

## From the Beginning

Matthew 19:8 says, "...but from the beginning it was not so." This familiar phrase is part of Jesus' response to the Pharisees who were quizzing Him about Moses permitting divorce. Jesus' famous response was, of course, referring to Genesis Chapter 2, verse 24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." WOW!! That is quite a response! Jesus is referring to a period of time that predates sin. Now that is a perfect marriage!

As my children get older, I attend more and more weddings. They are so beautiful. The message always includes the famous Matthew 19:6, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The vows also always include an "until death do us part" commitment which is a Biblically based covenant taken from Romans 7:2-3, "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." and from 1 Cor 7:39, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

Yes, weddings are beautiful. The message, the vows, and the covenant are not only beautiful for the couple being married but also such a perfect example of Christ's relationship with the church.

The message, the vows, and the covenant also seem to be so straight forward; so simple, direct, and easy to understand. So why do roughly half of all marriages end in divorce? I believe there are two reasons:

- 1) The vows of non-Christians are not truly "vows." At best they are well intended promises based solely on man's feeble efforts. Perhaps it is remarkable that half of these marriages survive!
- 2) Christians believe that scripture permits divorce. This is very unfortunate.

Divorce among non-Christians is not surprising. Besides, Romans 8:8 and Hebrews 11:6 tell us that nothing a non-Christian does pleases God so I will not address the issue of divorce amongst non-believers. My intent in this article is to address divorce amongst believers.

The passages mentioned above seem to be very clear. So why are so many Christians divorced? Some Christians use a passage or two to justify Christian divorce. However, these passages are always taken out of context with the balance of scripture.

Let's first look at Matthew 19. Scripture says, the Pharisees "tempted" Jesus about divorce; Matt 19:3. The word "tempted" was used because the Pharisees knew the answer to this question. Just as this is an unpopular subject today, it was an unpopular subject at that time. They knew that answering this question truthfully was going to cost Jesus some followers. Did Jesus "flinch?" Not in the least. "Truth" never bothered Jesus. Jesus threw the question right back at them, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh." Not only did Jesus answer their question, but by beginning His answer with "Have ye not read," He is confirming that they already knew the answer to this question. However, just in case there is any doubt, Jesus continued by saying, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

This is a direct answer to a direct question. It is short. It is sweet. And it is simple. It leaves no room for doubt. This response is so direct that it begs the question, “If our omnipotent God put it together, what makes mere man think it is even possible for him to take it apart?” A divorce court judge may be able to alter the legal responsibilities and obligations between two individuals, but it is not possible for a man to break a covenant made with God.

Ironically, it is this same Matthew 19 passage where some people believe that God has provided some sort of legal “exit strategy” or “get out of jail free” card. Skipping down a few verses, Jesus continues in verse 9, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” Some people insist that this “except for” clause permits divorce. The “logic” is fairly straight forward, and goes like this:

- IF divorce is legitimate, then marrying another would also certainly be legit.
- IF divorce is not legitimate, then marrying another would be committing adultery because that person is still married.
- SINCE this statement includes an “*except it be for fornication*” clause,
- THEN this person would not be committing adultery because the divorce would have been legitimate.

This "conclusion" drawn from Matt 19:9 (as outlined above) is certainly logical. As a stand-alone sentence, it passes all Boolean logic. I can't argue with that. However, this conclusion seems to contradict Matt 19:6 (and other passages) which allow for no exceptions. IF it does contradict Matt 19:6, then it would be "illogical." A passage cannot possibly be “logical” and “illogical” at the same time. Thus, let’s look at this exchange a little closer and consider this sentence in the context of the balance of the dialogue.

Let’s consider a similar exchange with similar grammar:

<p><b>Mat 19:3</b> The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?</p>	<p>Little Dare Devil Dennis is outside riding his bicycle with no hands. (He already knows his Mother does not approve.)</p>
<p><b>Mat 19:4-6</b> And he answered and said unto them, <b>Have ye not read, that he which made <i>them</i> at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.</b></p>	<p>When his mother saw Dare Devil Dennis riding his bicycle with no hands she quickly hollered out the window, “<b>Dennis, DO NOT ride your bicycle with no hands.</b>” (Notice her directive left no room for interpretation. The instructions were perfectly clear; period, no exceptions.)</p>
<p><b>Mat 19:7</b> They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?</p>	<p>Dare Devil Dennis (who always wants to challenge his mother) responds, “Ah, Mom. It’s OK. See?”</p>

<p><b>Mat 19:8-9</b> He saith unto them, <b>Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except <i>it be</i> for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.</b></p>	<p>To which his Mother responds, “<b>Dennis, Whosoever rideth his bicycle with no hands, except he miss all the ruts and pot holes, breaketh his neck!</b>”</p>
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Conclusions:

<p>It’s “OK” to divorce as long as my spouse has committed adultery.</p>	<p>It’s “OK” to ride my bicycle with no hands, as long as I miss the ruts and pot holes.</p>
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The illustration/analogy above is rather silly. (I agree.) However, by looking at the grammar of the Mother’s last sentence alone, “**Dennis, Whosoever rideth his bicycle with no hands, except he miss all the ruts and pot holes, breaketh his neck,**” one could easily conclude that it is “OK” to ride my bicycle with no hands, as long as I miss the ruts and pot holes. Taken alone, that sentence does not definitively indicate if riding with no hands is always forbidden. Similarly, the sentence of Mat 19:8-9 does not definitively indicate that divorce is “OK” (or not OK) depending on the spouse’s extramarital relationships. We cannot tell by this single sentence alone. To answer this question, we must consider the context of this particular exchange, other supporting passages in scripture, and the context of the New Testament as a whole. Let’s examine the various contexts available to us.

1) In verses 3-6 (as discussed above), Jesus provided a direct, straight forward answer. No exceptions were provided. In verse 7, the Pharisees continue in their attempt to “tempt” Him by badgering Him further. “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” So, Jesus’ response regarding fornication and adultery is after their continued badgering. What happened? Did Jesus change His mind?? Did the Pharisees break Him? Did Jesus recognize that He had quite a few divorced followers that He would lose if He did not soften His response? No way! Jesus never backed down to the interrogations of the Pharisees.

2) Continuing with the context, in verse 8 (also prior to the fornication and adultery response), Jesus responded to their question pertaining to Moses by saying, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.” This is a fascinating response for a variety of reasons.

- a) First and foremost, Jesus concludes by reiterating what He had already said, “from the beginning it was not so.” “The beginning” is clearly referring to Genesis Chapter 2; a perfect environment prior to sin.
- b) Some people claim that since Moses approved of divorce in the Old Testament, then it is OK in the New Testament. It is not my intent to cover the Old Testament law. God’s expectations for Christians are different from His expectations for the Old Testament Jews. (Matt 5:21-48, Acts 10:11-13, 11:5-7) So, let’s think about this from a “chain of command” perspective. That is like saying, “The General says, ‘don’t do...’ but the sergeant says ‘it’s OK,’ therefore it must be OK.” That would be a rather tough position to defend in a court martial.
- c) This passage does not say that Moses “approved” divorce. It says he “suffered” divorce. There is a big difference.

d) Jesus reminds them that it was due to their “hard hearts,” i.e. their “sin,” that Moses suffered divorce. Since when does it make sense that we can ever justify a questionable activity because of our sin? If the activity is questionable, we better have a better justification than our sin.

3) Let’s read the statement of question one more time. Once again, verse 9 states, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” What is this all about? I thought the Pharisees’ question pertained to “divorce,” not fornication and adultery. Did Jesus change the subject? Is He dodging the issue? No. “Context” is important. Let’s look at this same statement in Matthew Chapter 5. Remember the “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...” sayings? This is where Jesus raised the standard for us in 7 different areas of our lives.

Reference	Topic	Raising the Standard
Matt 5:21-26	Murder	Not only is murder wrong, but “anger” is just as bad.
Matt 5:27-30	Adultery	Not only is adultery wrong, but “lust” is just as bad.
Matt 5:31-32	Divorce	Not only is divorce wrong, but a man would be <u>causing</u> adultery as well.
Matt 5:33-37	Guidelines for oaths	Do not swear at all. Say “yea, yea” and “nay, nay” <u>only</u> .
Matt 5:38-42	Eye for eye	Go the extra mile.
Matt 5:43-47	Love your neighbor	Love your enemies as well.
Matt 5:48	{ Summary }	Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Notice that Jesus “raises the standard” for us in every case. It would be absurd to suggest that Jesus inserted a “lower standard” in the middle of this passage by providing a loophole for divorce. Let’s look at Jesus’ response to the issue of divorce in verse 32 a little closer. “That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

Once again, did Jesus change the subject? No, it would be very difficult for a divorced woman of that culture to support herself. Marrying another man would be a natural solution. So, Jesus is indicating that not only is the divorce wrong, but

- a) If she remarries she is in another sin; “adultery,” and
- b) He that marries this divorced woman is also in “adultery.”

People who believe that divorce is ok, base their entire argument on one word; the word “except,” (which, by the way, is not in some of the Greek manuscripts.) They are missing the key word, “and.” Look at the passage closely, “and shall marry another, committeth adultery and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” These are two sins in addition to the sin of divorce. Thus, if a man divorces his wife, he will be causing her to be in adultery if/when she marries again, and he that marries her will be in adultery. This would be the case even if the woman was pure and blameless at the time of the divorce. (What a terrible burden!)

So what is this exception, “saving for the cause of fornication” clause all about? Isn’t this my loophole? My exit strategy? My get out of jail free card?? Not in the least. This “parenthetical” clause pertains to causing her to commit adultery. If she was already in “fornication,” she would already be in adultery. In that case, obviously the divorcing husband would not be causing her to be in adultery; she would have

already been in adultery. In this case, just because he is not causing her to be in further sin (adultery) that does not negate his own sin of divorce. Nowhere in Matt 5 or Matt 19 does it say that a divorce is ever allowable. The context of the “adultery and fornication” phrases pertain to additional sin as is clearly indicated in Romans 7:3, “So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” It is heartbreaking that the beautiful concept of “until death do us part” described in Romans 7 it used as a “divorce loophole” in Matthew 19.

It should also be noted that a similar dialogue can be found in Mark 10 and Luke 16. However, these dialogues do not include the phrase “saving for the cause of fornication.” Jesus simply concludes His statements by saying, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” The issue of causing the spouse to commit adultery is not addressed in this passage. Jesus’ clear command is, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Furthermore, it should also be noted that 1 Timothy 5 goes into great detail as to how and when to care for widowed women. Why? Because they are so destitute. In this passage the subject of a “divorced woman” is conspicuously absent. Yet – a divorced woman would be just as destitute as a widowed woman. Did Paul somehow “forget” about the divorced women? Not likely.

The next passage that people seem to use to justify divorce is 1 Cor 7. Using 1 Cor 7 to “justify” divorce requires some playing with words. If I ask, “Is divorce ok?” my question is somewhat vague. Generally the question of divorce is, “Is it ok for me to divorce my spouse?” These questions are very different. The passage that is used to justify divorce is verse 15: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”

When a person asks, “Is divorce ok?” the intent of the question is generally, “Is it ok for me to divorce my spouse?” 1 Cor 7:15 does not address that question at all. The context here is, “What do I do if my unbelieving spouse divorces me?” Notice two aspects of this passage:

- 1) It pertains to my response to my spouse, who is an unbeliever, and
- 2) It pertains to the departure of this unbeliever, not the departure of the believer. The response to the believer is, “let the unbeliever depart.”

I will not address the question “is it ok” for the departing unbeliever. As mentioned before, the unbeliever can do nothing to please God. (Romans 8:8 and Hebrews 11:6.) The question for tis article is, “What is the role of the believer?”

There is one other “caution” with respect to this passage. Christians aware of this passage sometimes “taunt” their unbelieving spouse into divorce. The believing spouse does not file for divorce; they let the unbelieving spouse do that. Then, the believing spouse can play their “let him depart” card and then readily agree to “his request” for a divorce. After all, since my unbelieving spouse filed the divorce papers, 1 Cor 7:15 gives me permission (justification), right? Wrong! Verses 12 and 13 refute that notion. “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.” God knows the heart of the believing spouse. God knows when a believer has “taunted” their unbelieving spouse into filing for divorce.

Yes – people will also say that this is Paul speaking, not God. But Paul continues in verse 14 and explains why this principle is valid. “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy

husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” Consequently, if a Christian wants to play their “This is Paul speaking, not the Lord” card, then that spouse is also disregarding their role and responsibility as a Christian witness to their unbelieving spouse. That responsibility comes from the Lord, not Paul.

We now need to return to the practical ramifications of the “except for fornication” card. Let’s consider these “proposed” principles of Matt 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:12-13 together.

1 Cor 7:12-13            A believer should not leave an unbelieving spouse.

Matt 19:9                If an individual violates the “except for fornication” clause, the spouse can divorce him.

Let’s see how this mindset plays out. Bonnie and Clyde are both married; but not to each other. Both of their spouses have been wondering where they have been until they read about the murders and bank robberies in the newspapers. Bonnie’s husband and Clyde’s wife want a divorce. The pastor asks them if Bonnie and Clyde have been sleeping together. The spouses certainly expect that they have, but don’t know for sure. The pastor informs them that 1 Cor 7:12-13 forbids divorce in this situation. Later, Bonnie’s husband notices Bonnie and Clyde (at least he thinks it was them) sitting in the back seat and plays the Matt 19:9 “except for fornication” card. Free at last!!

Does that scenario make any sense?? Does Matt 19:9 “disallow” divorce for murder and robbery yet allow it for sexual sins? Is our “sex life” the most important aspect of our marriage? Is this what Matt 19:9 teaches?? Not when you look at it in context.

Aside from our relationship to Christ, our relationship to our spouse is the most special relationship we can have. Reading scripture in “context” is imperative. We have discussed Matt 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:15 within their “local” context. Now let’s look at a much “broader” context; a full “New Testament” view.

Matt 9:15, Mark 2:19, Luke 5:34	Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them
Matt 22:2	The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son
Matt 25:1	Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom
John 3:29	He that hath the bride is the bridegroom
2 Cor 11:2	for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ
Eph 5:23	For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church
Eph 5:24	Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing
Eph 5:25	Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it
Eph 5:27	That he might present it to himself a glorious church
Eph 5:31-32	For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church
Rev 19:7	for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready
Rev 19:9	Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb
Rev 21:2	prepared as a bride adorned for her husband
Rev 21:9	Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife

In EVERY one of these passages (and I am sure there are more), God parallels “marriage” to His relationship to believers. This analogy runs strong from Matthew to Revelation! What an incredible parallel and beautiful picture IF we look at it properly. Let’s look at this parallel. What specifically is this analogy all about? Is it:

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| 1) Living under the same roof?     | No |
| 2) The tax advantages of marriage? | No |
| 3) Sharing the same toothbrush?    | No |
| 4) Procreation?                    | No |
| 5) Sexual relationships?           | No |
| 6) Love?                           | No |

“Love” is certainly the closest analogy so far, but, IF Matt 19:9 provides for divorce, then this analogy can ONLY be valid for those who consider God’s relationship to us as being “conditional.” IF one believes that any one single/specific sin can permanently separate a believer from God, then “conditional love” is a valid analogy here. Otherwise, we have not identified God’s intended analogy. So far, we are missing the obvious and most extraordinary analogy ever:

- 7) Our assurance of a loving unconditional relationship with Christ **YES!**

Why is this analogy of marriage; a man with a woman, and Christ with the church, stated all throughout the New Testament? “Once the knot is tied, the relationship here on earth is characterized by unconditional love, respect, and responsibility.” The key here is “unconditional.” Marriage between a “man and a woman” or between “Christ and the church” is characterized by unconditional love, respect, and responsibility. As with any analogy, all have their limitations. However – the “marriage / church of Christ” analogy has virtually no meaning if it is conditional. If marriage between a man and a woman is “conditional,” then the marriage described by the church and Christ is also “conditional.” If marriage between a man and woman is conditional, how can any other analogy of Christ and the Church not include a conditional connotation?

Also, in the context of the N.T. as a whole, if adultery is the only cause for divorce, then sex is elevated to the highest level in matrimony. (If some other aspect was elevated higher, then it would also prompt grounds for divorce.) Elevating sex to the highest level of marriage totally butchers phrases like Eph 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church,...*

1 Cor 7:15 fits this analogy just as well. For the unbeliever, “assurance” is irrelevant. Furthermore, if we consider the “except for” clause of Matt 19:9 to be a condition of marriage and IN context with the balance of scripture, then we have no “assurance” of our salvation. If this is the case, the marriage analogy all through the New Testament carries a very disappointing message of our relationship with Christ. This crippled view of marriage is the message that Satan would like Christians to believe about their assurance of salvation!

By now the obvious question is, “With the scriptures so clear, why do so many people believe that divorce is ok in the case of fornication?” Divorce was common enough in Jesus’ day that even His disciples found this teaching difficult to accept. Mat 19:10 “His disciples say unto him, ‘If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.’” Jesus’ response was telling, “But he said unto them, ‘All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.’” (Mat 19:11) Obviously Jesus was right. Today is no different. Many people “cannot receive this saying;” just as Jesus had indicated.

So far we have been discussing the Biblical aspects of divorce with a few “extensions” of the applications for illustrative purposes. However, we also need to address the “practical” aspects of believing that divorce is sometimes permitted. Once again, these comments pertain to Christians only.

Sometimes the behavior of our pets can comically illustrate common principles. When I was a teenager, our family owned a dog. Our next door neighbor owned a cat. As you may already expect, the two hated each other. Both families consciously and constantly took steps to keep these two animals apart from each other. However (I have no idea how this happened), my Mother and I visited our next door neighbor and as we entered the house, our dog somehow slipped between our feet and got into the house. The door closed behind us. The next thing you knew, the dog and the cat were in the living room together. You could clearly see the look in their eyes, KILL! But what took place next stunned us all. Both animals looked at each other (as if looks could kill). Next they looked around the room. The doors were closed. No means of escape existed. They looked at each other. They looked around the room. Then, at the same time, they both sat down and quietly tolerated the situation.

When a couple approaches the altar, they make a lifelong covenant with God. The wedding vows never include an “except for” clause. So how can “divorce” ever be an option? How would they even truthfully pray this through? “Dear Lord, I didn’t really mean those vows.” Or, “Well, actually, I had my fingers crossed.” At the altar, they have one of two beliefs; either divorce is not an option, or it is an option. These are the only two beliefs. Let’s face it; everyone has different personalities, tastes, preferences, Biblical views, etc. Married couples will inevitably incur stressful situations. How they handle these situations is significantly determined by what they believe about divorce.

1) If they believe that marriage is truly a life commitment, a covenant with God with no “fire escape,” they will tend to work things out and they will tend to get along even when things are not worked out. This is similar to the dog and the cat in the room with no exit. As uncomfortable as that situation was for those two animals, they sat down quietly and tolerated the situation. Their whole demeanor changed.

2) On the other hand, if they believe that divorce is an option (regardless of how difficult they believe it is to obtain), they know that there is (in a worst case scenario) a way out. This is similar to the dog and the cat when they were not in the same room. They knew that if the situation got too tough, they could always retreat. That being the case, the ability to tolerate the stress of the relationship, is substantially reduced. Biblical teaching about how a husband and wife should treat each other is certainly helpful. However, even if they have no expectations of ever needing it, they have already “looked around the room,” and they know that the backdoor is not locked.

So how does this play out? When I was in college, I was taught that marriage must always be a 50:50 relationship. It wasn’t until years later that I realized how foolish and ridiculous that mindset is! A 50:50 relationship is doomed to failure. A marriage must always be a 100:100 relationship. Any other mindset suggests that “I only have to go so far. My spouse has to meet me the rest of the way.” This relationship is plagued by one spouse always trying to change the other. If the other doesn’t live up to “expectations,” they soon remember, “the back door is unlocked.” They fail to remember that the only thing we should/could “expect” is to die and go to hell – that is – if it weren’t for that permanent loving covenant that Christ made with us.

By the time a married couple begins the divorce process, they remind me of the dog and cat in the yard. How did a couple that “loved” each other so much at the altar come to “hate” each other now? It’s the same two people! It is often said that divorce is only allowable in unusual, extreme situations. However, what follows is neither unusual nor extreme. It is fully normal and expected.

A couple is not getting along. Their relationship is dominated by friction, tension, bitterness, and hurt. Both of these individuals have a better relationship with any other person, and every other person, of the opposite sex than they do with their spouse. No other person gives them so much grief an agony. So – relationships with people of the opposite sex will grow. This is not a statement of intent or deceit. Neither is it “unusual” or “extreme.” It is merely an honest assessment of the current situation. What happens next is also neither “unusual” nor “extreme.” The natural desire for attention and affection strengthens external relationships. This, of course, threatens the spouse and sends the marriage further down the tubes. Whether an inappropriate activity has occurred or not is almost irrelevant. This is my “get out of jail free” card. “I want a divorce.” The accusation is made. It is impossible for a pastor to verify.

James 1:15 (and numerous other places in scripture) tells us, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” The next thing you know, one of the two has an affair. The sin is revealed and the “get out of jail free” card is now available. “I want a divorce.” To the one that sinned, “I backslid. It was a one time event. I’m not really that way. But if you {my spouse} want to file for divorce, it’s better than continuing in grief and agony.” Justification. It wasn’t a very “clean” break, but the end result is the same; an end to the “bondage.” Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things,…” Such is the “justification” of one in such deep emotional pain. To a spouse looking for a way out, accepting a momentary sinful event (even if that sinful event is my own) is far better than the prolonged cruel bondage of the deteriorating marriage.

None of this was unusual or extreme. It was a natural progression that would have never started if only the back door was locked “from the beginning.” By this point it does not matter that a church teaches that God hates divorce. All discouragement from divorce will fall on deaf ears. If any door for divorce is open, it will be used as such. The pain is simply too great to listen to any other teaching.

#### Summary:

- 1) Passages that “seem” to indicate that it is ok to divorce your spouse are taken out of context.
  - a. 1 Cor 7: It is said that verse 15 “let him depart” provides permission for divorce. This statement does not give the Christian permission. Verses 12 and 13 specifically prohibit a Christian from divorcing a non-Christian spouse. No exceptions for any specific sins are included.
  - b. Matt 19: It is said that verse 9 “except it be for fornication” provides justification for divorce. This is out of context in several respects:
    - i. Continuing in verse 9, the object of the “except for” is “committeth adultery” not “divorce.” To contend that Jesus approved of divorce in this verse is to say, “I know that Jesus said ....{*this*}...., but what He really meant was .....{*that*}.....” The purpose of this article is to contend that what Jesus “said” and what He “meant” are one in the same.
    - ii. Jesus had already categorically answered the Pharisees question in verse 6, “let not man put asunder.”
    - iii. After continued badgering by the Pharisees, His response in verses 8 and 9 are to the effect, “not only is the divorce wrong, but so is remarriage after divorce.”
  - c. Matt 5:21-48 supports this. In this passage Jesus “raised” the standard for Christians in seven areas of our lives. It would make no sense that Jesus “lowered” the standard for the one listed in the middle.
- 2) Many passages clearly indicate that divorce is not allowable.
  - a. Rom 7:2-3 and 1 Cor 7:39: Tell us that marriage is until “death do us part,” no exceptions.

- b. Matt – Rev: In over a dozen passages, Scripture paints a beautiful analogy between the marriage of a man and women and the marriage between Christ and the Church. If a Christian can divorce their spouse, this analogy, at best, implies “conditional salvation.”
  - c. 1 Tim 5: Paul goes into great detail as to how and when to (and how and when not to) care for widows. Divorced women would be just as destitute yet any reference at all to divorced women is conspicuously absent.
- 3) God’s word is practical as well.
- a. Christian vows include no “escape clause.” The marriage bond/covenant is made with God; “what God hath put together, let no man put asunder.”
  - b. If a Christian believes that the back door is unlocked, it is much easier for his Jer 17: 9 (deceitful heart) to “justify” divorce, even if it means acknowledging “backslid sin.”
- 4) Believing that divorce is “OK” actually redefines the word “marriage.”
- a. The Bible teaches us that “marriage” is a covenant between the man and woman with God.
  - b. On the other hand, for those who believe that divorce is ok, then “marriage” is a conditional relationship between the man and the woman.

So, in conclusion, believing that a Christian can divorce their spouse (for any reason) is:

- a) unscriptural, and
- b) destructive.

AuxtBCR deals primarily with the subject of creation and the book of Genesis. Why so much emphasis on divorce? Because this is one more significant example of the mindset that, once an individual chooses which sections of scripture to accept or reject, that process of “personal choice” extends to other major sections of scripture with very serious consequences.

So – Remember, Matthew 19:8 “...but from the beginning it was not so.”

Jay Auxt