



## **Divorce and Remarriage**

Joseph Herrin (7-16-03)

[jbherrin@heart4god.8k.com](mailto:jbherrin@heart4god.8k.com)

I would like to begin this study of divorce and remarriage by entreating those who would read these words to exercise great patience and to not allow love of the brethren to be violated in any way. The topic at hand is one that tends to inflame the passions of men, and many people who have held all manner of diverse views on this matter have become indignant, angry, hostile, and even openly hateful when they have encountered others who espoused a different belief than their own. The Scriptures plainly tell us:

**James 1:19-20**

**This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.**

Those who are leaders among the flock of Christ should set an example, as they demonstrate gentleness in carrying out their duties to instruct, correct, refute and edify the body of Christ. Paul spoke these words to Timothy:

**II Timothy 2:24-25**

**The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...**

Though many sincere men and women have come to varying conclusions regarding the topic of divorce and remarriage, we can be assured from these verses that the Scriptures are very plain in instructing the brethren how to approach this topic. They should put away all anger. They must not be quarrelsome. They must be kind to all, especially those who disagree. They must be patient when wronged, and they must exercise gentleness in correcting those who are in opposition to the truth.

I cannot stress this matter enough. As a minister whom the Spirit has led to use the instrument of the Internet to instruct and encourage the saints, I have encountered many, many men and women who have claimed to be followers of Christ, yet they have been very impatient, quarrelsome, and far from gentle. Many have resorted to reviling because they

have encountered some teaching that differed from their own understanding, and in the name of defending the truth they have violated the most basic command of our Lord, to love one another. Paul reveals a profound truth in the following verses:

**I Corinthians 13:2**

**If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.**

If you or I are the only saint that has perfect understanding in the matter of marriage and divorce, and yet this knowledge leads you or I to violate love of the brethren, then the Scriptures state that we are nothing. In God's estimation we have become a big, empty zero.

The Corinthian church was one in which many quarrels existed. Brothers were suing one another in public courts, and divisions were existent among them. Paul scolded them severely for displaying a lack of love and graciousness in public. In his first letter to them, as he wrote about the topic of food sacrificed to idols, he declared:

**I Corinthians 8:1-2**

**Of course we know that all of us possess knowledge [concerning these matters. Yet mere] knowledge causes people to be puffed up (to bear themselves loftily and be proud), but love (affection and goodwill and benevolence) edifies and builds up and encourages one to grow [to his full stature]. If anyone imagines that he has come to know and understand much [of divine things, without love], he does not yet perceive and recognize and understand as strongly and clearly, nor has he become as intimately acquainted with anything as he ought or as is necessary.**

**(Amplified Bible)**

I am stressing the necessity of maintaining a love of the brethren before launching into this study, because this topic has been the cause of many failures of love. Churches have split over the issue of divorce and remarriage. Saints have scandalously hurled insults at one another, and much emotion has been generated. Yet if we truly love one another we will desire to edify and not quarrel. We will exercise patience and gentleness with one another as we seek to come to a knowledge of the truth.

The Scriptures actually have much to say about divorce and remarriage, and with a wealth of passages to draw from we might wonder why there is any confusion at all surrounding this topic. The issue is made difficult, not because it is hard to understand, but because it is hard to obey. There are men and women who are in marriages where they are continuously

subjected to suffering, and where their flesh cries out for release. Only by taking up the cross and putting their flesh to death can many of these marriages be endured. We live in an age where the message of the disciple's cross has been rejected by the church, and consequently many of the teachings of Christ and the doctrines of the apostles have been altered to assuage the demands of the flesh.

Yet there are some aspects of this subject that have been confused due to other misunderstandings. Paul divides the issue of marriage and divorce into two categories: that in which both spouses are Christians, and that in which one spouse is a Christian and one is an unbeliever. Some would erroneously treat all marriages the same. Some also contend that God only recognizes the first union between a man and woman as long as both are still living, and only death can dissolve this first union. Then there is the issue of forgiveness. If a saint has transgressed in this area by divorcing a former spouse for a reason other than fornication and then has married another, is there forgiveness for such a sin? Does God recognize the current marriage, or must the saint put away the one they are wed to and return to the first partner? And finally, and related to the previous question, do saints who have been divorced and remarried continue in adultery as long as they continue in their present state, or does God put away their sin and sanctify their current union?

By the grace of God we will look at these issues, and seek the mind of Christ. Some in looking at the matter of marriage, divorce and remarriage have chosen to focus on a particular passage while ignoring others, and many have twisted and distorted the Scriptures instead of rightly dividing them as the saints are commanded to do. This has resulted in a myriad of views that range from that which states that no divorce and remarriage is permissible, to those that declare that everything is allowable. On the one hand men and women are placed in bonds that God has not constructed, while on the other they are given over to licentiousness and the destruction that is the reward of those who sow to the flesh.

Beyond identifying what is sin in the eyes of God, and what is not, there is the deeper issue of what our response should be to one who is in sin, and what Yahweh's response is to the same one. Many have failed to arrive at the mind of Christ regarding these issues, for their focus has only been upon identifying the sin, and they have not gone past this point to also discern how God's great grace and forgiveness are to be applied to those who have transgressed the will of the Father. Many have forgotten the words "mercy triumphs over judgment" and have laid a judgment of condemnation upon those saints who have experienced divorce and remarriage from which they can never be freed.

As we look at this very troubling matter of divorce and remarriage let us try to step back

from time to time and look at the larger picture of all men and women being transgressors before God, remembering Christ's atoning sacrifice for ALL the sins of mankind, and of the grace and mercy of God that brings forth beauty from the ashes of our failures.

The first Scripture passage I would like to explore is that which is referred to as "The Sermon on the Mount". The words of Christ recorded here have been used as a foundation upon which men and women have built many a spurious doctrine and have arrived at a mass of wrong conclusions. To understand anything properly we must discern the context of the message. We must discern why Christ was speaking what He was speaking, and what conclusions He wanted His listeners to arrive at. For this reason I am going to include more than just the portion of the passage that speaks of divorce and remarriage, and I ask you to bear with me patiently, for discerning the intent of Christ's words is of utmost importance if we are to arrive at His mind on this matter.

#### Matthew 5:13-48

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 21 **You have heard** that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 **But I say** to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into

prison. 26 Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. 27 **You have heard** that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; 28 **but I say** to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 **It was said**, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; 32 **but I say** to you that everyone who puts away his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery. 33 Again, **you have heard** that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ 34 **But I say** to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil. 38 **You have heard** that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 **But I say** to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 **You have heard** that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 **But I say** to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In the midst of these words of Christ we find Him speaking about adultery and divorce and remarriage, and some have microscopically zeroed in on these words of Christ regarding these specific issues while failing to back up and look at the fuller context of His words. We see that these words of Yahshua are a portion of a larger discourse that is marked by six repetitions of the phrases “You have heard”, and “But I say”. These two phrases give us an indication of what the mind of Christ is as He is speaking these words.

All six of the issues Christ addresses are written about in the Law as it was delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Yahshua is speaking about the Law in this passage, and this is clear from

His words, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” To arrive at the mind of Christ we must ask ourselves, “What is Yahshua trying to communicate to these Jewish people to whom He is speaking?” It is evident from His repetition of the phrases “You have heard” and “But I say” that the Jews were not discerning something correctly and He was seeking to bring them understanding. Yahshua was not annulling the Law, nor was He adding to it, He was seeking to reveal to these people what constituted perfection in the eyes of God. This passage ends with the words, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The Jewish people had deceived themselves concerning their ability to satisfy God’s righteous requirements. They had received the letter of the Law and they had labored to keep the letter of the Law even as a lawyer would seek to meet some legal requirement. In fact, there was an entire segment of Jewish society that had arisen that was marked by a profusion of lawyers and scribes who interpreted the Laws of God much in the same manner as lawyers and judges seek to interpret the Constitution of the United States today. The first five books of the Bible were known as the Torah, or Law, and there were also the books of the prophets and the Psalms, these writings being inspired by Yahweh.

In addition to these God inspired writings, the Jewish Rabbis and experts in the Law had added their own voluminous writings known as the Talmud. The Talmud contains the whole body of Jewish civil and canonical laws and traditions, with the commentaries and speculations of the Rabbis. These writings were not “Spirit breathed”, but they were often given as much weight as Scripture. It was these writings that Christ referred to when He stated:

**Mark 7:6-13**

“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that. ”

The Jews, with their vast religious and legal system, thought they were perfectly keeping the righteous requirements of God, yet they were stumbling badly and were failing to even come

close to the heart of God. Paul was a Pharisee, and he thought that he was thoroughly pleasing to God. He wrote of himself, “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, [I was] found blameless” (Philippians 3:6). Yet Paul was deceived. This supposed righteousness of his was leading him to murder the saints of God and to persecute the Son of God. He was like the great majority of the Jews of whom he wrote:

**Romans 10:2-3**

**For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.**

This then was the message Yahshua was declaring in His sermon on the mount. He knew that the Jewish people had a zeal for God, but it fell short of God’s will. They were trying to establish their own righteousness, and they did not realize how far their feeble attempts fell short of that perfect requirement of the Father. They were making many provisions for their flesh by concerning themselves with outward actions and appearances while neglecting the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Jewish leaders and people thought they were righteous if they did not murder one another, not realizing that if they hated a brother, or were angry against their brother without a cause, that they had fallen short of the will of God. They thought they were righteous if they did not commit adultery with a woman, but they allowed themselves to lust after a woman in their heart. They thought they were righteous if, in sending away a wife that they were dissatisfied with, they gave her a certificate of divorce so that her marriage was legally recognized as being dissolved and she could marry another without being called an adulteress. Yet they did not discern that, in the eyes of God, to send a wife away for any reason other than unchastity was an immoral and treacherous act, and they were causing her to commit adultery.

In these examples, and many others, Yahshua was declaring to the Jewish people that they were not even coming close to fulfilling the righteousness of God. He was revealing to them that God through the Scriptures has shut up all men under sin (Galatians 3:22). All men have fallen short of the perfection of God, and all who rely upon their own works to justify themselves stand condemned before God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Yahshua was leading them to Himself. Only Yahshua, the spotless Lamb of God, fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the Law. Only of Yahshua did the Father confess that He was well pleased, and that He found no fault in Him.

With every “You have heard... But I say” Yahshua was revealing that a correct understanding of God’s holy Law had shut up all men under sin and only through faith in the atoning work of the Son of God, through our identification and union with Him in His life, death and resurrection, could we ever be considered righteous in the eyes of Yahweh.

This is the larger context of this passage in Matthew. It was spoken to reveal to ALL that they are transgressors in the eyes of God. Those who use this passage to condemn those who divorce and remarry for a reason other than unchastity have failed to discern that Christ also was condemning them for looking at a woman with lust. What man has not ever looked at a woman with lust? We live in a perverse and wicked generation where men and women expose their bodies in a sensual manner as they seek to provoke the flesh of those around them. What man has remained perfect in this matter and has never given into this fleshly arousal and entertained a lustful thought? Do you realize that if you have lusted after a woman that God’s law condemns you as an adulterer? If you then are also a transgressor, and ALL have transgressed, then do you stand with finger pointed to condemn those who have allowed their thoughts to be expressed outwardly? Or do you fall on your knees and declare, “Father, I am no more righteous than these who have committed fornication and adultery! Father have mercy on me, and have mercy on them!”

This place of humility and repentance is where Yahshua is seeking to lead all mankind. Yet in our pride we stand as the Pharisee in the temple and we declare, “God I thank You that I am not like other men, a sinner!” Men and women, open your eyes! We are all sinners before God! We have all transgressed, and whether you have sinned in thought, or in deed, the sin is the same to Yahweh. He wants all to be perfect, and we only become perfect through union and identification with Christ. You who have never divorced and remarried, you who have never committed adultery with another person, you who have never been unchaste, if you have even lusted in your heart then you are dead in your sins and need the forgiveness of a Savior. You who have sinned in thought need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb as surely as the one who has sinned in deed.

Yahshua did not speak these words which we call The Sermon on the Mount so that we might point to others and say, “I am glad I have not transgressed as others have.” No! He spoke these words that we might all beat upon our breasts and declare, “God have mercy upon me, a sinner!” What do the Scripture declare concerning our guilt?

**James 2:10-13**

**For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you**

do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Do you show no mercy to the one who has been divorced and remarried? Do you think you are more righteous than they because you have not sinned after the same manner? Do you not realize that if you have stumbled in one point, and all have done so for there is none righteous, then you are guilty of all? If you have lied, or lusted, or coveted, or been angry without cause, or broken a vow, or failed to honor mother or father, then you are also guilty of all. You too are an adulterer for the Law is the perfect expression of the will of God and disobedience is disobedience. It does not matter if you disobey by lying or disobey by committing adultery. You are as surely a son or daughter of disobedience as any other, and you need to receive the mercy of God as certainly as the worst sinner you can imagine.

Do not these words cause you to tremble, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy"? Who among us wants to stand in judgment and receive justice? Who among us desires to receive the just recompense for our transgressions? Who wants to bear the wrath of God for the sins they have committed? Will you not then be merciful in your judgment of others? This is the message of the parable of the unforgiving servant.

#### Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Yahshua said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And

his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Having been forgiven such an immense debt yourself, will you go out and find another of God's children and grab them by the throat and demand that they pay for what they have done? Will you receive the immense and immeasurable mercy of your heavenly Father and then not extend the same mercy to others? By the same judgment you judge others you will be judged. Let us all then choose to be merciful, recognizing that we have all been shut up under sin and none of us are righteous by our own actions and works.

Is it not amazing that we can read the sermon on the mount and turn around and use it as a legal charge to condemn others? Yahshua's whole intent with His words was to reveal that none have arrived at the perfection of the Father. We all need a Savior. We all need forgiveness and grace and mercy. What a tragedy it is that we take His words and use them to heap condemnation upon our brothers and sisters. Yes, our brothers and sisters are guilty. Yes, they have sinned. Yes, they have need of repentance and to receive mercy and forgiveness. But so do we!

This then is the meaning of my earlier statement, that many have erred by only seeking to identify sin and they have stopped short of seeing God's provision of forgiveness, and the grace and mercy that He extends to all. These have become ministers of condemnation and death, rather than ministers of reconciliation and life.

Having now established that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and having established that even a man who has lusted after a woman has committed adultery with her in his heart, and having established that there is forgiveness and mercy for all who call on the name of Yahshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord, I will now spend some time looking at how God sees the issue of divorce and remarriage. It is necessary that we agree with God concerning what constitutes righteous and unrighteous behavior, what satisfies His perfect holiness and what falls short of it. As we look at this, however, I want us to keep in mind that there is forgiveness for any and all sin.

In ancient days when a man had a wife who no longer was pleasing to him he would oftentimes simply send her away. She might be sent away with little or no provision, and because she was a married woman she would be considered an adulteress if she married another man. It was acceptable in Old Testament times for a man to have more than one wife, but it was not acceptable for a wife to have more than one husband. We read of David having

many wives:

**II Samuel 3:2-5**

Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; and his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These were born to David at Hebron.

Later David also took Bathsheba as his wife, and he had other wives as well.

**I Chronicles 14:3**

Then David took more wives at Jerusalem, and David became the father of more sons and daughters.

Jacob also had both Rachel and Leah as wives, as well as having children by their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah. We also read that Gideon had many wives.

**Judges 8:30**

Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.

Elkanah, the husband of Hannah who was the mother of Samuel, had two wives. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, also had many wives.

**II Chronicles 11:21**

Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom more than all his other wives and concubines. For he had taken eighteen wives and sixty concubines and fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

It was Solomon, however, who had more wives than any other man recorded in Scripture.

**I Kings 11:3**

He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

Whereas it was permissible for a man to have more than one wife, it was not God's will that they should multiply wives. Yahweh gave the following instruction to those who would rule as kings over Judah and Israel.

### Deuteronomy 17:17

“He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.”

The word “multiply” in the Hebrew holds the meaning of “to increase abundantly”. Solomon very obviously violated this commandment of Yahweh and it led to his downfall. We see from these examples that men often had more than one wife, but we never see a woman having more than one husband. A woman was considered an adulteress if she had more than one husband. This placed a woman in a very real predicament if her husband disliked her and simply sent her away without any legal dissolution of the marriage union. The man could take another wife, but the woman could not take another husband.

It was due to this practice of men putting away their wives without legally dissolving the marriage, that Moses permitted them to give their wives a certificate, or writing, of divorce that declared the woman totally freed from her former marriage so that she would not be considered an adulteress if she married another.

### 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 blemish 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 Yahweh, and you shall not bring sin on the land which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance.

### Jeremiah 3:1

God says, “If a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted?”

There were only two ways in which a marriage union could be dissolved. It could be dissolved by the death of a spouse, or it could be dissolved by the husband issuing a certificate of divorce to the wife. If a husband merely sent his wife away then she was considered to still be married, and for her to marry another while her previous marriage was undissolved was to commit adultery. If both spouses were living, only a certificate of divorce could dissolve the marriage.

We see this illustrated in the relationship between David and his first wife Michal. When David fled from Saul he left his wife Michal behind, though he had no thought of divorcing her, and he did not give her a writing of divorcement. Saul, in an apparent insult to David, gave Michal to another man for a wife. Yet this was an illegal action, for Michal was still married to David. After Saul died and the Northern Tribes wanted to take David as their king, David said that they would first be required to restore his wife to him.

I Samuel 25:44

Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

II Samuel 3:13-14

[David] said, "Good! I will make a covenant with you, but I demand one thing of you, namely, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me." So David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I was betrothed for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines."

In Deuteronomy 24 we read that if a man sends his wife away and gives her a certificate of divorce and then she marries another, she can never return to the first husband. However, David had never sent Michal away, nor had he given her a certificate of divorce, therefore she was never legally married to Palti the son of Laish. She remained married to David even when she was given by Saul to another man.

Why did God permit a man to send his wife away with a certificate of divorce? Yahshua answers this question.

Matthew 19:3-10

And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to put away 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 longer 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 of divorce and put her away?" He said to them, "**Because of your hardness of heart**, Moses permitted you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever puts away his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The phrase “hardness of heart” refers to men resisting God’s will for them. When Yahweh sent Moses to Pharaoh and demanded that Pharaoh let the Israelites go, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he would not obey God. In the same way, the Israelites hearts were hardened against God’s perfect will for them. It was not God’s will that they put away their wives for any reason other than immorality. Yahweh knew the hardness of heart of this stubborn and rebellious people, and He knew they would send their wives away if their wives displeased them in any way, and this would place the woman in the tragic position of having to commit adultery in order to survive. Therefore He allowed them to be legally released from their former marriage by receiving a certificate of divorce from their husband. They could then marry another and not be labeled as an adulteress by Jewish society. To be an adulteress was punishable by stoning (Leviticus 20:10).

This provision of writing a certificate of divorce was an act of mercy for the woman, but it was never God’s intent for a man to separate from his wife. ***We must see divorce as two parts in order to understand what the Scriptures are speaking, and to discern the mind of Christ in this matter. There is a putting away, which is an act resulting from man’s hardness of heart, and there is the issuing of a certificate of divorce, which is an act of mercy originating in the heart of God.***

The Scriptures are very consistent in revealing these two parts, though many of our modern translations have obscured the difference by translating words inconsistently. The New Testament Greek word for divorce is apostasion, and the New Testament Greek word for putting away, or sending away is apoluo.

**apostasion** (ap-os-tas'-ee-on) - This is Strong’s NT word 647, and it is described as: “*Neuter of a (presumed) adj. from a derivative of NT:868; properly, something separative, i.e. (specially) divorce*”. This word is very similar in origin to the word “apostasy” which is defined as a falling away from the truth, or a divorcement from the truth. It implies that two things that were formerly joined together are now made separate. In the case of apostasy, a man is separated from truth. In the case of divorce, a husband and wife who were one flesh before God have become legally separated from one another. I have rendered this word consistently as “divorce” in the Scriptures cited.

**apoluo** (ap-ol-oo'-o) - This is Strong’s word 630, and it is described as: “*From NT:575 and NT:3089; to free fully, i.e. (literally) relieve, release, dismiss (reflexively, depart), or (figuratively) let die, pardon or (specially) divorce.*” This word begins with “apo” and this is the same beginning we find to the word “apostle”. An apostle is a sent one, and “apo” means “sent” or “send”. The end of the word, “luo” is understood to mean “away”. I have

rendered this word consistently as “put away”, or “send away” in the Scriptures cited.

It is not God’s will that those who are joined together as husband and wife, becoming one flesh, should be separated from one another. The transgression is in bringing a separation to what God has joined together. The transgression is not in the writing of the certificate of divorce, for this is an act of mercy. God knows that men and women have hard hearts and they will not always choose His will. Therefore He has made provision for those who have been the victims of this hardness of heart. Many men have acted treacherously by sending away their wives when they displeased them for any reason. This sending away is the act of a sin hardened heart. The writing of a bill of divorcement is God’s provision for the victim.

Some people have contended that both parties in a divorce are always at fault, yet these should remember that God divorced Israel, and if they stand by their statement then they are condemning God.

#### Jeremiah 3:8

"And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce..."

#### Isaiah 50:1

Thus says Yahweh, “Where is the certificate of divorce by which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”

It is quite possible for one party to be the transgressor and the other party a recipient of the consequences of another’s sin. If we look at any other sin, such as murder, theft, lying, abortion, etc., we can see the truth of this. We don’t judge both parties as guilty in a murder, or in a theft. Why then do some stumble when considering that only one member may be the transgressor in divorce? There are certainly times when both parties are at fault, but we would err to say this was true in every instance.

The transgression in a divorce is the act of sending away, of making a separation in that which God has joined together. The one who initiates the separation is the transgressor. This understanding is made more plain as we look at the apostle Paul’s words to the saints.

#### I Corinthians 7:10-15

But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that *the wife should not leave her*

*husband* (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that *the husband should not send away his wife*.

-----

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, *he must not send her away*. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, *she must not send her husband away*. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. *Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave*; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Considering what has been said so far, that the sin of divorce is in sending away, or bringing a separation in what God has joined together, look closely at Paul's words. Does Paul not make the same distinction? He does not condemn all who experience divorce, he condemns the act of sending away. He even goes so far as to state that if an unbelieving spouse wants to leave, then the saint is to let them leave. The saint is not to resist the unbeliever who initiates a separation. How often the church makes those who have been divorced at the initiative of another feel ashamed and dirty and like second class members of the kingdom of God. Yet the unwilling recipient of divorce is not declared guilty by God, nor have they transgressed if their spouse was the one who separated from them.

It is in initiating a separation for a reason other than unchastity that the transgression lies. Being the recipient of another's separation is not sin anymore than being the victim of another's theft would render a person guilty.

The apostle Paul states,

*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.*

What does this phrase "not under bondage" mean? Does it mean that they are free to marry again? By examining other statements of Paul in this same chapter, we are able to arrive at an understanding.

**I Corinthians 7:15**

*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.*

I Corinthians 7:27

Are you **bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

I Corinthians 7:39

A wife is **bound** as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

As we compare Paul's use of the word bondage and bound, both of which are forms of the same Greek word "deo" which means "to bind", we can determine what he means in saying "the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases". The bondage being spoken of is being bound to a spouse, and so the phrase "not under bondage" means they are not bound to a spouse. What does it mean to not be bound to a spouse? Paul tells us plainly in verse 39, "(he/she) is free to be married to whom (he/she) wishes, only in the Lord."

Paul says the one who is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever chooses to leave, is not under bondage. They are in the same position as the one whose spouse is dead. They are no longer bound. Is this not the plain meaning of the expression, they are "not under bondage"? Should we not allow Paul's own words in the same passage to define what he is saying? The saint is not under bondage. They are not bound to the unbeliever who has left. They are free to be married to whom they wish, only in the Lord.

I know that with these words I have stepped on a lot of toes, but I urge you once more to not give into anger, for we are called to love and peace. If you have been taught differently then I ask you to examine these Scriptures. Find where I have used improper exegesis in comparing word to word and expression to expression. I have merely used Paul's own words to bring understanding to the things he is stating.

The situation is different, however, when two believers are wed together. Paul has separated his words regarding separation from a spouse into two categories: a believer wed to a believer, and a believer wed to an unbeliever. Let us look at the passage one more time.

I Corinthians 7:10-15

***But to the married (both Christians) I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send away his wife.***

-----  
***But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and***

she consents to live with him, he must not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Why would Christians desire to divorce one another? It is quite possible for a woman who is married to a Christian spouse to be mistreated by her spouse even though he is a believer. It is also possible for a Christian man to be mistreated by his Christian wife. There are both carnal and spiritual Christians, and for one spouse to be carnal while the other is spiritual can lead to as severe of problems as if one spouse were lost and the other saved. The carnal Christian acts like they are still in the flesh. If both Christians are carnal, this also leads to a myriad of problems. The apostle Peter spoke of a situation in which a Christian wife is wed to a husband who is walking in disobedience, and we can glean some things from his words.

#### I Peter 3:1-2

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

It is quite possible for a Christian wife to have a Christian husband who is disobedient to the word. His disobedience may even manifest in his mistreating his wife. Paul says that Christ commands a Christian wife to not leave her Christian husband, and Peter gives the wife instructions in how to win such a husband back to a place of obedience. Yet Paul states, “but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband”, and in these words he concedes that some wives will leave a Christian husband, and I believe he has in mind those who are suffering abuse from their spouse. Paul is not giving the wife justification to leave her husband, for he says she is not to leave. Yet knowing that some will leave under such conditions, he makes it plain that they must remain unmarried or return to their spouse. They have no other option. They will only compound their sin by marrying another.

*The conclusion of these words of Paul, which are actually Christ’s command, is that in a union of two Christians divorce is forbidden, and if divorce is forbidden, so is remarriage.*

But to the married I give instructions, **not I, but the Lord**, that the wife should not leave her

husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

The apostle's words are very plain here. The command of Christ is that two believers who are wed together are forbidden to divorce. Yet if they divorce they are to remain unmarried. They are forbidden to marry another, for such an action would be considered adultery in the eyes of the Lord. There is only one exception to this, as mentioned previously, for Paul is surely referring to the words of Christ that we have already read.

#### Matthew 5:31-32

“And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; but I say to you that everyone who puts away his wife, *except for the cause of unchastity*, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery.”

Saints, the words of Scripture are clear. If two believers are married, they are not to separate from one another, or divorce, and if they do separate they are to remain single or be reconciled to their spouse. We need not complicate the matter. The Scriptures are clear.

The situation is different for the saint married to an unbeliever, though Paul gives basically the same command to the believing spouse who is wed to an unbeliever, as he did to the one who is wed to a believer. Do not send your unbelieving spouse away. We must wonder why Paul instructs the saint who is married to an unbeliever to not hinder them from leaving. The reason is found elsewhere in Scriptures. Paul understands that a believer and unbeliever yoked together creates an unequal partnership.

#### II Corinthians 6:14-16

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

A believer who is wed to an unbeliever is involved in a partnership that has no true basis for fellowship. Righteousness and lawlessness are yoked together, as are light and darkness, Christ and Belial (Satan). In the Old Testament the Israelites were forbidden to marry foreigners lest the foreign spouse should lead the Israelite into idolatry and sin.

#### Deuteronomy 7:3-4

“Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.”

If it were possible for those who were foreign to the covenant of God, and who were idolaters, to turn the hearts of Israel away from Yahweh, then it is also possible for an unsaved spouse to turn the heart of a Christian spouse away from obedience to Christ. In the very best of circumstances a believer and an unbeliever could only know fellowship on a physical and soulful level. There could be no true spiritual communion. For this reason, Paul is making it clear that it is his judgment that a believing spouse should not separate from an unbelieving spouse, but if the unbeliever desires to leave that they should not be hindered in doing so.

I have heard wonderful testimonies of those who remained with an unbelieving spouse, even through much persecution and heartache, and the spouse was gloriously saved. I have also heard of those who sought to stay with an unbelieving spouse and the unbeliever was unwilling and forced the separation. Then there are the tragic stories of those whose hearts were turned back to sin by an unbelieving spouse, and some who once confessed Christ ended up denying Him. In all things we must be sensitive to the voice of the Spirit of God and follow in obedience.

A believer yoked to an unbeliever is in a precarious position. They are a new creation yoked to a fallen creation. They are light trying to walk in league with darkness. They have the Spirit of Christ and are trying to walk with one who has the spirit of Belial. Paul states that although this a very unequal yoking, there is reason to remain in the relationship.

**For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.**

Paul here contrasts the words ‘sanctified’ and ‘holy’ with the word ‘unclean’. The spouse and the children that would otherwise be unclean are considered holy and sanctified. God does not consider the believing spouse to be in an impure relationship, nor does He declare them to be defiled due to their marriage union. The spouse and children are sanctified, made clean by virtue of their relationship to the believer. “To the pure all things are pure.”

This then leads to a point that I would like to draw out, for I believe it has great bearing upon

those who were divorced and remarried before coming to Christ. Paul declares that it is forbidden for a believer to marry an unbeliever, for it is great folly to yoke oneself to another when there is no basis for fellowship. Let us look at this Scripture again:

**II Corinthians 6:14-16**

**Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?**

It would be an act of disobedience before God for a believer to marry an unbeliever. There are no exceptions given to this rule, and we read in other Scriptures that such a union is forbidden.

**I Corinthians 7:39**

**A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, *only in the Lord.***

**I Corinthians 15:33**

**Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."**

A believer would be sinning and transgressing against the will of God if they went and joined themselves to an unbeliever. They were commanded emphatically to not do such a thing. Paul declares that believers are only free to marry "in the Lord", that is, they can only marry those who are believers. They are bound from marrying an unbeliever. Yet if a man or a woman is converted while married to an unbeliever, they are not to seek to be loosed from the relationship. God will not consider them unclean in such a situation, for the spouse and children are sanctified by the believing family member.

***So we see that which would be considered a sinful union and is forbidden to the saints to enter into, is declared sanctified and holy when a saint finds themselves in this condition due to their new birth in Christ. Whereas the saints are commanded to not seek such a union, they are told to not seek to be loosed from this same union when it is their condition at the time of their calling to Christ.***

Consider then the state of a couple who before coming to Christ experience divorce and remarriage. Even though they were strangers to Christ, such a breaking of a covenant and making of another is a transgression of the will of God. Yet we know that those who are of

the fallen seed of Adam do many sinful things. The word of God commands that men and women should not cast aside their marriage covenant, nor treat it as a common thing. The marriage union is holy in the sight of God. Those who are strangers to the covenant of Christ often have little regard to the commands of Christ and they transgress many of His commands.

What then should such ones do who are gloriously translated out of darkness into the kingdom of light and they realize that they have transgressed God's will regarding marriage? Should they separate from their present spouse and live celibate lives? We know they cannot return to their first marriage partner, for that is forbidden and considered an abomination.

**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 blemish 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 Yahweh*, and you shall not bring sin on the land which Yahweh your God gives you as an inheritance.

**Jeremiah 3:1**

God says, "If a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted?"

I believe we find the answer in looking at the pattern we are discussing. Even as the man or woman who is born of the Spirit is not to seek to be loosed from their unbelieving spouse, so the man and woman who were divorced and remarried before coming to Christ are not to seek to be loosed from their current union.

We see in both cases that it is forbidden to enter into such a state, yet when one finds themselves in this state at the time of their calling, they are not to seek to be loosed from it. One should remain in the state that they are in at the time of their calling. We find Paul emphasizing this principle in another passage to the same Corinthian church.

**I Corinthians 7:18-27**

Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised.

Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. *Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.* Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. *Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.* Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that *it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*

The argument that Paul is making is that becoming a Christian is not reason to annul all civil and personal relationships that a person had entered into before his/her calling. Paul wrote to the Galatian church and told them that if they received circumcision then they were bound to keep the entire Law. He even went so far as to state:

**Galatians 5:2**

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

This is a very dire statement. Yet what if a man was circumcised before coming to Christ? Paul says, "Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised." Circumcision was a sign of the Old Covenant, that one was bound before God to keep it entirely and to be bound by the blessings and cursings of that covenant. There is only one way to end such a covenant and that is through the death of one of the members who covenanted together. Those who are in Christ have experienced such a death.

**Romans 6:4**

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Anyone who had entered the Old Covenant with the sign of circumcision would be obligated to remain under all the conditions of that covenant unless death had freed them from its obligations. Yahshua stood in the place of all men when He died on the cross, and we have become partakers of His death as signified through the ordinance of baptism. Because we have legally died by virtue of our identification with Christ, we are freed from any previous covenant by which we were bound. This is Paul's message in the following passage:

Romans 7:1-4

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Our union with Christ in His death has freed us from much more than the Law. It has also freed us from all of our past transgressions. Paul knew this, and counted on this as much as anyone. Before coming to Christ Paul was a murderer, a blasphemer, and a false accuser of those who were righteous. He stood by as the legal authority when that righteous man Stephen was stoned to death, giving his consent to the murder of this holy man. Before his calling to Christ Paul was a murderer. Yet after his calling he was cleansed, no longer to be considered a murderer.

I Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yahshua the Messiah and in the Spirit of our God.*

Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. Adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God, whether those who became adulterers through divorce and remarriage, or through sexual relations outside of marriage. Idolaters, thieves, effeminate, homosexuals, drunkards, murderers, swindlers, revilers and all whose hearts are filled with wickedness will not inherit the kingdom of God. And though such things were found in the hearts of many saints before coming to Christ, and many acted upon their evil desires, in Christ they have been washed, they have been sanctified, and they have been justified.

Ezekiel 36:24-27

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and

put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

No matter what condition we were in when we were called by the Spirit of Christ, we have all been cleansed through the blood of Christ which is able to save to the uttermost. The most vile sin has been atoned for and the most wicked sinner can be given a new heart and a new spirit. Truly it is spoken that “old things have passed away, behold ALL things have become new.”

Can the murderer bring back to life the ones he has slain? Can the reviler call back the words he has spoken? Can the adulterer undo the sin he has committed? No! But in Christ all are made new. All are cleansed and forgiven.

In the life of David and Bathsheba we are given a foreshadowing of one whose sin was forgiven by God. Though David committed adultery and murder, and he suffered the consequences of his sin, his transgression was forgiven. He was not told to separate from Bathsheba to make things right, for the sin had already been committed. As James spoke:

James 1:14-15

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

David was enticed by his own lust when he saw Bathsheba bathing. When lust had conceived it gave birth to sin, and when his sin was accomplished it brought forth death, both the death of Uriah and of the son born to David and Bathsheba. David could not bring Uriah back from the dead. He could not undo his act of adultery that was born of his lust. Neither did God ask David to try to set things right by putting away Bathsheba from being his wife. Yahweh took away David’s sin when David repented.

II Samuel 12:13

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yahweh." And Nathan said to David, "Yahweh also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.”

This is the tremendous grace of God. When He removes our sin He restores us to His favor and blessing. David had to bear his punishment as his son died and his own wives were violated publicly by his son Absalom. Our punishment was laid on the shoulders of the Son of God and He suffered in our place. Yahweh restored David and Bathsheba, and it was their

son Solomon who reigned in greater glory than any other king of the earth. Yahweh named him Jedidiah, which means ‘beloved of God’.

If God could so remove the transgression of a man under the old covenant of Law, how much more is He willing and able to remove the transgression of those who enter into the new covenant inaugurated in the blood of His dear Son? He makes all things new. God does not require that those who were adulterers in heart before coming to Him should undo their sin. Instead He places within them a new heart that yearns to walk in faithfulness and love. He does not require those who were divorced and remarried before being born again to separate from the spouses that were theirs at the time of their calling. He calls them to remain in the condition in which they were called and to walk with a heart of love, faithfulness, righteousness, purity and peace.

There are many churches today that teach that those who were divorced and remarried before coming to Christ must separate after they are saved and remain single and celibate the rest of their days, or they will be considered adulterers. These have failed to discern how God is able through the blood of Christ to put away our sin and to make all things new. David committed adultery with Bathsheba when his heart was filled with lust, yet after he repented he was not still considered an adulterer though he married Bathsheba and had more children with her. God put away their sin, and through Christ He also puts away the sin of those who have transgressed while they walked in darkness.

**I John 1:9**

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

This verse declares that when we confess our sins, God is both faithful and righteous (just) to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness. How is it righteous and just for God to put away our sins in this manner? It is because His Son bore all our punishment on the cross. The sin has not just been winked at, it has been atoned for by the blood of Yahshua. Those who were stained with sin have been washed and declared righteous.

Even as those who are born again and who find themselves in a marriage relationship with an unbeliever are not to seek to separate from their spouse, so those who have been divorced and remarried before coming to Christ are not to separate. Each man should remain in the state in which he was called. I believe this is the mind of Christ, and He has called us to peace and love.

One situation we have not yet looked at is that case of two saints who have divorced and remarried after they came to Christ. What should the church's response be to those who have divorced and remarried while they were Christians? Such saints have clearly violated the teaching of the apostles, as we have looked at in I Corinthians chapter 7, and the apostle Paul was merely reiterating the command of Christ.

But to the married I give instructions, *not I, but the Lord*, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

It is not a light thing to transgress the command of the Lord. To this same church Paul gave instructions about how they were to deal with Christians living an immoral life.

I Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

It is one thing to commit sin while an unbeliever, but to continue in this same sin after coming to the knowledge of the truth and being born of the Spirit of God is another matter. To the Hebrews Paul wrote:

Hebrews 10:26-29

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

It is understandable that those outside the church will have hard hearts that are opposed to the will of God, but those inside the church have better things expected of them. They are

not to continue in the sins of the world, divorcing and remarrying at will. We are given an example in Scripture of one who was a Christian and who began to walk with the Lord and who then walked back after the manner of the world. This was the young man known as John Mark. Though his specific transgression was not divorce and remarriage, I believe we can gain some insight into how we should respond to those who have walked carelessly after the flesh after having come to Christ. The following Scriptures, in order, I believe represent a progression in the discipline and restoration of one who has willingly transgressed after coming to Christ.

Acts 12:25

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

Acts 15:36-40

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

Colossians 4:10

Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)...

II Timothy 4:11

Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

Philemon 23-24

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

In Acts we see John Mark accompanying the apostle Paul, and John Mark's cousin, the apostle Barnabas, on their missionary journeys. When they traveled to Pamphylia John Mark deserted them, and had forsaken the work of the gospel. Because of John Mark's instability and unfaithfulness, Paul was unwilling to associate with him. Barnabas, being a cousin of

John Mark and a very compassionate man, was not willing to separate from him. There has been much debate about whether Barnabas was correct in this, and we see no more mention of Barnabas from this point forward. Whatever work he accomplished from his point of separation from Paul has not been included in Scripture.

We do know that Paul instructed the churches to not associate with those who are called brothers and who live unruly or immoral lives. Yet there is room for restoration to those who have fallen, even as Christians. We see the next mention of John Mark in the book of Colossians, and Paul adds these words, “also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him.)” At this point John Mark has been received back by Paul, but not without some restrictions. We see that Paul has written special instructions about John Mark to the churches. The churches are told to welcome him back into their fellowship, but some special restrictions apply to him. He must still be watched and he must prove himself after his failure.

Next in II Timothy we see Paul declaring that John Mark is useful to him, which is a sign of his proving himself faithful, yet the fact that this phrase is added to the mention of this young man is indicative that the memory of his failure has not yet been completely removed. Finally in Philemon we have Paul’s words that Mark is a fellow worker, named among Aristarchus, Demas and the beloved Luke. Nothing is appended or added to the mention of his name, and we can assume that he has been fully restored.

This is also a pattern for those who have sinned willfully in other matters while in the church. The church should never treat willful sin as a light thing. If a saint is in serious sin and has not repented then the church is not to associate with them. Even if they do confess their sin and express godly sorrow, they are to be watched carefully and certain restrictions should apply to them depending upon their transgression. For example, if one sinned as a thief he would not immediately be entrusted with financial stewardship. If one sinned sexually it would be unwise to put them in a position where they were unsupervised with those of the opposite sex. Over time, however, if one proved themselves faithful then the restrictions could be lifted.

This pattern is no different than how we are to raise our children. Those who are faithful and responsible are given greater freedom and privileges. Those who have not yet demonstrated victory over their carnal desires cannot be given the same freedom. This is not to shame or punish them, but because we love them and do not wish them to make a shipwreck of their own lives, or the lives of others. If we do not wish divorce to be a rampant problem among the saints then we must be firm and consistent in our treatment of those who willfully

transgress against the Lord's command in this matter. The Lord's ideal is for two saints to be joined together in marriage, in purity, faithfulness, honor and love.

If you find yourself in the situation described above, then you cannot undo the sin by putting away your current spouse and returning to the former one. God declares such an action to be an abomination. You must choose from this day forward to be faithful to the one to whom you are currently wed, and to not compound the transgression by putting away another spouse.

Those who teach, or who have been taught, that those who are divorced and remarried must put away their current spouse and return to their first one (a clear violation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4) in order to be absolved of their sin, I ask you to look at the Scriptures and see if there is even one example of Yahweh, Yahshua, or an apostle instructing anyone to put away their current spouse and to return to their original spouse. If this were the doctrine of the church, then surely we would have at least one instruction, or one example of this doctrine. Yet there is none.

I have spent much time in prayer and in study to prepare this writing. We are instructed to rightly divide the word of truth, and to the best of my understanding I have done so. May Yahweh give you understanding in this matter, and may we all be ministers of reconciliation, bringing others to agreement with the mind of Christ in all things.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days.