

16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

16:15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

In verses 11 to 13 Jesus had said that the one who is unfaithful in the use of wealth will *not* be entrusted with spiritual riches. He also made it clear that the one who loves money cannot serve God for no one can serve two masters. The Pharisees were lovers of money, so quite naturally, they were offended by Jesus' comments and began scoffing at Him.

Most people are good at justifying their behavior and the Pharisees were no exception, but Jesus reminded them that God sees the heart and what He saw was detestable.

16:16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

Verse 16 is a minefield of problems resulting in numerous interpretations.

Jesus divided God's program into two distinct periods: the time in which men were under the law and the prophets, and the time in which the gospel of the kingdom is preached. These divisions represent the era of promise and the era of fulfillment with John the Baptist as the transitional figure. John belonged to the old era in terms of his function; he was the pointer of the new age inaugurated by Jesus (Lk. 3:1-6, 15-20; 7:18-35; Acts 10:37; 13:34-35; Bock, 1351).

The era of the law and the prophets prepared people for the coming of Christ. In Luke 24:44-45 Jesus said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Also see Acts 3:11-26. The message of the kingdom was no longer proclaimed as a distant reality, but in terms of newness and arrival; there was a new era and new authority (Bock, 1351).

The latter half of verse 16 is particularly difficult.

"the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it."

There are three main problems that arise when trying to interpret this:

1) The meaning of the verb "forcing" (βιάζω) is in question.

First, the verb has a number of different meanings. It can mean "to violate, to force, to oppress, to urge" (Garland 660), to insist, to enter (Bock, 1352)"

Secondly, in Greek, the form of the verb can be either a passive or a middle voice. If it is a passive voice, the people spoken of would be acted upon and it would be translated as "everyone is being forced into" the kingdom; if it is a middle voice, the people would be acting for themselves and it would be

translated as “everyone is forcing his way into” the kingdom. Most Bible translations take the verb as a middle voice.

2) Furthermore, there is the question as to whether the verb has a negative or a positive connotation in the context. Is the force being exerted against the kingdom? That is, are people opposing it and trying to oppress it or are they forcing their way in (zealously trying to enter it)?

3) Lastly, there is a question about the relationship of this passage to Matthew 11:12–13.

Matthew 11:12-13 says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John."

Is the content of Matthew 11:12-13 related to Luke 16 or are the passages unrelated?

The following possible interpretations have resulted:

VIEW 1: Jesus is saying that the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and all act violently against it; that is, the kingdom is subject to universal opposition. In the immediate context, those who oppose the kingdom would be the Pharisees.

In this view the verb is taken as a middle voice, negative in connotation, and the interpretation is connected to the passage in Matthew 11.

Objections to this view: (1) Although the words “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew 11:12 and “kingdom of God” in Luke 16:16 represent the same idea, the rest of the imagery in the two passages is very different (Schrenk, TDNT, I, 609, 610, 612). (2) If Jesus were saying that all act violently against the kingdom of God, we would expect the latter half of verse 16 to *contrast* the beginning of the verse: "The gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, *BUT* everyone is opposing it." (3) Such a statement seems to be overly pessimistic, as *all* were not opposing the kingdom; some believed and followed Jesus.

VIEW 2: Jesus is saying that the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and people try to violently bring the kingdom to the earth by force of arms. That is, some wanted to establish the kingdom through force, and in their efforts they prevented people from entering it (Schrenk, TDNT, I, 611). In Matthew 23:11 Jesus said, “woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.” This reflected the mindset of the Jewish zealots.

In this view, the verb is taken as a middle voice and it has a negative connotation, but it is *not connected* to Matthew 11.

Objections to this view: (1) This view has the same problem as VIEW 1 - we would expect the latter half of verse 16 to contrast the beginning of the verse. (2) There has been no mention of political opposition to Jesus at all. What would prompt Jesus to suddenly start talking about zealots?

VIEW 3: Jesus is saying that the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone tries to force their way into it. That is, people are trying to enter the kingdom so earnestly that their

behavior can be described as forceful entry (Morris, 274). This is the interpretation taken by the translators of the ESV, NASB, and the NIV.

In this view the verb is taken as a middle voice, but there is a *positive* connotation.

In favor of this view over views 1 and 2, the Greek speaks of people coming “*into* (εἰς αὐτὴν) the kingdom” not coming “*against* (πρὸς or ἐπὶ) it.”

One objection to this view is that it seems overly optimistic considering the intensity of the opposition to Jesus’ ministry. Even the immediate context is hostile; Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for scoffing at Him.

VIEW 4: Jesus is saying that the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone *is being urged* to come into it, or it could mean, “the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone *is being pressed* into it”(Edwards, 463).

In this view, the verb is taken as a *passive* voice with a positive connotation. The “pressing” is not something that people do, but is what God’s redemptive love does; God compels people to enter into the kingdom (Edwards 464). In spite of the fact that the Pharisees were hostile toward Jesus, He continued to urge them to enter it. He presented the message and hope of salvation to all (see Lk. 14:15-24).

This view is supported by the fact that the intensive form of the same verb (παραβιάζομαι) means “*urged*” (Lk. 24:29; NASB) or “*persuaded*” (Acts 16:15; NIV). In the Greek translation of the OT it also meant “to urge” or to “invite incessantly” (Gen, 33:11; Jdg. 13:15-16; 19:7; 2 Sam. 13:25, 27; 2 Ki. 5:23 in the LXX: Bock, 1353, n.18; Garland 661). In addition, this would make the expression parallel with the passive “is proclaimed” in the first clause: “the kingdom is proclaimed . . . and . . . people are urged to enter.”

Objections to this view are that the verb naturally refers to a forced, not a voluntary act; an act that is hostile, not laudable (Schrenk, TDNT, I, 610). In Matthew 11:12 it is translated as “suffer violence.”

Therefore, it is probably best to hold any interpretation tentatively.

16:17 "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail."

If the era of the law and the prophets has ceased (16:16), what has become of the law? Has it failed? No, the Law has not failed! It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

The law points to the kingdom. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus, the Pharisees, and the disciples still stood under the Law. The Law provided the indispensable pre-text and context for the gospel (Garland, 464). The Law accomplished all that it was intended to accomplish. Since the Pharisees loved the Law, they should embrace Jesus to whom the Law pointed.

Jesus then uses the covenant of marriage as an example of the unchanging nature of the Law. As Garland says, “The divorce saying has a figurative function that reinforces the point that Jesus’ teaching and the Law and the prophets cohere” (Garland, 662).

16:18 "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."

The Law first speaks of marriage in Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” This was the passage that Jesus founded His view of marriage upon, and from which He drew His conclusions about divorce. According to Jesus, when God declared that male and female become one flesh, He was stating that they had entered into a permanent and indissoluble union. The “Law and the prophets” (the OT) ordained this state, which represents the divine will expressed in creation (Edwards, 466).

This went against the Judaism of His time, according to which a husband had freedom to divorce his wife and remarry. Jesus also condemned marrying a divorced woman which Jewish law allowed. Instead He pronounced “that for a man to divorce his wife and remarry is tantamount to adultery on his part, and likewise for a man to marry a divorced woman is to commit adultery. The statement is essentially the same as that in Matthew 5:32” (Marshall, 630).

NOTES on DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE:

Divorce continues to be prevalent in our culture among Christians and non-Christians alike. The following does not represent the position of our church, but is my personal understanding about what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. These conclusions guide my own life and teaching, and dictate the degree in which I will be involved in officiating weddings. The following view was not my original understanding of divorce and remarriage, but has become my opinion as I studied the Scriptures more thoroughly throughout the years.

In a nutshell, I believe that the most coherent understanding of divorce and remarriage is the following: (1) Restitution in marriage is always preferred over divorce. (2) In some cases, divorce is inevitable or allowed as a concession. (3) Remarriage is always prohibited except where a spouse has died (I am still undecided about whether Matthew 19:9 makes immorality an exception to the prohibition on remarriage, or not – see below).

The following is a *brief survey* of the most significant texts on the subject and explains why I have drawn the conclusions I have. Although we may disagree over these conclusions, every Christian must live according to his or her own conscience and should allow a serious study of the Bible to form their convictions.

INTRODUCTION:

1) The original state of marriage is found in Genesis 2:24. Jesus applies this in Mark 10:6-9. There He says, "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Marriage is God's design; it is not just a cultural custom invented by man. This is seen in Genesis 1:27-28 where God created people as male and female and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. Then it is seen also in Genesis 2:18 when God declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" and in Genesis 2:24 when God said, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

Not only is marriage God's design for humanity, Genesis 2:24 shows that marriage is a permanent bond in which two become "one flesh" (they are unified mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, as well as knit together by love and mutual respect). The oneness of marriage is so complete that marriage is chosen to picture the union between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:31-32); the church expresses solidarity and unity with Christ just as man and woman become one through marriage. We understand what this oneness is when we consider that being united with Christ means we died with Him, were raised with Him, and are seated with Him in heavenly places; His experiences and His life become our experiences and our life. On the highest level of being, our union with Christ is compared to the union that exists between the Persons of the Trinity in the Godhead. This is staggering, but it is the case (Jn. 14:23; 17:21-23; Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*). For Paul to use marriage as an image to describe this union helps us see how deep the oneness in marriage really is. In Genesis 2:22-23 it says that male and female literally came from one flesh; through marriage the two become one flesh again.

Initially, all divorce was inconceivable.

2) Although marriage is God's design, it was corrupted by the sinfulness of the human heart. This led to a period of compromise.

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Moses addressed the problem of divorce. The meaning of the passage hinges on a long series of conditional sentences. This is brought out in the following paraphrase: "*If* a man takes a wife. . . and *if* he finds some indecency in her, and *if* he writes her a certificate of divorce and sends her out of his house. . . and *if* she becomes another man's wife . . . and *if* her second husband divorces her or *if* he dies then her first husband must not marry her again since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD . . ."

This became the proof-text on divorce and re-marriage used by the rabbis.

Some important observations need to be made about what these verses actually say and don't say.

1. These verses treat divorce as a fact rather than legislation in favor of it. They presuppose the existence of divorce and remarriage (cf. Lev. 21:7, 14; Num. 30:9); Moses is regulating the situation after a divorce for indecency has occurred.

2. These verses are mostly concerned about prohibiting the re-marriage of the woman to her former husband after divorce (cf. Jer. 3:1).

3. Although divorce is taken for granted, verse 4 says that the woman who is divorced was "defiled" by her remarriage. This implies that remarriage *after* divorce defiles a person. In this case even if her second husband died, she was not permitted to remarry her first husband. In other words, divorce in the Mosaic Law did not legitimize remarriage.

Divorce in the OT was an attempt to limit human sinfulness (Brooks, Mark, 157). Jesus said that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did not reflect the true creation ordinance, but was necessary because of the hardness of men's hearts (Lk. 16:18; Matt. 19:8). If Moses permitted divorce, he did so because sin was so vile that divorce was preferred to continued indecency. Though the nature of the indecency is not specified, it is probably best to assume that it was something less than adultery since adultery was a capital offense (Deut. 22:22-27; Lev. 20:10).

Whatever view of divorce one might take, it should never be thought of as a God-ordained, morally neutral option; it is the evidence of sin and the hardness of the human heart in rebellion against God (Carson, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew, 413, 417).

BIBLICAL PASSAGES THAT PROHIBIT DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1) Luke 16:18: Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

This verse states that divorce does not terminate marriage. This is borne out by the fact that to remarry after a divorce is called adultery (***Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery***). If divorce dissolved or erased the previous marriage, remarriage would not be adulterous, it would be morally neutral. The fact that Jesus calls remarriage adultery even *after* divorce means that divorce does not break the original marriage covenant.

Furthermore, anyone who marries someone who was previously married also commits adultery (***he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery***). This is because there is the assumption that one who was married is still bound to the spouse of their first marriage. Divorce does not break that union. Therefore, to marry someone who is divorced would be tantamount to marrying someone's wife, which is adultery.

"Since there are no exceptions mentioned in the verse, and since Jesus is clearly rejecting the common cultural conception of divorce as including the right of remarriage, the first readers of this gospel would have been hard-put to argue for any exceptions on the basis that Jesus shared the cultural assumption that divorce for unfaithfulness or desertion freed a spouse for remarriage" (Piper, ©2012 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org).

2) Mark 10:2-12

2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

4 They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY."

5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

6 "But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.

7 "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER,

8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.

9 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

In verse 2 the Pharisees asked Jesus if divorce was legal. There is no evidence that they denied the legitimacy of divorce or that divorce was an issue under dispute. Probably, the intent of the question was what constituted justifiable grounds for divorce (Brooks, Mark, 155; France, NIGTC, Mark, 390; Lane, NICNT, Mark, 353) or perhaps they were wanting Jesus to comment about the actions of Herod in marrying his brother's wife – an action that resulted in the beheading of John the Baptist when he opposed it.

Jesus responded by asking them what Moses had *commanded* (10:3); they responded by stating what Moses *permitted* and quoted Deuteronomy 24:1; **"Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."**

Jesus rejected their answer. Deuteronomy 24:1 would not even exist were it not for the gross immorality that had disregarded the marriage ordinance set forth by God in Genesis 2:24. As Jesus says, it was **"because of your hardness of heart he (Moses) wrote you this commandment."** It was rebellion against the will of God that provided the occasion for Moses to write Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Lane, NICNT, Mark, 354). Moses' "permission" was in reality, "regulation" after a divorce had taken place, not an endorsement of divorce (France, 391).

The Pharisees failed to honor and encourage people to obey God's intention for marriage (**from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female (Gen. 1:27) for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).**) They had chosen a post-fall condition as the rule to guide their lives instead of the pre-fall design of marriage established by the authority of God; they had chosen to use provisions meant to limit sin as the standard for living.

The crux of Jesus' argument is found in the words, "the two shall become one flesh" and "they are no longer two, but one flesh." In marriage, a man and a woman become one being; their union is permanent; they are no longer two; they can't be torn apart; they are bound together by God. The implication is that marriage is a life-long union.

Is it lawful for a man to divorce? Jesus' answer was that divorce is not lawful; it is a concession, the lesser of two evils. Furthermore, even when divorce takes place, it does not nullify the one-flesh union in marriage. Therefore, any marriage that involves a divorcee is adulterous.

In Judaism divorce was accepted and always included the right to remarry. Jesus' comments were so radically different from His culture, the disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing; once they were alone with Jesus they began to question Him.

10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again.

11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her;

12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

In verses 3-9 Jesus answered the Pharisees' question about the legality of divorce. However, because remarriage often followed divorce and because it was the theme of Deuteronomy 24:1, Jesus expanded upon the implications of divorce and remarriage.

Without qualification Jesus says whoever divorces his wife and gets remarried is committing adultery against her (i.e. the wife he divorced). Because the one-flesh union of marriage is inseparable, remarriage is a sin against God, the divorced wife, and the new spouse. It disregards the union that had taken place and the covenant promises made to one's wife.

Jesus' comments in Mark are essentially the same as Luke 16:18; the only difference is that in Mark 10 the woman is also condemned for initiating a divorce or marrying a divorced man.

The conclusion is that not only is divorce contrary to God's will, remarriage is adulterous.

The practical application of this teaching in a society in which both adultery and divorce are common and legally permissible cannot be straightforward. But Mark's Jesus offers no direct guidance on the problem, simply a clear, unequivocal, and utterly uncompromising principle that marriage is permanent and divorce (together with the resultant remarriage) is wrong. Whatever the other considerations which pastoral concern may bring to bear, some of them no doubt based on values drawn from Jesus' teaching on other subjects, no approach can claim His support which does not take as its guiding principle the understanding of marriage set forth in vv. 9 and 11-12 (France, NIGTC, Mark, 394).

3) 1 Corinthians 7:39

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

4) Romans 7:1-3

Do you not know, brethren—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during his life? 2 Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning her husband. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Both 1 Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2 explicitly say that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. No exceptions are mentioned that would suggest she could be free from her husband to remarry.

Furthermore, it would be misleading for Paul to say that a woman is bound to her husband *as long as he lives* if he knew that divorce also nullified a marriage. Being a Pharisee himself he would surely be aware of the issues of the day and not set himself up to have his logic challenged so easily.

5) 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

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

In verse 10, Paul addresses a Christian woman who is married to a Christian man (verses 12ff. will address Christians married to unbelievers). Paul says that a wife should not leave her husband (7:10). Then, in verse 11, Paul says that a husband should not divorce his wife (7:11). In verses 10 and 11 (and throughout this passage) “leaving a spouse” and “divorce” appear to be synonyms.

Although believers are commanded not to divorce a spouse, Paul is also aware that some in the church will be disobedient and will leave their husbands or have left their husbands already. If that is the case, they should realize that there is no possibility of re-marriage. Whoever leaves their spouse only has two options: they must remain unmarried, or be reconciled.

Paul believed that his comments in verses 10 and 11 reflected what the Lord had said during His public ministry (*I give instructions, not I, but the Lord*).

DISPUTED PASSAGES**1) 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, 15**

***12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.
13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.***

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, Paul had addressed Christians with believing spouses (see above). Now he addresses “the rest.” “The rest” is vague, but it appears to be a reference to those in mixed marriages (Christians married to unbelievers). Although Paul admits that Christ did not address this particular issue (**“to the rest I say, not the Lord”**), his words are still authoritative. As an apostle, Paul was Christ’s spokesman. What he wrote is God’s inspired word to the church. Later, he will give his opinion (7:25ff.) which is clearly a suggestion, not a command.

Verse 12 gives instruction to a (Christian) **“brother”** who has an unbelieving wife. Paul says if his wife is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. The same is true of a Christian woman who is married to an unbeliever (v. 13). This agrees with 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 – a Christian should not divorce a spouse whether they are a believer or an unbeliever.

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

Although a Christian is obligated to stay in the marriage (7:10-11), an unbeliever may not feel that obligation. Therefore, it is possible for an unbelieving spouse (someone who does not acknowledge the authority of Christ) to initiate a divorce. In such cases, Paul says to let them leave.

This latter half of the verse is ambiguous and has caused many to see desertion by an unbelieving spouse as an exception to the rule *prohibiting remarriage*. They believe Paul is saying, “If an unbeliever leaves, the deserted spouse is ‘not under bondage,’ that is, they are no longer bound by the marriage contract and under such circumstances are free to remarry” (Hodge, 1 Corinthians, 118).

At first glance this seems to be a reasonable understanding of the text, however it is plagued with a number of problems.

The first problem is that the expression “not be under bondage” is not clearly defined. The verse doesn’t actually say “is not be bound by the marriage covenant anymore” although some may conclude that that is what is implied.

Some explain that this is an exception to the rule prohibiting remarriage *because* it involves a marriage to an unbeliever. For example, Robertson says, “Marriages between Jews ought not to be dissolved and marriages between Christians ought not to be dissolved; but heathen marriages stand on a different basis” (Robertson/ Plummer, 1 Cor., 143). One should ask, what makes the nature of a marriage between Christians different than a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever? Aren’t all marriages a one-flesh union? Based on Jesus’ argument, if people are joined together as one flesh in marriage, no one should tear this union apart (see comments on Matt. 19:6 below). It seems to me, if Paul is allowing for remarriage for desertion, we need to explain Jesus’ comments in Luke 16, Mark 10, and Matthew 19 differently than what they seem to be saying in plain language. Moreover, it would appear that Paul would be contradicting himself. He has already stated twice that Christians are not to divorce (1 Cor. 7:10-11 and 7:12-13) and in verse 39 he will flatly say that remarriage is only permissible upon the death of a spouse.

Furthermore, it seems superficial to say, “if a Christian leaves the marriage, they must stay unmarried or reconcile (vv. 10-11), but if their unbelieving spouse leaves them (v. 15) they can get remarried.” The nature of marriage doesn’t change depending on who leaves it first or upon their spiritual condition. Needless to say, this interpretation seems problematic.

Secondly, it is important to note that the word used for “bound” (*douloo* – δουλόω) in verse 15 is not the same word used in verse 39 with reference to marriage (*deo* – δέω). *Douloo* (Δουλόω) in verse 15 literally means “to make a slave” or “enslave.” Paul, for example, used it of his obligation to God (Ro. 6:18, 22; TDNT, vol.2, 279). In 1 Corinthians 9:19 Paul says, “For though I am free from all men, I *have made myself a slave* (δουλόω) to all, so that I may win more.” Paul was willing to submit to the customs and scruples of others so as not to cause them offense. By contrast, *deo* (δέω) (v. 39) means “to bind” or “to bind to” (TDNT, vol.2, 60). *Deo* (Δέω) is used of legal obligations (Thiselton, 576), and Paul consistently uses it when speaking of the binding nature of marriage (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39 7:27[?]). But when he refers to a deserted spouse not being “bound,” he chooses a different word. We would expect this if he was trying to make a distinction between the permanent bond of marriage and what he means by “not under bondage” in verse 15.

Therefore, in 1 Corinthians 7:15 Paul isn’t saying that the marital bond is no longer legally binding, rather he is saying that if a spouse leaves, the deserted believer is not obligated to a mechanical retention of the relationship the other party wishes to abandon (Barrett, 166). In other words, in such cases there is an exception to the prohibition *to divorce*; although they should not seek a divorce, if someone divorces them they do not need to fulfill their marital *duties* anymore. Nevertheless, this does not address the previous instruction; verse 11 still applies to the divorced Christian: they must remain unmarried, or be reconciled.

If this is what Paul meant, his teaching does not conflict with the uncompromising statements of Jesus.

The last clause, “God has called us to peace,” is also problematic. Some think this means, “don’t fight the divorce.” I take it to mean that even though Paul does not hold someone accountable for the actions of a spouse that divorces them (the believer can let them leave), divorce is never God’s ideal. The goal of the Christian is to pursue peace. It is always better to seek peace and stay together than to allow marital hostility and hatred rise to the point of divorce “Thus, despite the exception, Paul prefers that they follow ‘God’s call into the ways of peace’” (Fee, 305). In Romans 12:18 Paul said, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

This interpretation also harmonizes with the intent of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Moses permitted divorce due to the hardened hearts of sinners, so does Paul, but neither encourage divorce or condone remarriage.

The resultant meaning is this:

12 But to the rest (Christians married to an unbeliever) **I say, not the Lord, that if any brother** (a Christian) **has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.**

13 And a woman (a Christian) **who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away** (she should not divorce her unbelieving spouse)

15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves (if the unbeliever divorces the believer), **let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases** (they are not obligated to retain the relationship; it is not sin on their part if their spouse leaves them), **but God has called us to peace.** (but divorce isn't God's will; His will is peace)

In conclusion, whether one is married to a Christian or an unbeliever, Christians are commanded not to divorce their spouse. However, if an unbelieving spouse divorces them, they do not need to seek to fulfill their marital obligations any longer. There is nothing in this verse that says that God permits remarriage.

2) 1 Corinthians 7:25-26

25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

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

28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

1 Corinthians 7:25-28 may seem straightforward in English, but it is extremely difficult to understand in Greek. This has resulted in numerous interpretations on almost every verse. The following is my understanding of the text.

In verse 27, Paul is illustrating what he means by "remain as you are" (7:26b). Many would understand this as meaning that if you are married, don't seek a divorce; if you are divorced don't seek to get married, but if you do get remarried after a divorce, you haven't sinned."

This is unlikely.

First, the words "now concerning virgins" show that Paul is beginning a new section and dealing with a new issue (this wording for introducing new material is repeated throughout the epistle; 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1, 12:1; 16:1, 12). "Virgins" are mentioned in verses 28, 34, 36-38; unless there is compelling evidence to think otherwise, common sense tells us that Paul is addressing singles in a new section of his letter. That is, Paul has already dealt with people who are married, now he is turning his attention to those who are not yet married.

Secondly, it is debated whether the word translated as "wife" in verse 27 is translated correctly. It can also mean "woman." Paul may not be addressing married people; he could be addressing a single man

who is engaged. Engagement was considered binding and so the word *δέω* is used as it is when referring to marriage (see notes above on 1 Corinthians 7:15).

Lastly, the word “released” is also a problem. It is a word that only appears here in the entire NT. The word “released” (*λύσις*) is not Paul’s word for divorce. Throughout the passage he has consistently used *chorizo* (*χωρίζω* verses 10, 11, 15; cf. Matthew 19:6) and *aphienai* (*ἀφίημι* verses 11, 12, 13) when he talks about divorce. So is Paul talking about divorce, or simply being released from obligation?

Just to simplify things, the following interpretation of this passage is possible although it is not apparent in English:

25 Now concerning virgins (Paul is now addressing those who are unmarried) ***I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.*** (in 1 Cor. 7:10-11 Paul referred to a command from the Lord, namely, that one should not divorce their spouse, but if they did they were to remain unmarried or reconcile. Now he has some personal advice for those who are unmarried)

26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. (Paul’s general opinion is that under the current circumstances it’s best to stay in the state you are in when you come to faith – V. 27 then gives examples of what Paul means to “remain as you are”)

27 Are you bound to a wife? (“Are you married”? OR, “Are you engaged?”) ***Do not seek to be released.*** (don’t seek to be released from that obligation) ***Are you released from a wife?*** (Are you free from obligations? Are you single? A widower?) ***Do not seek a wife.*** (don’t get married)

28 But if you (the single man; the one without any marital obligations) ***marry, you have not sinned*** (although Paul just said “do not seek a wife” and “remain as you are” he isn’t suggesting that getting married is a sin. Of course, the readers would already understand from the earlier verses that Paul had set limitations on remarriage for people who are divorced); ***and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned*** (this is the flip side of the first half of the verse). “Virgin” is only used of a woman who has never been married. This would mean that the parallel thought in the first half of the verse must be a reference to a single man. The resultant meaning is “if you, a single man, marries, you have not sinned; if a single woman marries, she has not sinned.” Paul repeats this in verse 36: “If anyone thinks that he (a single man) is not behaving properly toward a virgin (a single woman), if his passions are strong, *and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin*” (compare 1 Cor. 7:1, 2, 8, 9). ***Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.*** (nevertheless, considering the present troubles, Paul thinks they are better off remaining single)

In conclusion, Paul is not erasing what he has prohibited earlier. He is not now allowing those who are divorced to get married again, rather he is suggesting to those who are not married to stay single. Regardless of what verse 27 means, the symmetry in verse 28 and the content that follows makes it pretty clear that Paul is speaking to singles when he says, “if you marry, you have not sinned.”

3) Matthew 5:31-32

**31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'
32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

Before we address the exception clause ("except on the ground of sexual immorality") we need to first ask the question, how does someone who divorces his wife *make* her commit adultery? Divorce in itself isn't adultery. Nor does a husband force his ex-wife to remarry. So in what sense does someone who divorces his wife "make her commit adultery"?

The argument is based on the assumption that in most situations in that culture a divorced woman would be drawn into a second marriage. The blame is attributed to the husband because if he divorces his wife he creates the circumstance that leads her to remarry and thus to an adulterous relationship.

The only instance when the husband does not make his wife commit adultery is when the ground of the divorce is sexual immorality.

VIEW 1: This is saying that if a man divorces his wife for any other cause he would be making his wife commit adultery (should she remarry). But if there is sufficient cause for divorce (namely, immorality) the wife would be free to remarry. In other words, remarriage generates adultery unless immorality is the ground for divorce; in that case remarriage is not prohibited.

However, this doesn't make sense. Jesus is speaking to the husband about his responsibility to his wife. In this scenario, he is divorcing his wife for something he doesn't like in her. If an innocent wife who is divorced commits adultery when she remarries, one would think that an immoral wife would be all the more guilty. To conclude that a guilty woman is free to remarry, while the innocent woman is not, is absurd.

VIEW 2: A husband who divorces his wife is responsible for creating a situation that would tempt his wife to commit adultery if she remarried. However, if the divorce is instigated by his wife's immorality, she is responsible both for the divorce and the subsequent remarriage, not him.

VIEW 3: Divorce is wrong because it generates adultery, except in the case of immorality. In that case immorality has already been committed.

In this passage divorce for immorality is permitted though it is not encouraged.

This then becomes an expansion of the commandment, "Do not commit adultery" in Matthew 5:27. Although the religious leaders allowed for divorce for almost any reason at all, Jesus was in essence saying that by doing so they were proliferating adultery. Not only would the spouse who was divorced become an adulterer if they remarried, the person they married became an adulterer as well.

4) Matthew 19:3-9

3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,

5 and 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 '?

6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Much of the interpretation of Matthew 19 has already been discussed under Mark 10:2-12 and will not be repeated. However, there are some additional details that will be pointed out.

Jesus was asked for His opinion on how Deuteronomy's law on divorce was to be interpreted. The issue was not if divorce was legal; they already assumed that it was legal. The question was should a man be allowed to divorce a woman "for any and every reason?" (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 411).

The Pharisees who followed Shammai held that divorce was only permissible for sexual offenses, such as adultery, whereas the followers of Hillel argued that divorce was justifiable for almost any reason, even spilling food or talking too loud (Heth & Wenham, Jesus and Divorce, 46; RWP; Carson, 411). Jesus agrees with neither (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 412).

In reply to the Pharisee's question, Jesus, in verses 4-5, quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, and concludes that marriage is indissoluble - "what God has joined together let no man separate (v. 6) (Heth & Wenham, Jesus and Divorce, 46). The husband and wife are no longer two but one and that by God's doing. If God had joined them together according to the structure of His own creation, divorce is not only unnatural but rebellion against God (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 412). "The implication is that Jesus rejects the Pharisees' use of Deuteronomy 24:1 and raises the standard of marriage for his disciples to God's original intention in creation. He says that none of us should try to undo the "one-flesh" relationship which God has united" (Piper).

7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?"

8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

In answer to the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" Jesus focused on the sanctity of marriage by emphasizing the unity of the couple. He also appealed to the principle "the more original the weightier" (and it is impossible to go further back than creation). If marriage is grounded in creation it cannot be broken by conventional means (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 412). The Pharisees rightfully interpret Jesus' answer as a rejection of divorce, so they shift their attack and quote

the provision in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (Heth & Wenham, Jesus and Divorce, 46). However, Jesus stands by His position and shows that divorce was a concession due to Israel's sinfulness (hardness of heart). It was not God's intention for it to be that way in the beginning (Heth & Wenham, Jesus and Divorce, 46).

Then in verse 9 He says, "***whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.***"

Is this an exception to the prohibition of divorce and remarriage? Those who say it is not, argue that Jesus is allowing divorce in the case of immorality (as in Matt. 5:32); however, if either partner were to marry someone else, they would be committing adultery. This fits the pattern already established elsewhere.

Others question this interpretation. They say that since remarriage is implied, the exception must also be applied to remarriage, not just the divorce. One could not divorce his wife "for any reason at all," but he could divorce her for immorality. In that case, to "marry another" would not be adulterous.

The following is taken from a paper written by John Piper entitled "Divorce & Remarriage: A Position Paper" @ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-remarriage-a-position-paper>;

In the New Testament the question about remarriage is determined by the fact that:

1. Marriage is a "one-flesh" relationship of divine establishment and extraordinary significance in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8),
2. Only God, not man, can end this one-flesh relationship (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9—this is why remarriage is called adultery by Jesus: he assumes that the first marriage is still binding, Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11),
3. God ends the one-flesh relationship of marriage only through the death of one of the spouses (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39),
4. The grace and power of God are promised and sufficient to enable a trusting, divorced Christian to be single all this earthly life if necessary (Matthew 19:10-12,26; 1 Corinthians 10:13),