

Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19

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Recently, while traveling to Europe, my wife found an interesting article in a magazine, describing the behavior of modern women. Fortunately, a lady wrote the article. She illustrated her point by describing the breaking apart of a marriage. A former gold medalist and world recorder holder, who is still active in pursuing her career in sports, left her husband, a twofold world finalist and now a homemaker, including her two sons, in favor of a lover, who is also a well-known sportsman. The writer the article states that behavior that was considered male, namely leaving spouse and children to live with a new partner, has become common with women. Eva Kohlrusch remarks sarcastically: “Women can congratulate each other. Equality progresses. Women do more and more often what in the past was considered a typical male behavior. They get out of their marriage and their children with their father. . . . She behaves as he has done in the past. . . . We need to invent a totally new concept to protect children from feelings of abandonment.”¹

Divorce and remarriage has become a challenge for societies and churches. Ideas of the postmodern age are also influencing Christians. Some abandon the concept of absolute truth. Pluralism is partially accepted. The human has become the ultimate goal. Abundant life is defined as feeling well and being well only. Pain and suffering have become unacceptable. Although there are very difficult circumstances in some marriages, we must recognize that sometimes people may get out of their marriages too easily.

Jesus addressed the issue of divorce, and his statements are found in Matthew 5 and 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16. In this article, we will focus on Matthew 19, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about grounds for divorce (19:1-12).

Jesus again and again stressed the indissolubility of marriage. He upheld God’s ideal as instituted in the Garden of Eden. And I believe He wants us to see beauty of marriage and forget about dwelling on problems. This may be indicated by the context in which the account of Matthew 19: 1-12 is found.

I. Jesus’ Statements on Marriage and Divorce and Their Interpretation

Christians have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. They have decided to follow His footsteps (I Peter 2:21). His life, death, and resurrection have saved them. His priestly ministry in Heaven supports them. His teachings are normative for them. Therefore, when it comes to minor as well as to important decisions in life, Christians ask what Jesus has to say about the issues involved. This is especially true in the case of divorce and remarriage. In four places of the Synoptic Gospels Jesus addressed this question: Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; and Luke 16:18.

Chronologically, Matthew 5:31, 32 comes first. This text belongs to the Sermon on the Mount. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus addressed this difficult and tricky issue. The place is Galilee. Matthew 19 and its parallels in Mark and Luke belong to Jesus’ Perea

¹ Eva Kohlrusch, “Seitensprung in ein neues Leben” in *Bunte*, no. 28/2000, pp. 88, 89 (translated).

ministry. According to Matthew 19 and Mark 10 the Pharisees forced Jesus to discuss the topic, but He did not avoid it and came across very clearly.

In the time of Jesus, divorce was taken lightly. Basically, the school of Hillel allowed as a reason for divorce whatever a husband did not like about his wife. To burn a meal may have been such a reason.

On the other hand, the school of Shammai allowed a husband to divorce his wife only if she had committed some kind of sexual offense. Yet, what was considered a sexual offense? It included a wife being seen in public with open hair or with bare arms. According to Rabbi Meir, it also included an outgoing attitude toward slaves and neighbors, spinning on the street, drinking eagerly on the street, and bathing with men. It was more or less an offense of the current customs by his wife that allowed a husband to get a divorce.² In addition, divorce was seen as a privilege that God had given to Israel. “According to rabbinic tradition Yahweh has said: ‘In Israel I have given divorce, not have I given divorce among the Gentiles.’ Only in Israel ‘God has connected His name with divorce.’”³ Instead of following God’s plan and accepting the indissolubility of marriage, divorce was regarded as a privilege. “Thus even a dissolution of a marriage without any reason was considered valid. . . .”⁴

Jesus’ words about divorce and remarriage have been understood quite differently. Here are some of the views that are maintained:

(1) Divorce is impossible even in the case of adultery; otherwise Jesus would not differ from Moses and would have taken a position more liberal than the Mosaic Law that—in the case of adultery—required the death penalty. Remarriage is unthinkable.⁵

(2) Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. However, even if one partner commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, remarriage is excluded. This is the position of the church fathers and is found even in our day.⁶

(3) Divorce is not possible except for sexual unfaithfulness during the engagement period. If it is found that one spouse was unfaithful during the time of engagement, divorce is permissible, as well as remarriage.⁷

(4) Divorce is not possible except in the case of adultery. If one spouse commits adultery and the spouses are divorced, the partner who did not commit adultery may remarry.

However, reconciliation is preferable. This is the position of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the major Reformers, many evangelicals, and the Adventist Church.⁸

² For the historical background see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Misrasch*, Band 1 (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), pp. 304, 315-320.

³ Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1984), p. 270 (translated).

⁴ Hermann L. Strack and Billerbeck), pp. 304, 315-320.

⁵ Cf. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), p. 183.

⁶ Cf. Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 19-44. This also seems to be the position of A. Schlatter. Cf. Adolf Schlatter, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1947), pp. 73, 74. See also Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1984), p. 324; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990), pp. 163, 428.

⁷ Cf. Bacchiocchi, p. 182.

⁸ See Wenham und Heth, who discuss this interpretation on pp. 73-99. Cf. Craig S. Keener, . . . and Marries Another: *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991) and the *Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000). Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952), pp. 341, 342: “Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow. . . . God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband

(5) Scripture is opposed to divorce. Yet it is possible to get a divorce. Reasons are not only adultery but also abandonment by a spouse, abuse, violence, etc. Remarriage is possible.⁹ Some suggest that the question of who is guilty should not be discussed. Others suggest that remarriage is always possible, at least under the condition that the former spouses manifest a spirit of forgiveness.¹⁰

(6) It is claimed that Jesus' original words did not contain the exception clause. These original words are found in Mark and Luke. The exception clause occurs in Matthew and is an addition of the early church, which under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the post-Easter Christ has actualized the Biblical text. Another application and actualization is found with Paul (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). Therefore, the Christian church has the right not only to interpret but also to reinterpret Scripture. There is an openness to deal with other cases not mentioned in Scripture. Why should the Holy Spirit not lead the modern church in finding other reasons for a legitimate divorce as He has led the church of old?¹¹

(7) It is claimed that when Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount dealt with the issue of divorce and remarriage this was not a commandment. Because verse 30 of Matthew 5 has to be understood figuratively, verse 32 and the entire passage should also be understood figuratively. Although Jesus' intention is clear that marriages should be permanent, divorce and remarriage are possible.

(8) The exception clause refers to incest only. Divorce is possible only if a "marriage" exists, that according to Leviticus 18 never should have been instituted, and if a believer and an unbeliever are married and the unbeliever wants to get a divorce. However, spouses who abuse their partners verbally or physically, who are alcohol or drug addicts, who are blasphemers, who love pleasures more than God, etc., are hardly believers, even if they are baptized Christians. They are to be avoided.¹²

We now turn to Matthew 19 and take a closer look.

II. The Context of Matthew 19a

1. Jesus' Position on Divorce in the Context of Matthew 19 and 20a

Matthew 19:1-20:16 is a passage describing Jesus' ministry. Its segments¹³ are connected to each other by common vocabulary.¹⁴ We also detect that Jesus talks to the Pharisees first

leave his wife, which was adultery:" Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 454: "Here and in Jesus' parallel discussion in Matthew 5:32 it seems to be implied, even though not specifically stated, that the innocent party to a divorce is at liberty to marry again. This has been the understanding of the great majority of commentators through the years:"

⁹ See "Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission Report, 22.6.99," pp. 5, 10.

¹⁰ Lothar Wilhelm, ". . . das soll der Mensch nicht scheiden"? Fragen zu den Aussagen der Evangelien über Ehescheidung und Wiederverheiratung", in *Glauben heute, Jahrespräsident 1999*, edited by Eli Diez (Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 1999), pp. 16-33.

¹¹ Cf. Robert M. Johnston, "Divorce and Remarriage: What the Bible Teaches" (paper prepared for the World Ministers Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1990).

¹² Bacchiocchi, pp. 183-189, 215, 216. On p. 216 he writes: "How should a Christian relate to a spouse who persists in his or her perverse lifestyle? Paul's admonition is straightforward, 'Avoid such people' (2 Timothy 3:5). Living with and loving a person who blatantly and obstinately violates the moral principles of Christianity, means condoning such an immoral lifestyle."

¹³ (1) Marriage, divorce, and staying single (19:1-12), (2) blessing of the children (19:13-15), (3) "the rich young ruler" (19:16-26), (4) rewards of discipleship (19:27-30), and (5) parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16).

(19:3-9). Then He turns to the disciples (19:10-15). After the dialogue with the rich young ruler (19:16-22), as this man is called, Jesus teaches His disciples again (19:27-20:16).

a. Father and Mother

“Father and mother” is one of those literary connections. In 19:5 Jesus talks about leaving father and mother as soon as a man marries. In 19:19 He mentions the fifth commandment, namely to honor father and mother, and in 19:29 He states that His disciples may sometimes be forced to leave father and mother for Jesus’ sake. To leave father and mother in order to marry does not violate the fifth commandment, neither does leaving father and mother for Jesus’ sake.

Thus, indirectly marriage may be compared with the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. The famous passage in Ephesians 5 may be foreshadowed here. If marriage is similar to our connection with Jesus, how important and uplifting must marriage be, how beautiful and blessed, and also how enduring! Whoever has tasted the goodness of our Lord and the pleasantness of His fellowship, may also enjoy His tremendous gift of marriage.

b. Whom to Leave and Whom Not to Leave

Matthew 19:29 is very interesting: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.” It almost strikes us that Jesus talks about leaving siblings, parents, and even children, but He does not talk about leaving one’s spouse.¹⁵ In omitting a reference to the spouse here, the message for us seems to be: Even for Jesus’ sake we are not asked to leave our husband or wife, to be separated from him or her, or to divorce our partner. Marriage is indissoluble. Marriage is good. Jesus does not break apart marriages when He asks people to follow Him.

c. The Seventh Commandment

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus discusses divorce, remarriage, and adultery. In Matthew 19:18 He quotes the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” The two texts use a verb with a common root. Again marriage is very important for Jesus. Obviously, His statements in Matthew 19:9 and 5:27-32 re related to the seventh commandment and therefore to the Decalogue. Jesus argues against the Pharisees in going back to the Creation account and by indirectly referring to the Ten Commandments.

Jesus’ position is what the Law is all about. This Law is still the same. In Jesus’ time it was still as binding as it was when God pronounced it on Mount Sinai. It is also valid today. It is

¹⁴ E.g., “disciple” (19:10, 13, 25), “the Kingdom of Heaven” (19:12, 14, 23; 20:1), “father and mother” (19:5, 19, 29), “word” (19:1, 11, 22) and “adultery” (19:9, 18).

¹⁵ Some manuscripts contain the term “wife,” others do not. Modern Greek New Testaments such as *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Nestle-Aland, and *The Greek New Testament* by the United Bible Societies, omit the word. The parallel passage in Mark 10:28-30 does not mention the wife, either (in a good number of important manuscripts), however, Luke 18:29 does. Yet Luke 18:29 and the text on divorce in Luke 16:18 are not found in the same immediate context. It is true that the disciples temporarily left their wives and followed Jesus. But later it is reported that Peter was traveling with his wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). The specific contexts of Matthew and Mark that contain the passage on divorce and remarriage may have caused the omission of the term “wife” from the list of those whom a disciple may have to leave for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. People could have drawn the wrong conclusions that were opposed to Jesus’ intention. In the context of Matthew 19 and Mark 10, it was necessary to stress that discipleship does not lead to a divorce and does not allow for a divorce. Even in Luke the term “to leave” may have intended a temporary separation only. In 1 Corinthians 7:12, 13 Paul seems to address the same or a similar issue, stating that the believer should not divorce the unbeliever.

independent of changing cultures and value systems. This Law is good. God's gift of marriage and His protection of this gift are good.

d. The Hard Heart

The most important connection between the different parts of Matthew 19 and 20a, and therefore the most important topic in Jesus' Perea ministry is, it seems, the theme of the hard heart and the related motif of the evil eye.¹⁶ Jesus Himself has introduced the phrase "hardness of heart" in 19:8. The pharisees show clear evidence of hard hearts, because they look for reasons that would allow them to get out of marriage. They do not understand God's marvelous gift of marriage, and they spoil it because of their attitude and behavior (19:3, 7). When they think about marriage, only divorce comes into their mind.

But even Jesus' disciples have a hard time accepting His teaching on marriage. They suggest staying single and not marrying, if marriage is indissoluble (19:10). They clearly understand Jesus' claim, and yet they decide to take sides with the Pharisees. They too cannot think of marriage in other terms than divorce. They have hard hearts. This hardness of heart is manifested a little later when they encounter the children brought to Jesus in order to be blessed, and they scold them (19:13).

The rich young ruler is not willing to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Because of their hardness of heart it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God (19:21-23). Again the disciples seem to favor those who do not make it into the Kingdom of God. (19:25), and Peter's question about the reward of following Jesus may point to hardness of heart (19:27).

Finally, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, those who have worked all day long are not content with their wages. They complain about the generosity of the landowner. The problem is not that the lord did not pay them fair wages. The problem is that those who did not have the chance to be employed all day long received the same amount of money. They compare themselves with their fellow workers, and instead of being moved by gratitude for what has happened to those, they concentrate on themselves and the alleged injustice done to them. The landowner responds: "Or is your eye evil because I am generous?" Instead of rejoicing with their fellow workers and praising the generosity of the lord, they grumble and complain. They have an evil eye. Their hardness of heart does not allow them to see the goodness of God.

Thus, the entire section on Jesus' Perea ministry challenges the readers to appreciate the extraordinary gifts of God, and especially the gift of marriage, and to turn away from any consideration of divorce.

e. Summary

In summarizing we can say:

(1) To a certain degree Jesus' relationship with His disciples may be compared to the relationship between husband and wife. For the sake of this relationship, one may need to leave other persons and possessions. The benefits are immeasurable.

(2) To follow Jesus does not mean to separate from or divorce a spouse. Marriage is indissoluble.

(3) Jesus' statement on divorce is connected to the seventh commandment. This commandment is binding and is independent of changing times and cultures.

¹⁶ See Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 261-280.

(4) Matthew in quoting Jesus challenges readers and hearers to repent of their hardness of heart and their evil eye, to turn away from any toying with the idea of divorce, and to treasure the fantastic gift of marriage.

2. Jesus' Position on Divorce in the Context of Matthew 18

Matthew 19 is preceded by a conversation between Jesus and His disciples in Capernaum. In spite of the different geographical locales, there are strong connections between Matthew 18 and 19. These include the terms “disciples;” “kingdom;” “children;” and “heart.”¹⁷ At the beginning of chapter 18, the disciples ask the question “Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” (18:1), Jesus’ answer makes mention of a child, the little ones, and the sin of a brother (18:2-20). After His response, Peter asks another question, dealing with the issue of forgiveness of sins (18:21). Jesus replies with a short statement and the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:22-35).

a. The Hard Heart

Although the disciples have been warned not to despise the little ones and not to scandalize them (18:6, 10), they have not learned their lesson, as their behavior in 19: 13 demonstrates. Instead of welcoming the children in the name of Jesus, they have rejected them. While warned against hardness of heart in Matthew 18, the disciples have exhibited precisely that behavior. Chapter 18 ends with the warning that the Heavenly Father will hand over to torture those who do not forgive their neighbors from their heart (18:34, 35). The motif of a hard heart is already present in chapter 18, although the exact phrase will appear in 19:8 only. The unforgiving servant is an example of a hardhearted person par excellence, and it is interesting that this motif is developed in the following pericope dealing with divorce and remarriage.

Instead of forgiving their spouses, there are people such as the Pharisees, who only look for loopholes and possibilities to get out of their marriages and rid of their partners. They do not care for their wives or their husbands. They are not interested in them. They forget the incalculable debt God has forgiven them, and they count all mistakes of their spouses against them. Forgiveness is not practiced, not even considered. Claiming to fulfill the Law, they are judged by the Law. Their hardness may reach even so far that they want to get out of marriage, even though their spouses may not have sinned against them at all.

b. Cutting Off a Hand and Plucking Out an Eye

Matthew 18:8, 9 symbolically talks about self-mutilation. Cutting off a hand and plucking out an eye in order to prevent being led astray is found almost identically in Matthew 5:29, 30, a passage which is alluded to in Matthew 19:1-12. Matthew 18:8 adds the cutting off of a foot. Since these verses in Matthew 5 are found in the context of adultery and fornication, the respective parallel verses in Matthew 18 may also refer to sexual sins.

We are called to fight against sin, including sexual sins. We are called to fight for our marriages and make them work. Church members are called to help those who are in danger of being seduced and led astray. Sometimes church discipline is necessary in order to win them back. In any case, after repentance forgiveness must be granted. Our marriages live off forgiveness. We live off forgiveness. Therefore, we extend our forgiveness to our spouses. The issue is not divorce. The issue is to forgive each other and let go of the hard heart.

¹⁷ (1) 18:1-35—Jesus’ dialogue with the disciples (children, Kingdom of Heaven); (2) 19:1-9—Jesus’ dialogue with the Pharisees; (3) 19: 10-15—Jesus’ dialogue with the disciples (children, Kingdom of Heaven).

c. Summary

Again we summarize:

(1) Matthew 18, with its parallels in Matthew 5:29, 30 prepares the way for the discussion on divorce and adultery in chapter 19. Although Jesus' statements in Matthew 19:4-6, 8, 9 and 11, 12 are based on the Creation account, they also contain an exposition of the seventh commandment. Jesus affirms that by remarrying, one may commit adultery. Marriage by its very nature is indissoluble. God's commandments are still valid.

(2) Again readers are challenged to turn away from hardness of heart and to freely and graciously forgive each other (18:35; 19:8).

(3) Instead of seeking divorce and enjoying the thought of being "free" again, we are challenged to grant forgiveness and stop counting the mistakes of our spouses. Forgiveness is limitless.

(4) In some cases of marital breakdown, church discipline is necessary. Its goal is to prevent those involved from becoming "lost sheep" (Matthew 18:12-14). Following Matthew 18:15-20 and the subsequent parable, church members are called to forgive their erring fellow believers.

III. Exegesis of Matthew 19

I. The Structure of the Passage

The passage of Matthew 19: 1-12 can be outlined in the following way:

1. *Local Frame and Narrative Frame (1, 2)*

2. *Jesus' Dialogue With the Pharisees (3-9)*

a. First question of the Pharisees (3)

Scene 1

b. First answer of Jesus (4-6) A

c. Second question of the Pharisees (7)

Scene 2

d. Second answer of Jesus (8, 9) A

3. *Jesus' Dialogue with the Disciples (10-12)*

a. First question of the disciples (10)

Scene 3

b. Third answer of Jesus (11, 12) A

Of special interest are verses 3-9. However, the second scene has also strong verbal connections to the third scene.¹⁸

2. Interpretation

a. Verse 3

The conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees starts with the Pharisees asking Jesus a question about divorce. Probably, they wanted to draw Jesus into the controversy between the more liberal school of Hillel and the more conservative school of Shammai. Maybe they even

¹⁸ Literary connections between scenes 2 and 3 are, for example, "to marry" (19:9, 10); "man" and "woman" (19:3, 5, 8, 9, 10); "mother" (19:5, 12); and "reason/relationship" (19:3, 10).

hoped Jesus would touch on the case of Herod being married to Herodias, thus making Herod His enemy (14:3, 4). This was a highly political issue and had cost John the Baptist his life.

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” In Matthew 19:1-12 the issue of divorce and remarriage is addressed from the male perspective. The husband can get a divorce. The female perspective in addition to the male side is presented in the parallel text in Mark 10.

An important term in 19:3 is *apoluo*, which in this context means “to send away” or “to divorce.” It is also found in verses 7-9. The Pharisees twice use the term and Jesus twice uses it, however only in His second answer. In His first answer Jesus uses the term *chorizo* (v. 6) to express the concept of divorce.¹⁹ Jesus clearly says No to divorce. In verse 6 no exception is listed; in verse 12 a single possible exception is mentioned.

The phrase “for any and every reason” can also be translated “for any reason at all.” The first option reflects the position of Hillel and seems to be preferable in this context. Obviously, the Pharisees espoused Hillers position.²⁰ Their question is already aiming at Deuteronomy 24:1, although it is only later that they openly mention that text in trying to counter Jesus’ arguments.

b. Verses 4-6

Starting with verse 4, Jesus answers the question of the Pharisees. It is important to notice that Jesus answers with Scripture as He did when Satan tempted Him in Matthew 4. Jesus avoids taking sides with one of the rabbinical schools. He uses a higher authority than the interpretation of famous rabbis.²¹

“Have you not read that He Who created them from the beginning made them male and female?” This answer may contain some sort of rebuke. The Pharisees should not have asked such a question. Scripture has already answered it. However, by concentrating on what is allowed and what is forbidden, and how to get rid of one’s wife, tragically Jesus’ adversaries do not recognize God’s wonderful gift of and ideal for marriage.²²

Yet Jesus addresses this very issue. In Matthew 19:4-6 He develops God’s perspective on marriage, an institution that together with the rest of Creation was very good. Jesus proves His point by Scripture, going back to the Creation account. Indirectly He declares this account to be authentic and normative. His answer begins with the One Who has created, namely God, and it also ends with the Creator God Who has joined together man and woman in marriage. Jesus’ first answer to the Pharisees (19:4-6) begins with a question. Inserted in this question are two OT quotations. Then a statement follows, and finally an imperative is employed:

- (1) Question: Have you not read.....(v. 4a)
 - (a) Quotation from Genesis 1:27 (v. 4b)
 - (b) Quotation from Genesis 2:24 (v. 5)
- (2) Statement: The two are one flesh (v. 6a)
- (3) Imperative: Do not divorce..... (v. 6b)

¹⁹ This is the same term used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

²⁰ Vgl. Strack und Billerbeck, p. 801.

²¹ Cf. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew*, reprint of the 6th ed. of 1884 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), p. 337.

²² Cf. Patte, p. 264. On p. 265 he states: “Why then would one want to ask whether it is permitted to divorce? . . . The only reason for this attitude is that one does not perceive of marriage as a good gift from God and that consequently one views as good the possibility of separating oneself from one’s wife. . . .”

The first quotation is short, consisting of five words only (in the Greek); the second has twenty-one words; altogether twenty-six words. According to Matthew's account, Jesus Himself uses only twenty-four words in His answers to the Pharisees, while in verse 6a He even repeats the last words of the second quotation. Therefore, we hear twice about "two" humans who have "become one" (vv. 5b and 6a). Jesus allows Scripture to address burning questions and bring about a decision when being asked by the Pharisees about divorce. What is a reason for divorce? Answer: The Creation order does not allow for any reason.

The expression "in the beginning" in Matthew 19:4 can refer to God Who created or to the creation of "male and female." In the first case one would translate "He Who created from the beginning. . . ;" whereas in the second case the idea would be "He created *them* from the beginning male and female." The second option is preferred by many translations. Because of the repetition of the same phrase in verse 8, Grundmann accepts the second option and states: "From the beginning God wanted humans to be sexual beings."²³ This reference then prepares the way for the second important statement: The two genders are dependent on each other. One man and one woman would be joined together in marriage and thus become one, inseparably connected.

Matthew 19:5 begins with the phrase "and said." According to the previous verse, this phrase refers to God. It was God Who spoke. Jesus claims that God said: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." However, in reading Genesis 2:24, whence this quotation was taken, and by reading its context, one gains the impression that this statement was a commentary made by the author of Genesis,²⁴ Moses, not by God Himself. But Jesus informs us that Genesis 2:24 is a direct word of God the Father. It rests on the highest possible Authority. God Himself has ordained that a man leaves his parents and together with his wife forms a new union.

The phrase "one flesh" points in a special way to the physical union of the spouses. However, the term "flesh" stands for the entire personality and cannot be limited to the physical sphere.²⁵ Therefore, adultery is very traumatic. It ruptures the wonderful union between husband and wife, and in Scripture it is compared to idolatry by which the people of God make a decision against their Creator God and Saviour.

The term "one" stresses union and unity. Two beings, a man and a woman, become one. By making this statement, Jesus rejects homosexuality as well as polygamy. The Hebrew text of Genesis 2:24 does not contain the numeral "two." However, by adding this term, which is also found in the Septuagint (LXX), monogamy is stressed even more. According to God's will, two different persons, one man and one woman, become one. To achieve this, is necessary to leave the parents in order to be free for a new union. Only then can a man "cling" or "cleave" to his wife. Jesus emphasizes the idea of oneness by repeating it at the beginning of verse 6. Then He comes to the conclusion: "What therefore God has joined together, let no one separate." There is no question: God's intention is to join together, not to separate.

In Matthew 19:5, 6 the term *anthropos* is found twice, namely at the beginning and the end. The term normally designates the human being and is not used for one gender only.

²³ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 427 (translated).

²⁴ Cf. Alexander Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1989), p. 390.

²⁵ Cf. Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, The Expositor's Greek Testament, reprint (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 245, 246.

However, in verse 5a it refers to the male, whereas in verse 6b it may encompass everyone. The statement is a general one that applies to all couples.

A	The action of man (<i>anthropos</i>):	Separation from the parents and cleaving to his wife
B	Becoming one flesh (twice)	
A'	The action of God and the prohibition for man/human being (<i>anthropos</i>):	God has joined; no separation

To leave one's parents, to live together, and to become one flesh are human actions which in a hidden way form the joining together by God. The second OT quotation (Genesis 2:24) states what humans are doing. Jesus' explanation, however, stresses that this is the will of God. Although humans take action, it is God Who brings together husband and wife. Therefore, they do not have the authority to get a divorce. The creation of humanity consists of the creation of the male and the female. God has joined the two together. Therefore, we are not allowed to separate what God actually has brought together. Jesus' first answer consists of an imperative, which forms a prohibition. The message is: Marriage is indissoluble. Divorce is not an option.

We summarize Jesus' first answer:

(1) Jesus points to Scripture. His question, "Have you not read . . . ?" may contain a rebuke for not having considered the implications of Scripture carefully enough.

(2) According to Jesus, Scripture is normative. Therefore He uses it. His response is based on the Creation account. Interestingly enough, He quotes texts from Genesis 1 and 2 without seeing a contradiction between them. It is true that the social conditions of the first century A.D. were different from those in Paradise. Undoubtedly, Jesus is aware of that fact. Although the time He lived on Earth cannot be compared to the situation described in Genesis 1-2, Jesus still applied the original principles established in Eden to a world fallen prey to sin. Therefore, different cultures do not necessarily change the Biblical message and Biblical principles.

(3) Jesus clearly takes a position against divorce. God has instituted marriage. Humans are not allowed to get a divorce. With His imperative, Jesus makes a categorical statement.

(4) Obviously, Jesus addresses marriage in general. The direct context should not be disregarded as soon as verse 6b is investigated. God has created male and female and has joined them in marriage. Every legitimate marriage is therefore a joining together by God,²⁶ Whose plan it is that old relationships are left behind and a new union, one flesh, be established. Therefore, one should not use the excuse that God has not joined together one's own marriage and that therefore it is legitimate to divorce one's spouse.

c. Verse 7

The climax of the conversation is reached in verses 7-9. This becomes evident when we look at the speech formulas being used. Verse 3: "The Pharisees came . . . tempting Him and asking . . ." Verse 4: "Jesus said . . ." Verse 7 switches to the present tense: "They tell Him . . ." Verse 8: He (Jesus) says to them . . ." This switch to the present tense indicates heightened tension.

²⁶Cf. Nichol, vol. 5, pp. 338, 454.

The Pharisees respond to Jesus' speech by asking why Moses has given the certificate of divorce, if divorce is not possible. Like Jesus they also use Scripture. By referring to Deuteronomy 24:1, they may have wished to undo Genesis 1 and 2 and support a lax practice of divorce.²⁷ But Jesus explains how the Biblical passages relate to each other. In verse 9 we hear His conclusion: In divorce humans destroy God's work.²⁸ Grundmann calls Jesus' statement in v. 9 "authoritative Halacha of Jesus."²⁹

In their second question the Pharisees point to the authority of Moses. They understand very well that Jesus has argued against divorce and that by referring to the Creation order He has surpassed Deuteronomy 24:1, the only reference in the OT in which Moses mentions the certificate of divorce. Now they try to create a conflict between Jesus and Moses.³⁰ An important difference between them and Jesus is the respective interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, 2. Jesus must have foreseen that argument and may therefore have shown that Genesis 2:24 is an original word of God Himself. In any case, the Pharisees claim that Moses has commanded (*enteilato*) (1) to give ones wife a bill of divorce, and (2) to divorce her.

d. Verses 8, 9

Jesus is much more precise in His interpretation than the Pharisees are. In His second answer he replaces the word "commanded" with the term "permitted" (*epetrepesen*). Moses has permitted divorce but has not commanded it. Indeed, Moses seems to mention the certificate of divorce only in passing. The passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 clarifies whether or not a woman who has been divorced from her first husband may return to him. There is no imperative that would demand a divorce and the writing of a certificate of divorce. A certificate of divorce and divorce itself are limited to one reason only, namely "some indecency."³¹ This phrase has been interpreted differently, as can be seen of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, but it seems to imply some kinds of sexual offense. Remarriage is regulated.

Jesus' second answer consists of a defense of Moses. At the same time, Jesus surpasses Moses in verse 8 with His authoritative statement, "I tell you." Jesus defends Moses when He clarifies that Moses has not given a command. In addition, He mentions the human hardness of

²⁷ Patte, p. 265, writes: "According to the Pharisees, Jesus contradicts Moses' *commandment* regarding divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1; Matthew 19:7)." They "deliberately challenge the authority of the Scripture quoted by Jesus. . . ."

²⁸ Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, reprint of the ed. of 1985 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 280.

²⁹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 426.

³⁰ See v. 3 and the motif of testing.

³¹ The phrase has been translated "anything indecent" or "indecency," and consists of two words (*'erwat dabar*). The second term (*dabar*) means "word," "saying," "matter," or "affair." The first term (*'erwat*) is rendered "nakedness" or "pudenda" and refers, for instance, to shameful exposure or sexual transgressions. Most frequently it appears in the context of sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 and in Ezekiel 16 and 23. The Ezekiel texts are found in the context of fornication. Together the two terms (*'erwat dabar*) occur in Deuteronomy 23:14 and 24:1 only Deuteronomy 23:13-15 deals with human excrements, whereas Deuteronomy 24:1 implies some sort of sexual misconduct. Some argue that "*'erwat dabar* does not include adultery. They state that adultery required the death penalty through stoning (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), but did not allow for the possibility of writing a certificate of divorce. It is correct that a man who had sexual relations with a married or engaged woman should die, the adulterer together with the adulteress. However, the death penalty in the case of adultery was not always executed. In the time of Jesus, Herod and Herodias (Matthew 14:3, 4) were not punished. This was not only the case if influential persons committed adultery. Hosea's adulterous wife was not executed (Hosea 3:1). Joseph originally planned to dismiss Mary, because he believed that she had an affair with another man. He did not attempt to have the death penalty inflicted upon her. Jesus prevented the Jewish leadership from executing the woman caught in adultery (John 8:5). In Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 the certificate of divorce is mentioned in a metaphorical way. Israel, presented as Yahweh's wife, received the certificate of divorce from God because of her adultery. A literal or metaphorical bill of divorce was written in the OT for "sexual" offenses only. Therefore, the indecency in Deuteronomy 24:1 may refer to smaller sexual offenses, but at times it may also include adultery.

heart as a reason for the concession Moses made. Divorce was practiced. Moses could not prevent such inhumane behavior in his generation and the subsequent generations to take place. He only could try to keep the damage to a minimum. So he allowed for divorce under certain circumstances but did not command it.³² His intentions were similar to those portrayed in the Creation account, although a certain openness to divorce was given.

Jesus continues: “. . . but from the beginning it has not been this way.” Divorce is not part of God’s plan. Jesus had already used the phrase “from the beginning” (*ap’ archês*) a moment ago in His first response to the Pharisees (v. 4). There it was connected to Creation, as it is here. The topic of Creation connects Jesus’ two answers to the Pharisees. Jesus’ entire argument rests on the Creation account. Whatever marriage meant right from the beginning is still valid and binding, especially in view of the coming of the Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, and it does not allow for divorce.³³ Already in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus went beyond the certificate of divorce, and replaced the permission for a divorce by His Own authoritative word, closing the door to the option of divorce except in the case of adultery.

The Mosaic legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was thus not normative but only secondary and temporary, an allowance dependent on the sinfulness of the people. In that context it served as a control against abuse and excess. . . . The implication is that the new era of the present Kingdom of God involves a return to the idealism of the pre-Fall Genesis narrative.³⁴

The *Adventist Bible Commentary* maintains:

However, Christ’s teaching here makes it clear that the provisions of Moses’ law with respect to divorce are quite invalid for Christians. . . . The law of Genesis 1:27; 2:24 preceded the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and is superior to it. . . . God has never repealed the law of marriage He enunciated in the beginning.³⁵

The second scene ends with the statement “I tell you.” Jesus assures His audience that whoever divorces his wife—He now employs the word for divorce (*apoluo*) used by the Pharisees—commits adultery if the following exception does not apply. This means that in its character, marriage is indeed permanent. In verse 6 Jesus categorically denies divorce. In verse 9 He adds: Even if someone gets a divorce, but it is against the clear testimony of Scripture, he or she is not free. Such a divorce and remarriage are adultery, because the first marriage is still valid in spite of the divorce.³⁶ Matthew 19 here adds a new dimension not found in Matthew 5. Whereas in Matthew 5:32 the wife commits adultery if she remarries, in Matthew 19:9 it is the husband.³⁷

Whereas in Matthew 5:32 a divorced woman marrying again commits adultery—obviously she is still considered to be married—in Matthew 19:9 a husband marrying another

³² Cf. Bruce, p. 110; Sand, p. 389; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible Commentary*, reprint of the ed. of 1972 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 280.

³³ Cf. Sand, p. 391.

³⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1995), pp. 548,549.

³⁵ Nichol, vol. 5, p. 454. Cf. also p. 337.

³⁶ Cf. Meyer, p. 339.

³⁷ Cf. Horst Reisser, “*Moicheuo*,” in *Theologisches Begrifflexikon zum Neuen Testament*, ed. by Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, vol. 1, pp. 199, 200 (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977), p. 200. Cf. Patte, p. 266.

woman commits adultery—he is still married, if the exception does not apply. Husband and wife are treated the same way. At the same time we notice that a comprehensive picture emerges if we allow all Biblical texts on a given topic to speak to us.

Matthew 19:9 contains almost the same exception clause as already mentioned in Matthew 5:32. Jesus allows one single reason only for which divorce is possible. This reason is *porneia*. But even in such a case the context urges us to forgive our partner and let go of our hardness of heart and stiff-neckedness.

Thus, the introductory question of the Pharisees is answered. Divorce for any reason? No. Divorce contradicts the plan of Creation and the will of God, Who has joined together husband and wife. The only exception is *porneia*. The different aspects of *porneia* are found in both Testaments. They include prostitution, premarital sexual relations, adultery, incest, and homosexuality; in short, sexual relations outside of the marriage.³⁸

In Matthew 19:9 the primary meaning of *porneia* may be adultery.³⁹ And indeed most of the important shades of meaning of *porneia* can be subsumed under the term adultery.

Mark and Luke do not use the exception clause in their passages dealing with divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18). Luke's statement is very short and consists of one verse only. Mark is different. There we find a passage comparable to the one in Matthew 19. However, the argument runs vice versa. In Matthew 19 Jesus refers to the Creation account first, and thus states the basic principle guiding us in matters of marriage and divorce before the specifics of the certificate of divorce are introduced. In Mark 10 Jesus begins with the specifics, namely the certificate of divorce, and inductively moves toward the general principle found in the Creation story. Once having reached the basic principle, specifics such as the exception clause hardly have a place. Therefore, Mark may have omitted it, although he may have known it. Hill states:

Most commentators regard these words as having been added by Matthew. . . . This is not necessary; if *porneia* means "adultery," then Jewish law *required* a man to divorce his wife if she committed that act. Indeed, this fact may be assumed in the other Gospels. . . but is spelled out only in Matthew. An adulterous relationship violated the order of Creation, with its monogamous ideal. Therefore if Jesus upheld the indissolubility of marriage on the basis of Genesis, He must have permitted divorce for that, and that alone, which necessarily contravened the created order.⁴⁰

However, the most crucial issue is not the exception clause itself but the question of whether or not the exception clause refers to divorce only or does also permit remarriage.⁴¹ There are slight differences between the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, although the basic message is the same. In some sense the two exception clauses are even complementary. In any case, the exception clauses do not require divorce, but allow for it.

³⁸ Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, "Fornication," <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>.

³⁹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 428.

⁴⁰ Hill, pp. 280, 281.

⁴¹ Against remarriage of a spouse who has not been involved in adultery argue, for instance, Bruce, p. 110; Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 428; and Hagner, p. 549; whereas remarriage in the same case is supported, e.g., by France, pp. 281,282; Keener, pp. 43, 44; Lillie, pp. 199, 120; David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. by Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 59; and Nichol, vol. 5, p.454.

- (1) Whoever divorces his wife, *except for the reason of porneia*, makes her commit adultery;
- (2) and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

According to Matthew 5:32, a man commits adultery by marrying a divorced woman. In case she has not committed adultery, her marriage seems still to be valid. Therefore, a new union with her is adultery. According to Matthew 19:9, however, a divorced man commits adultery by marrying any woman, if the exception does not apply. His marriage is still valid and would be harmed by a new union. Therefore, men have to take into account that they may not only damage a woman's still-existing marriage when they remarry; they may also harm their own marriage and must be concerned about what they are doing. They are not at liberty to do what they want.

- (1) Whoever divorces his wife, *except for porneia*,
- (2) and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

The main clause of the sentence is “he commits adultery.” Dependent on this main clause is a subordinate clause with two verbs and two objects, “whoever divorces his wife” and “and marries another.” Divorce (1) and remarriage (2) are adultery (fourth line).⁴² Therefore it can be assumed that the exception clause found right between (1) and (2) refers to both divorce and remarriage. Since the discussion with the Pharisees dealt primarily with divorce, it is understandable that the exception clause directly follows the phrase “divorces his wife” instead of coming at the end of the subordinate clause. Furthermore, the question must be raised, how else could Matthew have expressed this concept? Would it have been clearer if the exception clause had followed the phrase “and marries another”? Should he have repeated the exception clause? Would that have confused his audience?

The exception clause makes little sense if the spouse not having been involved in *porneia* would not have the right to remarry. A legitimate divorce allows for a legitimate remarriage. Because in the time of Jesus, as well as during OT times, remarriage after a divorce was possible, one would expect a similar situation for the NT.⁴³ Otherwise, the NT would need to state clearly that a new order had been established.

Sometimes those who are opposed to remarriage of the spouse not involved in *porneia* point to the understanding and practice of the church fathers, who maintained the same position. However, one has to keep in mind that in Biblical questions the church fathers were not always more faithful to Scripture than are Christians today. Problems with keeping Sunday arose already in the second century A.D. Many accepted the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. The concept of ecclesiastical offices, especially the importance and power of bishops, was

⁴² One might argue: The husband who does not divorce his wife but marries again does not commit adultery. However, such reasoning is untenable. The passage in Matthew 19 discusses the problem of divorce and not the issue of polygamy. However, as pointed out above, by His strong emphasis on the Creation order (Matthew 19:4-6, 8), Jesus clearly rejects polygamy.

⁴³ Cf. William Lillie, *Studies in New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 119,120: “Jewish divorce made the remarriage of the wife possible. . . . This was subject to the two limitations that a priest could not marry a divorced woman (Leviticus 21:7, 14), and that a man could not marry his own former wife, if in the meantime she had been married to another (Deuteronomy 24:4). . . . In view of contemporary Jewish practice, it is extremely unlikely that early Christian teaching permitted divorce but forbade remarriage, as some have imagined.”

hammered out, and the church was elevated to a level superior to Scripture. Some recommended asceticism.⁴⁴

Although with His exception clause, Jesus allows for divorce and remarriage in one specific case, the point of His message is the indissolubility of marriage. Therefore, we find statements without exceptions next to those that allow for an exception in the case of *porneia*. Still, the thrust of Jesus' statements is clear enough. For that very reason, the disciples react very strangely and seem to be offended (verse 10). This brings us to the last scene.

e. Verse 10

The disciples state: "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." The term "relationship," "cause," "reason" (*aitia*) occurred already in verse 3. The disciples may be referring back to the question of the Pharisees who had asked if it is possible to divorce one's wife for any reason (*aitia*). In spite of the exception clause, they understand the radical nature of Jesus' demand and feel restricted and boxed in. They take sides with the Pharisees, who because of their hardness of heart, were looking for ways to get out of marriage. And they make a radical suggestion: If there is no way out of, marriage, then it is better not to get married at all. It is not worth it. They cannot think about marriage without thinking also about divorce, and they do not see and do not understand the tremendous gift of marriage offered to them by God.

f. Verses 11, 12

Once again Jesus responds. It is His third answer: "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given." The question is, What is the antecedent of "this statement" (literally, "word")? Again, scholarly opinion differs. Either it refers to the answers Jesus gave to the Pharisees⁴⁵ or it refers to the statement that the disciples had made a moment ago.⁴⁶

If "this statement" should refer back to Jesus' Own words, it would destroy what Jesus tried to establish. It would mean that Jesus' claims with regard to marriage, and His prohibition of divorce (with the exception of *porneia*) could be observed by those only to whom it is given. This would mean that any obligation to follow divine principles would be done away with, and all who should violate God's will would have the excuse that it was not given to them to follow God's plan, will, and ideal. Ethics would break down. The suggestion that France makes, that Jesus' demands would be binding for those only whom God has called to a Christian marriage, is not helpful, either.⁴⁷ Since when are God's commandments binding for Christians only? Certainly, non-Christians may trample upon God's Law. But do they have the right to do so? Will God not judge them?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Cf. Keener, pp. 43, 44.

⁴⁵ E.G. Patte, p. 267.

⁴⁶ E.g. Hagner, pp. 549, 550; Hill, p. 281; Lillie, p. 125; Meyer, p. 340; Nichol, vol. 5, p. 455.

⁴⁷ Vgl. France, p. 282.

⁴⁸ Andrew Comes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 90, writes: "To what does the phrase 'this word' (11) refer? Much the most likely answer is that it refers to what has just been said: the disciples' view that if remarriage after divorce (at least in many, perhaps in all, circumstances) is out for the follower of Christ (cf. 9) then the wise course of action is not to marry (10). Jesus—perhaps to their surprise—does not dismiss this view out of hand. On the contrary, for some people this is precisely what God has 'given' (11). . . . The alternative view—that 'this word' means Christ's prohibition of divorce except for marital unfaithfulness (3-9) or His prohibition of remarriage (9)—is unsustainable. It seems impossible that, having introduced His conclusion with the solemn

It is better to understand Jesus as referring to the statement of the disciples. Surprisingly He does not reject it, but declares that indeed it is given to some—though not all—not to marry. For the majority of the people, God’s plan is marriage and not celibacy. In verse 12 Jesus enumerates three groups of eunuchs: (1) eunuchs who were born that way, (2) eunuchs who were made eunuchs by others, and (3) those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It seems that not all three groups are eunuchs in the literal sense. Obviously, the first group should be understood literally. The second group may also represent real eunuchs, men who by force have been made unfit for marriage. Cornes, however, suggests understanding the term figuratively, referring to divorced persons.⁴⁹ The last group may comprise people such as John the Baptist, who remain unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is important to recognize one’s calling and to accept it, no matter to which group one belongs, and no matter whether or not one has to suffer injustice. What is crucial is to agree with God’s will, plan, or permissive will for our life.⁵⁰

It is God’s gift to humans to understand the mystery of marriage as well as the mystery of celibacy. . . . Whereas the mystery of marriage is founded on God’s will with regard to Creation, the mystery of celibacy is founded on God’s will with regard to the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.”⁵¹

In Matthew 19:1-12 Jesus allows for two alternatives. Humans may marry and receive God’s good gift of marriage. This is part of God’s order of Creation. Humans may also choose to remain single for the sake of the Kingdom of God, if they have received a respective calling. However, the possibility of getting a divorce is not given except in the case of adultery.⁵² The emphasis is on the indissolubility of marriage and not its exception. This is where our focus must also be. Those who constantly concentrate on the exception and consider that normal, have misunderstood Jesus and have a hard heart.

IV. Implications for Us

When God constituted marriage, it was thought of to be a lifelong union between one man and one woman in which the two would complement each other and would contribute to the well-being of each other. The ideal of marriage allows for the comparison of marriage with Jesus and His church.

Jesus has reinforced the indissolubility of marriage. Mark and Luke emphasize this fact without mentioning an exception. Matthew lists exception clauses in chapters 5 and 19. Divorce destroys what God has joined together and is against God’s will. In case a divorce takes place anyway—except for *porneia*—there are only the possibilities of staying single or being

words: ‘I tell you’ (9), He would then go on to say that some may legitimately refuse His teaching because it hasn’t been given to them. . . .’ Nor can He be saying in 11: ‘Not all [people] accept His teaching, but only those [i.e., all Christians] to whom it has been given: stating the rather obvious fact that while Christians will observe His teaching on divorce and remarriage, those who are not Christians will not. This would make a strange, unconnected response to their outcry in 10; it also makes 12 (with its connection ‘for’) a strange, unconnected follow-on remark.”

⁴⁹ Vgl. Cornes, p. 92.

⁵⁰ Cf. Cornes, p. 93.

⁵¹ Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, p. 429 (translated).

⁵² Cf. Hagner, p. 550.

reconciled to the spouse. Remarriage, then, is no alternative. Obviously, the first marriage stays intact despite even divorce. A person who gets a divorce for any reason other than fornication and then remarries, commits adultery and violates God's laws, which are valid for all time. This is also true for someone who marries a divorced person, if this person is not divorced by the spouse on grounds of *porneia*.

If a spouse commits fornication, i.e., is guilty of sexual unfaithfulness, the other spouse who was not involved in such an act may get a divorce. However, even in this case the ideal is reconciliation.

The two exceptions for divorce, *porneia* and divorce by an unbelieving spouse, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 7, are different. Only in the first case can the spouse who was not involved in adultery request a divorce. In the other case, the believing partner is passive and does not take the initiative to get a divorce. Therefore, the only reason for which a church member can divorce his or her spouse is fornication.

In the two exceptional cases just mentioned, not only is divorce possible—as tragic as that is—but also the faithful partner or the believing partner who is divorced by the unbeliever may remarry.

When a marriage falls apart, the church is always affected. Therefore, the church must apply preventive care in order to prevent spouses from getting divorced, and it must react in a balanced and Biblical way if a marriage is threatened or a couple has been divorced. Not to react at all may be irresponsible. The goal of the church's involvement must be to help, to bring about healing, and to assist those who otherwise may become lost. In some cases, this may include church discipline and removing a person from church membership.

All believers are called to turn away from hardness of heart, to work on their marriages, to grant forgiveness and new beginnings, and to set an example of what a Christian marriage is all about. Where conditions are unhealthy, the Christian solution is to change the conditions, but not the partner. Even in cases that seem to be hopeless, we remember that the Lord Who has risen from the dead can also resurrect our marriages to new life.