the spouses and the “innocent partner may remarry.

⁴⁵ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 51-52.

The destructiveness of adultery, however, does not require dissolution, but the divine ideal is that there are repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal rather than separation, divorce and remarriage.

The Apostle Paul confronted with Corinthian problem, granted permission for dissolution of the marriage vow when an unbelieving partner deserted his/her spouse. The believer may contract another marriage, but the new union must only be with a Christian.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the Exegesis of Matthew 19:5-9, this chapter encapsulates therefore Summaries, Conclusion and Recommendations.

5.2 Summary of the study

The study was undertaken extensively to critically examine divorce and remarry in our contemporary Christianity in the 21st century.

Generally, it was divided into five chapters.

The first chapter deals with general introduction and address issues such as the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, research methodology, scope of study, significance of the study, limitation of the study, significance of the organization of the study.

Besides, chapter two covers divorce and remarriage in the Bible. Issues discussed among others include; introduction, Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament, divorce and remarriage in the New Testament and conclusion of the entire discussions.

Moreover, chapter three tackles the Current Discourse on include; Introduction, some Denominational Guidelines to divorce and Remarriage, Can a Christian divorce? Can a Christian remarry after divorce? And conclusion of the entire deliberations.

In the fourth chapter, the study dive into the exegesis of Mathew 19:5-9 which encapsulates issues such as introduction, context of the text, content of the text, Exegetical implication of the text and conclusion.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, the study summarizes, draw conclusions and make recommendation of the entire research conducted.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion it should be reemphasized that, god never approves of divorce left alone remarriage but His heart beats, for it sanctity, sacred, lifelong and permanence of marital families. Broken relationships should be repaired through repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal rather than separation, divorce and remarriage.

We must therefore as it were work toward the ideal set for us by God, “what God has put together let no man put apart”. God be our helper! Amen

General summary

It is evidently clear from this theological exposition in divorce and remarriage that, it is unquestionably true that death actually servers the marriage bond, and permits the surviving partner to remarry.

It is also true that fornication, which for our purpose in this book is equivalent to adultery, does dissolve the marriage bond, remarriage, under that circumstance is permitted, certainly to the innocent party.

Besides, according to the teaching of Jesus there is no other ground, save fornication, for divorce; and if persons are divorced on any other grounds, such as desertion, non support, incapability, mental cruelty, etc. they are not entitled to marry again during the lifetime of the partner without such marriage constituting an act and state of adultery.

Moreover, while it might seem from Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39 and Romans 7:2-3 as though death alone gives the right of remarriage under ideal conditions

and where no such thing as marital unfaithfulness has taken place and that being the case, marriage is, of course, a life long contract and an indissoluble union.

Also, in the case of mixed marriage –where one is a Christian and the other is not- any separation or breaking of the marriage tie should not be at the initiative of the Christian. If the unbeliever should acquiesce. Only when such companionship is utterly and absolutely unbearable should there be separation, and even in that case remarriage has been entered into, it must be maintained. Christianity does not dissolve the marriage bond because both are not Christians. It is better, of course, that a Christian marries a Christian, that is as it ought to be, 1 Corinthians 7:39, II Corinthians 6:14; but if the marriage has taken place, it must not be dissolved because both are not Christian.

Similarly, in case where a couple, both divorced, remarried when neither was a Christian, and one has become a Christian since that marriage, what shall the Christian partner do?

Well, so far as I see, there is nothing for him to do than to reconcile with the divorced partner or confess the sin that has been committed, ask God to forgive it and then go on serving Him the best he can.

Finally, so long as the marriage bond has not been broken by either death or adultery, the partners to a marriage belong to each other; they are “one flesh”; remarriage other partner lives out of the question

5.4 Recommendation

These recommendations are carefully made out of selection of authentic and valid suggestion made by the various eminent scholars as well as numerous literatures reviewed as prescribed workable solutions to the problems.

First of all, a person who is contemplating divorce should first sit up and compare notes by weighing the cost and benefits of separation. The few questions among many others one may ask are as follows:

- Can I survive on my own?
- Will I be financially solvent?

If a Christian, then I think the following too must be considered

- What I am about to do, is it Biblical and is God happy about it?
- Will the move help me to remain in the faith?

It is believed that some after careful deliberations rescind their decision and work prayer full to mend the broken relationship.

Secondly, churches should work out a curriculum to teach about the rudiments and the biblical principles of marriage. For it has been established that many young Christians rush into marriage without the in-depth background knowledge of the game. Similarly, churches should put in place well-trained and seasoned marriage counseling to help in establishing new marriage and savaging collapsing ones. Also, there should be the need for a good and rich in-depth premarital and past marital counseling.

Thirdly, young Christians aspiring for marriage should be encouraged not to rush into it only to sing later the song of “had I know”. Emmanuel Tettey of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly rightly put it “people must learn to walk into marriage and not jump into it”⁴⁶

Fourthly, Christian couples faced with strains in relationship should and reconciliation, so as to save themselves and their children from the trauma and the inconveniences that accompany marital breakdowns.

⁴⁶ Tettey Emmanuel; *Accra Metropolitan Assembly* (Ghana Web, 2009).

Finally, I wish to recommend that new Entrants should be made to undergo medical examination on their HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) status. And that, they should be advised to be open, and honest to one another on any biological defect or weakness such as impotency, abortion, fragility and the likes. This is to avoid future embarrassing situations and circumstances that eventually will culminated to early divorce.

In brief and concise sense, perhaps the words of Dwight Small will appropriately summarize the views I have shared on divorce and remarriage.

“Let the church be bold in grace! Let the divorced and remarried feel fully accepted in the community of sinners saved by grace! Let the remarried find places of service in the church alongside those whose experience of the forgiving grace of God concerns less conspicuous areas of life. Let there be no penalties in the church where God disallows such penalties. Let there be recognition of the necessity for the tragic moral choice in this world, the necessity, at times, of choosing the lesser of two evils. Let us rejoice that the absolute will of God is not compromised, but that He conditions the exercise of His will to our imperfect faith and obedience, to our sins and our failures. And may the knowledge of such great grace fill our minds and hearts with such responding love as will motivate us to attempt in every way to fulfill His highest will in the power of enabling grace!”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Bontrager, *Divorce and the Faithful Church* 1973, 177.

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