Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible

by Dennis Hevener, April 2021

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http://www.heavenlymarriage.org

There is much disagreement about divorce and remarriage within Christianity. There are those who believe that divorce and remarriage is permissible in very limited circumstances. Most churches allow divorce and remarriage in the event of adultery, and less commonly for abandonment or physical or mental abuse.

Others believe that remarriage after divorce is never permissible, regardless of the circumstances. This idea is promoted by John Piper. He seems to be gaining traction lately. Nearly all churches penalize some people who are divorced against their will by denying remarriage.

The proponents of every view have scriptural support for their position. The widely differing beliefs are not because their proponents are poor Bible students. The fact is that the Bible is unclear on this topic.

As I researched various articles on when divorce and remarriage is allowed, I saw one key ingredient missing in nearly every treatise. Very few writers consider whether or not their conclusions are consistent with what we know about the nature of God. Is a loving God going to cause further suffering to a woman who is divorced through no fault of her own by denying her the comfort, companionship, joy, and parenting and financial support by denying her remarriage? Is God going to deny marriage to the man who loves her?

Another aspect that is missing from Christian writings on divorce is that the Old Testament is largely ignored. Most Christians distance themselves from the Old Testament to one degree or another. Megachurch pastor Andy Stanley has gone so far as to say that the church should “unhitch” itself from the old testament, and has made statements such as “You should not keep the ten commandments.”

Regardless of what one believes about the role of the Old Testament in the lives of New Testament Christians, any conclusion about divorce must agree with the Old Testament. When some Pharisees asked Jesus if a man could divorce his wife for “any reason.” Jesus replied “What did Moses tell you?” (Mark 10:2-3). Even if you agree with Andy Stanley, the Old Testament cannot be ignored when considering divorce in the New Testament, because Jesus did not ignore it.

It is ironic that people are quick to dismiss the Old Testament as being harsh, legalistic, and unforgiving, but then go out of their way interpret what Jesus says about divorce and remarriage in a manner that is much more restrictive, harsh, and unforgiving than the Old Testament.

I will present an interpretation of scripture that upholds marriage, discourages divorce, and is based solidly on the New Testament while being consistent with the Old Testament. An interpretation that is consistent with a loving God. A God that does not further punish victims who have been treacherously divorced, or those forced to initiate divorce because of extreme, unrepentant sin of their spouse.

Is the idea I propose a slam-dunk that explains everything and leaves no questions? No. Could I be wrong? Yes. Could John Piper be right? Yes. But the idea I propose is feasible, and more importantly, is more in line with what we know about God – a God that is merciful and comforting to victims and a God of forgiveness and second chances for sinners. If there are two ways that Jesus' words on divorce can be understood, should we not err towards the side that is most consistent with the loving nature of God?

Furthermore, we will see that God and scripture takes our marriage vows seriously. Not only the part about not committing adultery (forsaking all others,) but also the parts about having, holding, loving, honoring, and cherishing.

As I was nearing completion of this article, I came across the book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities* by David Instone-Brewer. https://amzn.to/2OcbQK9 (As an Amazon affiliate, we make a small commission on any Amazon purchases from the links on this document. This does not affect your cost. Thank you.) He is a scholar of Rabbinic Judaism in New Testament times at Tyndale House. His conclusion about the divorce and remarriage issue is similar to mine, namely, that scripture does not say that a person who is divorced against their will should not remarry. But unlike me, he understands the historical context of the words of Jesus and answered many of the unanswered questions that I had. All references to Instone-Brewer in this article are from his book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* unless otherwise stated.

I will include a section on Instone-Brewer in the appendix. I recommend his book for anyone facing decisions about divorce and remarriage.

Jesus on Marriage and Divorce

Let's explore what Jesus has to say about marriage and divorce.

Jesus mentions divorce and remarriage three times in his sermons:

The first is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt: 5:32) (Event# 62 in the Chronological Gospels. These event numbers are from Michael Rood's *Chronological Gospels.* https://amzn.to/2OhJoqr Lower-numbered events happened before later-numbered events.)

> It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, 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. (KJV)

The second is Jesus's sermon to the multitudes (Luke 16:18.) (Event# 147 in the Chronological Gospels)

> Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

The longest discussion about divorce in the New Testament detailed discussion is covered in starting Matthew 19:3 and Mark 10:2 (Event# 152) This records a discussion between Jesus and some

pharisees, in which the pharisees were testing Jesus. It then records an ensuing discussion between Jesus and his disciples.

What follows here is a reconstruction of the story made by combining the texts in Matthew and Mark. The **material peculiar to Matthew in boldface** and the *material peculiar to Mark in italics*. Normal font is common material. (New English Translation)

> And some Pharisees came up to him, testing him, and began to question him whether it *was lawful* for a man to divorce a wife, **saying, "Is it awful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?**"
>
> And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"
>
> And they said. "*Moses permitted* a man to write a *certificate* of *divorce* and send Her away."
>
> **And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them** [but] from the beginning of *creation* made them male and female, **and said,** 'for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, **and shall cleave to his wife**, and the two shall become one flesh'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."
>
> **They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and send her away?"** [But] Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, he *wrote you this commandment.* **Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.** And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.
>
> And in *the house*, the[y] *disciples* began to *question* Him about this again. And He said to them. "*Whoever divorces* his *wife*, and *marries another woman commits adultery against* her, and if she herself *divorces* her *husband* and *marries another* man, she is *committing adultery*."
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> **The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."**

https://bible.org/seriespage/7-teaching-jesus-divorce-matthew-193-12-mark-102-12

Historical Background

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

The above new testament passages are in reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

(1) Suppose a man marries a woman but she does not please him. Having discovered something wrong with her, he writes her a letter of divorce, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house. (2) When she leaves his house, she is free to marry another man. (3) But if the second husband also turns against her and divorces her, or if he dies, (4) the first husband may not marry her again, for she has been defiled. That would be detestable to the LORD. You must not bring guilt upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as a special possession. (New Living Translation)

When a man divorced his wife, he was to give her a certificate of divorce, known in Judaism as a *get*, the Aramaic name for the document. It is a legal document that dissolves the marriage and gives both parties the right to remarry. There is no divorce without the right of remarriage in the Old Testament or in Judaism.

In Jesus time there were two major schools of Jewish thought, lead by Hillel and Shammai, two prominent scholars of the era. They disagreed on a number of points, including legitimate grounds for divorce allowed by Deuteronomy 24. Hillel taught that this verse meant that a man could divorce his wife for any reason, including something as trivial as burning his meal. Shammai taught that only a serious sexual impropriety was grounds.

The point of controversy is a phrase in verse 1: "he discovers something wrong with her" (NLT) or "because he hath found some uncleanness in her" (KJV). It literally means "a cause of immorality" or "a thing of nakedness." The Greek word used to convey this in the New Testament is *porniea*, a catch-all term for sexual sin. This phrase was traditionally understood to mean that divorce was allowed only for serious offenses. But Hillel used some creative legal maneuvers to work around the obvious meaning of the text. They reasoned that since Moses wrote "a cause of immorality" instead of simply "immorality," the word "cause" allowed divorce for things in addition to immorality.

Shammai's position was the traditional one. Hillel's teaching had been around only a few decades at the time of Jesus' ministry. But not surprisingly, Hillel's teaching was the most popular among men of that era. It remains the prevailing view within Judaism today.

Another point of interest from Deu. 24: If the divorced woman consummates a marriage with another man, her first husband cannot remarry her under any circumstances. This is only one of several instances in the Bible where the legitimacy of second marriages after divorce is upheld. Scholars speculate that this was to prevent men from legally prostituting their wives or swapping wives with other men, by divorcing their wives then remarrying them. It would also discourage men from divorcing their wives over trivial matters in the midst of a fit of anger.

Analysis of the Words of Jesus

Testing Jesus

The first thing mentioned in the Matthew 19 account is that the pharisees were testing Jesus. Various translations say "tried to trap him with a question," "tempting him," and "trying him." They were trying to discredit him, and there was no better way to do that than to show that he contradicted the Torah.

The pharisees had heard the Sermon on the Mount. In it, Jesus spoke against divorce except for fornication, i.e. a grave sexual sin.

This in itself is not going against the teachings of the Old Testament. Jesus allowed for divorce in some circumstances, as does Deu. 24. Most of the pharisees interpreted Deu. 24 as allowing divorce for any reason. Jesus disagreed with this interpretation, but He could not be accused of contradicting the Torah. The school of Shammai, while a minority, was respected and held the traditional view.

What raised the pharisees eyebrows was Jesus' teaching that God joins couples together in marriage, and divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery.

The pharisees came to Jesus asking if a man could put away his wife for any cause. Jesus agreed with Shammai, but rather than argue the semantics of Deu. 24, He bypassed the Hillel/Shammai debate altogether.

After all, Hillel had a point. Although the intent of the passage is clear to us, Jews consider the Torah to be a legal document. Every word had meaning. Why *did* Moses write "immoral in a matter" rather than simply "immoral?" And why didn't God simply specify "adultery" in Deuteronomy as the only sin that permitted divorce? Scripture is somewhat vague on what reasons for divorce that God is allowing in Deuteronomy. Some believe that Deuteronomy is worded as it is to allow divorce for things such as homosexuality or bestiality which may not technically be adultery. The wording of Deu. 24 also makes it possible to divorce one's wife when adultery is evident, without having to actually prove adultery. Scripture specifies the death penalty for adultery. However, there is no record of it having ever been actually carried out. As we will see, in spite of Jesus' disdain for any-cause divorce, He does ultimately allow it!

Jesus presented an idea, that although it was apparently novel at the time, was solidly based on scripture.

Jesus' Most Radical Teaching?

OK, that subheading was just to get your attention. It may not be Jesus' *most* radical teaching – He had a lot of them. But it certainly is is most radical statement regarding marriage.

When the pharisees asked Jesus if a man could put away his wife for any cause, Jesus avoided the possibility of being accused of disagreeing with scripture by asking "What did Moses tell you?" (Mark 10:2-) They quoted Deu. 24:1.

Jesus did not argue with Deu. 24 or the pharisees liberal interpretation of it. Instead, He goes on to make a case that a couple joined in marriage are joined by God. Therefore marriage cannot be ended merely because one or even both parties want out.

Jesus also quotes Moses. Jesus' teaching that the joining in marriage is divine hinges on Genesis 2:

> And he answered and said unto 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. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mat 19:4-6 KJV)

Genesis 2:18, 24-25 God says "It is not good for man (mankind) to be alone. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Today's Christian readers miss how radical this interpretation of Genesis 2 is. Judaism holds marriage in high regard. It is seen as a commandment and a blessing. "The unmarried person lives without joy, without blessing, and without good.... An unmarried man is not fully a man" (Talmud: Yevamot 62b – 63a)

However, the concept that God actually joins the couple together was a novel application of Genesis 2. Marriage is correctly viewed within Judaism as a contract between individuals. Scripturally, it is not necessary to involve clergy or government to get married. Jews will obtain a marriage license when living in a country that offers one, and typically get married in a religious service in a synagogue presided over by a rabbi. But this is not a Biblical requirement for a valid marriage. While Jesus was not criticizing contractual marriages, He was elevating the status of marriage to new heights.

Genesis 2:24-25 is foundational. From these two short verses, we see a four important characteristics of a marriage:

Priority: This is expressed in the phrase "a man shall leave his father and mother." In terms of priority, the marriage has to be placed before all other relationships. Don't give top priority to your work, hobbies, friends, or family.

Pursuit: This comes from the phrase "…and cleave unto his wife." "Cleave" means to pursue with all your energy.

Are you actively pursuing your spouse? Marriage is work. It requires energy. Many couples apply no energy to their relationship but expect their marriage to thrive. That won't happen unless they pursue each other.

Possession: Marriage is about sharing everything, as revealed in "the two shall become one flesh." When you get married, you share everything with your spouse, from your bank account and furniture to important things like decision-making.

A dominant marriage, in which one spouse makes all the decisions and controls everything, always brings trouble.

Purity: "They were both naked…and were unashamed." Adam and Eve were completely exposed to each other physically. They were also exposed mentally and emotionally until sin took that intimacy away.

A healthy marriage requires intimacy without fear. If we are careful in how we behave and take responsibility for our issues, this kind of relationship is possible. But if we hurt each other and don't take responsibility, we become sensitive. We refuse to open our hearts to each other.

http://web.archive.org/web/20200807190033/https://marriagetoday.com/marriagehelp/4-reasons-marriage-still-works/

Hardness of Heart

Jesus goes on to say that in spite of the fact that marriages are joined by God, He allows divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts.

There are two aspects to this statement. The first is to realize that *all* divorces are the result of a hardness of heart, on the part of one or both parties. Had sin not entered the earth, there would be no hardness of heart, and spouses would naturally and easily love each other. No one would ever want a divorce.

The second aspect is practical applications of the hardness of heart principle in divorce. I will address that later.

Does remarriage equal adultery?

We are now getting into the issues that are the main points of contention in divorce. When, if ever, can a divorced person morally remarry?

There are two parts to Matthew 19:9. Here is the first

> And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery….

This part of the passage is not problematic. It is simply saying that if you divorce your wife without legitimate grounds, i.e. serious sexual sin, for the purpose of marrying someone else, you are committing adultery. Some commentators refer to this as "premeditated divorce and remarriage." When you have sex with your new partner, the fact that there was a divorce and remarriage doesn't make the new relationship non-adulterous if there was no grounds for divorcing your first wife.

More problematic is the second part of Matthew 19:9

> ...and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

and especially Matt. 5:32:

> But I say unto you, 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.

"Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" could be explained by saying that Jesus is simply was giving women the same restrictions against groundless divorce that He was giving

men. Under Deu. 24 and Jewish law, a woman could not divorce her husband. However, divorce was available to women under Roman law, and women could petition Jewish courts to force their husband to grant them a divorce. Indeed, the divorce of Herodias from Herod II and remarriage to Herod Antipas, brother of Herodias, was in the news at that time.

However, Matt. 5:32 seems to be saying that even an innocent victim of divorce cannot remarry. It is certainly interpreted that way by many, including some scholars of note such as John Piper. Indeed, Jesus established, from the Old Testament, that God joins a couple together in marriage, and people should not un-join them. The *Hebrew Matthew* says "… man **cannot** put asunder." A section on *Hebrew Matthew* follows.

However, to claim that this passage prohibits remarriage goes against the teachings of the Old Testament, on which this passage is based. Deu. 24 clearly allows remarriage of the divorced woman. Gen 2:18 implies that remarriage is allowed. The statement "It is not good for (mankind) to be alone." is an unqualified statement. It applies to everyone, whether divorced or not. We will see that the Apostle Paul confirms this idea.

David Instone-Brewer addresses Jesus statements on adultery resulting from remarriage of the innocent party as "precher's rhetoric" (p. 121). In Matthew 5:21 - 30 Jesus makes a number of statements that are obviously not meant to be taken literally. Being angry with your brother is equivalent to murder. Looking lustfully at a woman is equivalent to adultery. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

Immediately following, Jesus says that remarriage is equivalent to adultery. Instone-Brewer argues that one should not take this passage to mean that an innocent victim of divorce who remarries is literally committing adultery any more than on would literally pluck out an eye or cut off a hand:

> It seems self-evident that Jesus was using preacher's rhetoric here and did not expect us to act on it literally. If we did literally follow all of Jesus' rhetorical teachings, we would have to put the man who loses his temper in prison and tell the wife of someone who looks lustfully at another woman that she has grounds for divorce, and a large proportion of Christians would be self-maimed.
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> Matthew gathered these examples of preaching rhetoric into a single passage, Matthew 5:21-32, ending with the teaching that remarriage after invalid divorce is adultery. It followed immediately after Jesus' statement that lust is adultery and that we should "cut off" the body part that leads to lust. By putting Jesus' saying about remarriage in this context, Matthew was clearly implying that Jesus was not speaking in a literal way. He did not expect anyone to act as though remarriage is literally adultery any more than he expected them to act as though lust is literally adultery. (Instone-Brewer, pages 121-122.)

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 24 clearly allows any woman who has been divorced to remarry, and Jesus upheld the proper application of Deu. 24. He only disagreed with the Pharisees' any-cause interpretation.

Causeth her to commit adultery

To claim that Matthew 5:32 prohibits remarriage is requires ignoring the plain wording of the text. Jesus *does not* say that if a man divorces his wife without just cause, she cannot remarry. Jesus says that he is *causing* her to commit adultery. This phraseology is also used in some early manuscripts of Matthew 19 as well. (https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mt+19%3A9&version=NASB#en-NASB-23772)

Neither David Instone-Brewer nor John Piper address the term *causeth*. However, I believe it is significant. C*ausing* implies two very important things: (1) That she **will** remarry, and (2) that the resulting "adultery" isn't her fault!

Jesus is merely making the case that if a man divorces his wife without cause, he is committing adultery. Furthermore, he is making is wife and the man she marries commit adultery. He is guilty for his adultery and that of three others! (his second wife, his ex-wife, and his ex-wife's new husband.)

It must reiterated that Jesus is not casting any sort of cloud over the new couple's honeymoon. He is making a legal argument, and is not prohibiting people divorced against their will, without just grounds, from remarrying. A treacherously-divorced wife and her new husband could arguably be committing technical, legal adultery. We could also view this adultery as adultery-by-proxy by the man who treacherously divorced his wife.

Considering the *causeth* term allows for a more literal interpretation of Matthew 5:34, without denying remarriage to victims of groundless divorce. It is totally consistent with Jesus' assertion that marriages are made in heaven and cannot or should not be broken by mankind.

This view is consistent with John Piper's theology. It is just his application of this theology that is questionable.

Marriage Vows, or Statements of Intent?

Given the very limited circumstances under which divorce and remarriage has been allowed within Christianity, marriage vows – to love, honor, cherish, have and hold -- are largely unenforceable. As long as you don't commit the big A (in some churches you can get away with even that), you can do most anything else, and your spouse has little recourse against you. We may as well call them what they are: "Statements of Intent." Not "vows."

We will explore the origin of today's marriage vows, and show that the Bible permits divorce for reasons other than *porniea*.

Abuse, Abandonment, and Other Permissible Reasons for Divorce and Remarriage

The Apostle Paul allows divorce and remarriage for abandoned spouses.

> 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. (1 Cor 7:15 KJV)

Is Paul expanding the permissible reasons for divorce and remarriage over what Jesus allowed? Not at all. Paul had good scriptural backing for his statement.

Exodus 21:10-11

Deu. 24 is not the only Old Testament passage which allowed divorce. Exodus 21:10-11 says "If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money."

This passage permits a first wife to leave her husband if he marries another woman, and in doing so, withholds or reduces the amount of food, clothing, or sex that she receives.

Although strictly speaking, this passage is addressing taking additional wives in a polygamous society, rabbis of Jesus' time applied the principle of this passage to similar situations in all marriages. They reasoned that if multiple wives had the right to food, clothing, and sex, then an only wife did also. And if a wife had these rights, a husband did also.

Both men and women could initiate divorce based on this text. (David Instone-Brewer, chapter 3, sections "Three More Biblical Grounds of divorce," p. 35 and "Four Marriage Vows," p. 36)

Each marriage partner vowed to supply material support (food, clothing, and shelter, either by working to earn money to buy the raw materials or by cooking and sewing), and physical affection. Abusive situations were also covered by these laws, because physical and emotional abuse are extreme forms of neglecting material support and physical affection.

Gross laziness and financial irresponsibility is covered under material support. Exodus 21 was also understood to allow divorce for being unloving or disrespectful of your spouse or dishonoring them.

Ex 21 also covers the four rights of marriage implied in Gen. 2 which we already explored: Priority, Pursuit, Possession, and Purity.

A big issue in many marriages is withholding of sex. This is clearly covered by Ex. 21. One could also argue that refusing sex to your spouse would fall under the sexual sin covered by Deu. 24.

Ex. 21:10-11 is the basis of our marriage vows used today. (Instone-Brewer, chapter 11, p. 127).

Paul, being a pharisee, understood Ex. 21. When he taught that abandoned spouses had the right to remarry, he had solid scripture and precedent behind him.

Like abandonment, remarriage of spouses forced to divorce because of abuse would also be permitted. Paul did not give specific permission for abuse victims to remarry because it apparently never came up.

The Exception Clause

Jesus' phrase "except for fornication" is referred to as the exception clause. As we have seen, it allows for divorce and remarriage if your spouse commits adultery or other serious sexual sin. Fornication is

the **only** exception mentioned by Jesus. How then does Paul justify divorce and remarriage for abandonment, and how does anyone justify it for abuse or the numerous other reasons I mentioned?

When stating the exception clause, Jesus was addressing only Deuteronomy 24. This was the verse under discussion. The pharisees believed that it allowed divorce for any reason. Jesus said it only allows divorce for serious sexual sin.

Jesus made no recorded statements regarding Exodus 21. He apparently agreed with the interpretation of the Rabbinic courts of the day. He did not need to say anything because the principle was so universally accepted that there was no dispute about it. Jesus agreed with Shammai's interpretation of Deu. 24, and Shammai also allowed divorce based on Ex. 21. (Instone-Brewer, page 97.)

Had Jesus disagreed with Ex. 21, or the way it was interpreted in His day, He would have mentioned it, probably in the sermon on the mount and certainly in his exchange with the Pharisees in Matthew 19/Mark 10, and it would have been recorded.

The exception clause does not appear in Mark's account of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees (Mark 10:11-12) nor in Luke 16:18, a parallel passage to Matt 5:32. Some internet writers assume the exception clause is a later addition to Matthew. However, I am not aware of any reputable scholar who argues that it is not authentic. Certainly if John Piper felt that this were a realistic possibility, he would have mentioned it.

Why then is the exception clause not included in Mark or Luke? The audience of the day would have been familiar with the debate and with Ex 21, and would have understood this. It was not necessary for them to explain this. Instone-Brewer suggests that Matthew was written later, when the debate was more or less over and was less known, so he included these details (page 67).

Hardness of Heart Revisited

If divorce is permitted to anyone whose spouse has denied a request for sex, failed to prepare a meal, or was ever unloving or disrespectful, everyone would have grounds for divorce. Obviously this is not the intent of Ex. 21, and no authority has ever applied it in this way. Remember that God allowed divorce for hardness of heart. Divorce for occasional infractions or even for difficult marriages with frequent and repeated unlovingness, dishonor, and disrespect is not grounds for divorce, unless the person exhibits a hardness of heart by refusing to change.

No one is guaranteed an easy marriage. Marriage is difficult. However, everyone has a right to expect that their marriage provide enjoyment, friendship, love, and affection. If one party absolutely refuses to provide these basic things to their spouse, they are being hard of heart.

Instone-Brewer even applies the hardness-of-heart rule to adultery. According to him, divorce for adultery is justified only after repeated offenses without repentance (page 64).

(I am leery of Instone-Brewer's application because it in essence gives everyone a one-time pass to get caught committing adultery. Indeed, one-time adultery will have a much more devastating effect on marriage than the occasional but repeated commission of other most sins against your spouse.

It could be argued that anyone who commits the ultimate betrayal of adultery may be hard-of-heart, even if it is not repeated and if there is repentance. Indeed, Paul places the sin of adultery in a category of it's own (1 Corinthians 6:16-18.)

Granted, there may be mitigating circumstances that contribute to the adultery. Not everyone who commits adultery is hard-of-heart.)

Second Marriages of Divorcees Recognized as Legitimate

Scripture acknowledges marriages entered into after divorce as legitimate.

In John 4:18, Jesus is talking with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus asks her to go get her husband. She replies that she has no husband. Jesus says that she is correct. He lets her know that He is aware that she has had five husbands, and the man she is living with now is not her husband. Jesus recognizes her five marriages as legitimate marriages – He referred to the five men as "husbands." Given the context of Jesus calling her out on her moral situation, it is not reasonable to assume her five previous husbands had died.

In 1 Cor 7:27 Paul instructs those who are married to remain married. This blanket statement apparently includes divorcees in second marriages, indicating that such marriages are legitimate.

Incidentally, John Piper agrees with this stance. He does not advocate ending marriages even though he believes they were entered into sinfully. This is inconsistent. We would not encourage a person in an adulterous relationship to stay in that relationship. So perhaps in a round-about way Piper is admitting that remarriage after divorce is not adultery in the true sense of the word. (https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper, end of article)

Marriage permissible for anyone

Furthermore, in this same chapter, Paul says that marriage is permissible for everyone. He does not place conditions on whether they are divorced or not, or the reason for the divorce.

In 1 Cor 7:2, he says that in order to avoid sexual immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. Divorcees are not excluded.

In 1 Cor 7:8 Paul addresses the "unmarried and widows." Given persecution and difficult lives that Christians were experiencing at that time, he advised them to remain single. However, he says that it is permissible for them to marry so as not to burn (with passion). In 7:25-26 he addresses virgins – those who have never married. Therefore the "unmarried" mentioned in verse 8 must be divorcees.

Separation without divorce not allowed

Many churches permit members in untenable situations separate, but not divorce. However, Paul specifically says that married couples may not separate. "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband" (1 Cor 7:10-11, KJV).

A Hard Teaching, Better not to Marry?

Mathew 19:10-12 and Mark 10:10-12 records a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples after His debate with the Pharisees. Given the radical statement that Jesus just made, it is not surprising that His disciples questioned Him. In Matthew 19:10 the disciples state that if things are as Jesus says, then it is better not to marry.

Why would it be better not to marry? Even using the harshest possible interpretation of Jesus' words – that if you divorce or have divorce forced upon you, you cannot remarry under any circumstances, why would it be better not to marry? Even today, most marriages not only succeed, but are happy. (The 50% divorce rate is a myth. See Shaunti Feldhahn's excellent book *The Good News About Marriage*. https://amzn.to/2N9uYIs.) Divorce was much less common in those days. Why not take a chance at happiness?

Jesus goes on to say that there are men who were born without the ability or desire to have sex. ("Eunuchs" in the Bible does not necessarily mean men who have been castrated. See https://www.gotquestions.org/eunuch-eunuchs.html)

The disciples would have welcomed any justification to have any-cause divorce available to them. Perhaps the disciples were suggesting that since you would be forced to commit adultery (albeit, in some cases, technical adultery without actual sin on your part) if you divorce and remarry, the whole problem could be avoided by living in some arrangement provided the benefits of marriage without actually legally getting married, such as concubinage. Jesus shoots down this argument by saying, sarcastically, "If you are called to be celibate, then have at it."

An important point of this passage that is invariably ignored by those preaching against divorce is that Jesus teaching on divorce in this passage, whatever that may be, is not mandatory. Jesus replies that all men cannot receive this teaching. If people can accept it, good. But if they can't, they don't have to. This is in effect saying that Jesus does not absolutely forbid even groundless any-cause divorce. This text alone should be enough to keep clergy from forbidding remarriage to innocent victims of divorce.

Malachi 2:16 The Bible does not say "God hates divorce"

The phrase "God hates divorce" is often stated. The church often encourages those in loveless, sexless, non-functional marriages stay legally married, believing that they are honoring God by avoiding what He hates. However, as we will see, the Bible does not actually say this.

Because of this misunderstanding, the church is more concerned with avoiding divorce than promoting healthy marriages. Divorce is seen as essentially the #1 unforgivable sin within Christendom. When marriages end, the blame is usually placed on the person who filed for the divorce, not the person whose actions sundered the marriage. Gary Thomas relates the story of "Christine," who finally divorced her husband who committed adultery, denied her sex for over eight years, refused to give her money to buy groceries for her and their children, was emotionally and verbally cruel and physically violent. She finally filed for divorce. When the powers-that-be at her church found out that she was the one to file for divorce, she was kicked out of the choir! (*When to Walk Away – Finding Freedom from Toxic People* page 168, Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 2019 https://amzn.to/3dMEdJw.)

One need not wait long for news of yet another popular minister caught in sexual sin. I understand that these men face a lot of temptation that the normal man does not face. They are famous, financially well-to-do, and are admired and sought after by many women. They are under more of an attack by Satan, who seeks to destroy their successful ministries.

I am sure that some of them are hypocrites that do not believe what they preach. But I also believe that some of these ministers are in bad marriages to wives with hard hearts. Of course this is not justification for adultery. However, given the current climate surrounding divorce within Christianity, a pastor may feel that the sin of adultery is less than the "sin" of divorce. And indeed, a pastor be better able to survive and keep his position by getting caught in adultery than initiating a divorce. The sin of adultery is more forgivable than the "sin" of divorce.

No doubt the Church's stance on divorce contributes to the rash of premarital sex among Christians. Singles who are in love reason that the private sin of fornication is less than the public "sin" of divorce should their marriage fail. Hence they have incentive to put marriage off as long as possible, typically until they want children.

Now, let's see what Malachi 2:16 really says.

"'For I hate divorce,' says the Lord…." (NASB). It is true that God hates marriages ending. Marriage was designed by God at creation to be a lifelong bond.

Unfortunately, most versions of the Bible mistranslate Malachi 2:16 by saying God hates *divorce*. "Divorce" is a mistranslation. The KJV translates it properly. It says "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth *putting away*." A quick peek at a concordance or http://www.blueletterbible.org will verify this is a correct rendering of the Hebrew.

"Putting away" is not synonymous with divorce. In Deu 24:1 we read that if a man puts away his wife, he is to give her a certificate of divorce so that she is free to marry again. David Instone-Brewer points out that the Law of Moses did not give people permission to break up a marriage. It merely described the necessary legal process after the breakup happened (page 29.)

It is the "putting away" that God hates, not the formalization of the end of the marriage. God hates it when people repeatedly and unrepentantly commit sins against their spouse and puts their marriage asunder, be it by adultery, abandonment, withholding affection or sex, physical or mental abuse, or does anything that makes a functional marriage impossible. There is nothing in the Bible that says He hates it when the innocent victim of a sundered marriage proceeds with a legal divorce.

Here is additional Biblical support to show that God does not hate divorce. There are three lists of serious sins in the New Testament; sins which will jeopardize your salvation. All three mention acts that are legitimate grounds for divorce. However, none mention divorce.

Galatians 5:19–21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Cor 6:9-10: Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Rev 21:8: But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Gary Thomas of *Sacred Marriage* fame, takes this Biblical stance on divorce vs. putting away. In his new book, he writes "Because evil exists, we need to condemn the cause of divorce rather than the application of divorce." (*When to Walk Away – Finding Freedom from Toxic People* page 172.) On page 135 Thomas says "Every divorce is caused by sin, but not every divorce is sinful. On page 171 he quotes Megan Cox, an abuse survivor's advocate, who says "… in the face of unrepentant and unrelenting evil, divorce can be an effective tool rather than a weapon."

Joy in Marriage

A theme that is generally lacking in Christian teaching is joy in marriage.

However, the Bible makes it clear that marriage should be a joy. Deu 24:5 says "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken."

Most of the book *Song of Solomon* is about marital joy.

Genesis 2 implies that marriage should bring joy: "It is not good for [mankind] to be alone…."

Marriage is a lot of hard work and not always joyful. We understand that. The emphasis on the difficulties of marriage within Christianity is evident from the title of Gary Thomas' popular book *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* https://amzn.to/3kelDvc. Other than perhaps the subtitle, I am not criticizing this book in any way. It should be on everyone's must-read list. In summary it is saying to put God first, and all these things, including joy, will be added.

However, it is high time for a Christian book about marital joy. There is nothing wrong with joy in marriage. It is something we all should seek. Thomas has a later book on marriage entitled *Cherish*, which I am looking forward to reading https://amzn.to/38gQQcB.

Shaunti Feldhahn's research in *The Good News About Marriage* shows that most marriages not only survive, but are happy. Expecting your marriage to be happy is reasonable.

CONCLUSION

We have strong Biblical support for allowing remarriage for innocent victims of groundless divorce, or of hard-hearted and unrepentant adultery, abandonment, abuse, or withholding marital rights. This should be good news for the many Christians who fall under this umbrella, or those wishing to marry someone who does.

It is my hope that Christianity will adopt this kinder, more Christlike approach. Unfortunately, this is not likely to happen anytime soon. David Instone-Brewer's article in *Christianity Today* was printed in 2007. His book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* came out in 2006. *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* was published in 2002. In 20 years, not much has changed. Instone-Brewer himself writes "What can we do with the results of this study? In many churches with a strong tradition, the answer will be, Very little. The ship of the church is too large and its canon law is too well established for it to change course now, even if a huge number of people are leaning on the rudder." *(*page 169.) He goes on to say that smaller, younger denominations have a better chance to change direction.

Unfortunately, I don't see a lot of people leaning on the rudder. It seems to me that if anything, Christianity has steered towards even more stringent rules against divorce and remarriage in the past twenty years. As Instone-Brewer points out, denominational momentum is difficult to overcome. One would think that there would be a grass-roots groundswell of support for the concepts presented here. However, so many Christians, even Protestants, rely on what their denomination or pastor teach, and do not do any reading on their own. Even some whose personal circumstances would improve by knowing this are reluctant to embrace it. Many are sincere people who did what they believed to be right at a great personal sacrifice, are invested in the old teachings and are reluctant to view their sacrifices as unnecessary.

However, a lot can be done on the individual level. Share a copy of *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* and this article with anyone who is divorced or facing divorce. Whether they agree with the book and this article or not, it will cause the person to think and study for themselves. If you are divorced and wish to remarry, or wish to marry a divorcee, first study to show yourself approved, then approach your pastor with what you have learned. Share a copy of *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* and this article with him. If he has the freedom to do so, he may agree to marry you. Even if he is prevented from doing so by denominational or church policy, or is free to do so but declines out of caution for accepting a new idea that deviates from church orthodoxy, this would still be a worthwhile conversation to have – it will put a little more pressure in the right direction on that rudder.

Many pastors and churches take a more pastoral and less legalistic approach to the Bible will remarry divorced people, even though they lack any clear scriptural justification to do so. They could reason that if God's grace extends to those who hard-heartedly sunder their marriages, not to mention rapists and murderers, His grace also extends to the victims of treacherous divorce. Now these pastors have strong Biblical justification for remarriage of innocent divorce victims, and can avoid the slippery slope of ignoring what we believe scripture says to do when it goes against our understanding of justice.

This is a good time to mention that if you are divorced and cannot find a pastor to remarry you, a church or a clergyman is not necessary to have a marriage that is valid in the eyes of God. A civil wedding is legitimate.

While this understanding of divorce and remarriage can be good news to those who are innocent victims of divorce, it is also beneficial to those who have not yet married, or those who are currently in their first marriage.

This should be used to instruct the yet-to-be-married on the importance of marriage vows and the Biblical precepts behind them.

For those in a difficult marriage marriage who wish to improve it, they now have a couple of new resources available to them. Marriage vows now have teeth. If a spouse wants to stay married, they will make it a point to love, honor, and cherish their partner, because hard-heartedly failing to do so gives their partner legitimate cause divorce them. Pastors and Christian counselors would have more scripture to back them up when censuring a spouse who is consistently violating their vows.

Furthermore, for those in difficult marriages but without adultery as grounds for divorce will be in a much better position to work on their marriages. If someone believes that if their spouse divorces them, or if they divorce a spouse whom it is impossible to have a functional marriage with, they cannot remarry, they are likely to live with a bad situation rather than attempt to fix it or finally getting out if it ultimately proves unfixable, figuring it is better to stay in a bad marriage than being single for the rest of their life.

But if they believe that remarriage is a possibility and that God will still be there for them if divorce becomes a reality – if they realize that they are not trapped in their bad marriage – they can take the steps to save their marriage that they may not take otherwise. They no longer need to "walk on eggshells" to avoid upsetting their spouse who may then divorce them. They can stand up to their spouse and confront their wrongs. or seeking marriage counseling despite their spouse's protest.

Giving up on a marriage should never be taken lightly. Jesus demands that we do not. From a practical standpoint, the steps necessary to find a new marriage partner – dating and courtship – will take years. There is no guarantee that one will be able to find someone else. If one does, there is no guarantee that their next marriage will be any better than their first. That should not prevent someone in a truly unworkable marriage from divorcing and seeking remarriage. But it should prevent one from taking that step until all options to save the first marriage have been exhausted.

Appendix

1 Corinthians 7:10

Some reader is sure to raise questions about this verse:

> And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. (KJV)

Instone-Brewer covers this in detail in chapter 6.

The context of this chapter must be understood before concluding that 7:10 is a blanket prohibition against divorce (or a blanket statement of preference for singleness). As we can see from the first verse, the Corinthians had written Paul with a question about marriage.

> Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. (KJV).

This makes it sound like Paul himself is making the statement himself and that he is opposed to sex and marriage. However, these are actually the words of some Corinthians who thought they could live holier lives by avoiding sex and marriage, and wrote Paul asking if he agreed. (Instone-Brewer, page 72.)

David Stern agrees. He translates verse 1 as

> Now to deal with the questions you wrote about: "Is it good for a man to keep away from women?" (Jewish New Testament)

The New Living Translation, while putting Paul on record as agreeing with the Corinthians, does acknowledge that Paul was responding to a question.

> Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations.

Did Paul agree with the Corinthians, or not? Yes and no.

Paul goes on to explain that, due to the current distress (7:26) it is preferable to remain single if you are not married. Instone-Brewer says that there was a famine at that time (p. 72.) Getting married meant having and raising children, which is not easy in times of famine. But those already married must stay married and fulfill their marriage vows, including sexual vows. However, there is no reason to apply Paul's preference for singleness in times of famine as general counsel for all people at all times.

Paul says that people who had already separated due to the belief stated in verse 1, should not consider themselves divorced, and do everything they can to get back together. However, if you are the victim of divorce and cannot reconcile, you are free to remarry (7:15).

David Stern's commentary on 1 Cor 7:15 will prove useful in understanding this passage. (Jewish New Testament Commentary, https://amzn.to/30dBFMI)

For more information on ascetic pagan cults who were opposed to sex, and the influence they had on the Corinthians and early Christianity as a whole, See https://www.academia.edu/1435162/1_Corinthians_7_and_Asceticism.

John Piper

John Piper teaches that remarriage after divorce is never allowed for any reason under any circumstances. He has gained some traction lately, and has been critical of David Instone-Brewer. I will briefly introduce his teaching here and provide a brief rebuttal.

John Piper defines fornication – single people having sex – as the meaning of *porniea* as used in the exception clause. According to Piper, the exception clause only permits ending an engagement when your fiancee cheats. This is based on work by a Catholic scholar Father Murphy O'Connor, who found evidence supporting this in the Dead Sea Scrolls. O'Conner claims the exception clause does not permit divorce and remarriage even in the case of adultery. This is important for Catholic scholars as it agrees with the teachings of the Catholic church.

Piper claims the exception clause is included only in Matthew, because only Matthew includes the fact that Joseph was going to end his engagement with Mary after he found out she was pregnant. Piper

contends that Mathew included the exception for fornication to justify Joseph's intention break his engagement. However, Piper's explanation is a stretch. If that's what Jesus meant, then why did He not simply say "except for unfaithfulness during betrothal?" Also, it is a stretch to think that anyone would assume that breaking a relationship with a woman with whom you have not consummated the relationship and marrying someone else would be committing any kind of sexual sin.

O'Conner's claims are based on a single, particularly difficult passage in the Damascus Document. The Damascus Document describes how a group of Jews who lived in the desert to get away from the priesthood that they believed did not follow God's law. His work relies on the translation of the word *zenut* (the Hebrew term for porniea) as "sex before marriage." However, since O'Conner put forth his theory, other scrolls with this word have been found. Most scholars agree that the initial interpretation of this passage was mistaken, and that it was actually forbidding polygamy. Furthermore, Jews at Qumran regarded remarriage as the right of any divorcee (Instone-Brewer, page 109.)

John Piper dismisses 1 Cor 7:15 (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. (KJV)) by claiming Paul is saying that believing spouse is not obligated to try to get the unbelieving spouse to stay, but that does does not mean that they are free to remarry. This also is a stretch. If indeed the only way the believing spouse can have their sexual needs met and avoid burning with unrequited passion is to convince the unbelieving spouse to stay, then they are very much in bondage.

https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper
John Piper argues his position that remarriage after divorce is never justified.

https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/on-divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-event-of-adultery
John Piper teaches that the exception clause in Matt 19 applies to engaged couples only

David Instone-Brewer

I have relied heavily on the works of David Instone-Brewer for this article. I recommend that anyone who is facing decisions about divorce or remarriage read his book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*. I do not agree with all of his interpretations of some minor points, but I believe that he convincingly answers the question on whether remarriage is permissible for a divorcee.

https://amzn.to/2OcbQK9
We are an Amazon affiliate and will make a small commission from any Amazon links on this site. This does not affect your cost. Thank you.

Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible is a more scholarly version of *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*.
https://amzn.to/2N9uYIs

I caution anyone with a dog in this fight to actually read Instone-Brewer's book, and not rely on the article summarizing it in *Christianity Today*, or those writing rebuttals to this book.

There are a number of rebuttals, the most notable from John Piper. Piper's rebuttal is based on the *Christianity Today* article, not the book. Piper criticizes Instone-Brewer for saying that we have grounds for divorce any time we are dishonored by our spouse, and that all spouses can legitimately

claim that they are insufficiently honored at times. Piper allows that Instone-Brewer may have safeguards he puts around his sweeping grounds for divorce, but correctly states that they are not mentioned in the *Christianity Today* article. In fact, Instone-Brewer does not encourage divorce for trivial matters. He is actually rather hard-line against divorce even for adultery, allowing it only in the case of hard-hearted, repeated and unrepentant adultery.

Here is Instone-Brewer ChristianityToday article.
https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/20.26.html

ChristianityToday is a pay site, but a free copy can be found here:
https://nuggets4u.wordpress.com/2012/02/07/putting-away-a-untaught-truth-in-the-church/

Here is Piper's rebuttal:
https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/tragically-widening-the-grounds-of-legitimate-divorce

And Instone-Brewer's rebuttal to Piper:
http://divorceremarriage.blogspot.com/2007/10/john-piper-corrects-misconceptions.html

"Let Not Man Put Asunder" – Hebrew Matthew

This phrase appears in Mark 10:9 and Matthew 19:6. The Hebrew Matthew says that "Man *cannot* put asunder."

It is not the purpose of this paper to go into depth on Hebrew Matthew. But since I mentioned it, and since it could be used to support Piper's position that marriage cannot be ended, I will provide a brief background.

It is believed by some that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, not Greek. This is not a mainstream opinion by any means. However, there is some evidence to support this idea. Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebus wrote that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. (Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, George Howard, former chairman of the Religion Department, University of Georgia, Mercer University Press, p 157 – 8. https://amzn.to/2LVOAPN. You may also purchase George Howards book from this site, possibly at some savings over Amazon:
https://store.nehemiaswall.com/products/the-hebrew-gospel-of-matthew-by-george-howard)

Most scholars have assumed that the Hebrew Matthew was translated from the Greek. A copy of Hebrew Matthew was found in the library of Shem Tob, a Rabbi who used his copies of New Testament books to discredit Christians by showing how the New Testament supposedly contradicts Moses. However the few variations in meaning from the Greek actually are more supportive of the Old Testament than the Greek. Shem Tob's arguments against Christianity would have been better supported by the Greek Matthew.

For example:

Divorce Matt 5:31-32

[Greek]	[Hebrew]
It was also said, Whoever divorces he wife, let him give her a certificate of Divorce. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on	And Jesus said unto his desciples: "You have heard it said by those of long ago that everyone who leaves his wife and divorces her is to give her a bill

grounds of unchastity, makes her an adulteress. (RSV)	of divorce…. And I say to you that everyone who leaves his wife is to give her a bill of divorce. But concerning adultery, he is the one who commits adultery and he who takes her commits adultery.

Swearing Matt 5:33-37

[Greek]	[Hebrew]
Again you have heard it said by them of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn." But I say to you, do not swear *at all*…. (RSV)	Again you have heard it said by them of long ago: You shall not swear *by my name* falsely, but you shall return to the Lord your oath. But I say to you do not swear *in vain*….

On page 215 Howard states:

> "The difference between the Greek and Hebrew is striking. In the Greek, Jesus appears to revoke the law. In the Hebrew, he internalizes and radicalizes the law, but does not revoke it. According to the Greek, all divorce, except for unchastity, involves adultery. According to the Hebrew, adultery may be involved, but everyone who leaves his wife is to give her a bill of divorce…. In the Greek, Jesus forbids all swearing. In the Hebrew, he forbids only *vain* swearing."

In a footnote, Howard adds:

> "Some dispute that Jesus ever revoked the letter of the law. For a recent discussion, see Geza Vermes, The Religion of Jesus the Jew (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 21-37 https://amzn.to/2NZkZWV. Without entering into this debate, I wish only to show that the Hebrew text of Shem-Tob, in the relevant passages, is less anti-Law than the Greek text."

I agree with Howard that the Greek and Hebrew are significantly different in the second example about swearing. However, I do not see any substantial difference in meaning of the first example about divorce.

In the Hebrew, Jesus explicitly upholds giving a certificate of divorce to the divorced wife. However, the while the Greek omits this, it doesn't say *not* to give her a certificate of divorce. If one ignores the *causeth her to commit adultery* phrase and assumes that divorced wife is prohibited from remarrying, it would be reasonable to conclude that Jesus is implying that there is no need for the divorce certificate, since she cannot remarry anyway. However, if we consider the *causeth her to commit adultery* phrase, we must accept the implication that she will remarry, and that the divorcing husband is still expected to follow the law and give her a divorce certificate.

If the Greek is indeed a translation of the Hebrew, the terseness of Greek translation makes sense. The Greek translation was made to be copied and distributed far and wide. This copying was done by hand, so brevity was an advantage to spreading the Gospel. Also paper-making was more labor-intensive then, so it would have cost more than it does now.

So far we have given a historical background on the Hebrew Matthew and made a case that the Matthew was written in Hebrew. Now I will address the "*cannot* put asunder" wording of the Hebrew for Matthew 19:6.

Neither John Piper or Instone-Brewer mention Hebrew Matthew. Nonetheless, Instone-Brewer makes a convincing argument that scripture shows that marriage can indeed be put asunder. (Chapter 3, p. 33)

If the Hebrew Matthew is authentic, then how do we reconcile it with the rest of scripture? There are a couple of ways to do this.

Firstly, "cannot" may simply mean that one does not have permission. Your teenager asks "May I drive your car to Suzy's party tonight?" You reply "No, you cannot." You do not mean that your teenager is incapable of driving your car to the party. He simply does not have permission to do so. This is congruent with this phrase as translated from Greek. (A grammatical purist may point out that the proper answer to the teenager's question is "No, you *may* not." However, the Hebrew word for *cannot* (yāḵōl, Strongs #H3201) is sometimes used to deny permission as opposed to expressing inability. See Ex. 19:23).

But, if Jesus meant that not only does man not have permission to break the marriage bond, but he is incapable of doing so, this still isn't problematic with respect to the rest of scripture. Jesus may have just been shoring up his hyperbolic legal argument that all divorces and remarriages result in at least technical adultery, but never intended his statement to be taken as a prohibition against remarriage for innocent victims of divorce. In that case, it is not necessary to explain how one can remarry when the first marriage "cannot" be broken.

However, if one wishes to reason further, Instone-Bewer clearly shows that God divorced Israel (Chapter 3, p. 33.) God makes the marriage, so He can break the marriage. We have seen that all remarriages are recognized by God as legitimate marriages, even if they were entered into sinfully. Even John Piper concedes this. So, one can argue that when God joins people together in the second marriage, *He* dissolves the first marriage.

Here is another way that the Hebrew Matthew differs from the Greek is Matthew 23:3. This has nothing to do with divorce – I offer it as an aside, as it explains one of the most difficult passages in scripture and lends credibility to the Hebrew Matthew. According to the Greek texts, Jesus says that the pharisees sit in the seat of Moses. Whatever *they*, i.e. the pharisees say, you must do. This makes no sense. Jesus was constantly criticizing the pharisees for making rules that went against scripture. However, the Hebrew Matthew says

> The Pharisees and sages sit on Moses' seat. Therefore, all that *he* [i.e., Moses] says to you, diligently do, but according to their [the Pharisees] reforms and their precedents, do not do because they talk but they do not do. Hebrew Matt. 23:2-3.

This makes perfect sense!

This translation by Nehemiah Gordon.
https://www.jesuswordsonly.com/books/jesuswordsonly/212-matthew-232-3-in-hebrew-matthew.html
Howard Stern misses the *they* vs *he* nuance in his translation, and translates it as it is in the Greek.

Here is a video presentation on Hebrew Matthew by Nehemiah Gordon.
https://www.nehemiaswall.com/hebrew-gospel-matthew-nehemia-gordon

Further reading

Here are some random sites I found while researching this article. Some support the position presented here. Some do not.

A few days after sending the first "final" draft of this paper to my niece Brittany Scheib for review, I received this from Jay Dee of UncoveringIntimacy.com
https://www.uncoveringintimacy.com/swm-069-is-it-okay-to-remarry-after-being-divorced/
I was amazed that he discussed the "causes her to commit adultery" phrase, and furthermore, references George Howard and the Hebrew Matthew! His conclusions are similar to mine, but he makes some points that I missed.

Daryl Wingerd's critique of Instone-Brewer. His disagreement with Instone-Brewer boils down to this: Instone-Brewer believes that cultural and historical context is necessary to understand Mark 10 and Matt 19. Wingerd believes that the text of the Bible is necessarily sufficiently complete in and of itself.
https://www.ccwtoday.org/2009/04/dr-david-instone-brewers-divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-bible-a-critical-review/

Free online copy of Divorce and Remarriage in the Church by David Instone-Brewer:
http://www.instonebrewer.com/DivorceRemarriage/DRC/IndexBook.htm
The navigation page does not work too well. Here is a web page with a link to every page in Divorce and Remarriage
http://instonebrewer.com/DivorceRemarriage/DRC/Full/

Here Instone-Brewer replies to Piper's rebuttal:
https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2007/october/can-we-talk-about-divorce.html

Discusses Piper's belief that "porniea" in Mat. 19 should be translated "fornication" (sex before marriage). He bases this on a passage in the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, according to this article, new passages have come to light that does not support this position. This article shows that the rest of the NT translates "porniea" as general sexual immorality. This article quotes ancient writings on the Hillel/Shamai debate:
https://monotooth-moron.blogspot.com/2007/10/more-on-instone-brewers-article-in.html

Dr. Leslie McFall's critique of Instone-Brewer. Look under "Unpublished articles on divorce:"
https://lmf12.wordpress.com/?s=divorce

Book: Divorce and Re-Marriage: Recovering the Biblical View:
https://bible.org/series/divorce-and-re-marriage-recovering-biblical-view

The author answers a reader's question, and addresses the "causing her to commit adultery" phrase:
https://truthsaves.org/articles/remarriage-after-divorce-is-it-adultery/

Discusses how God recognizes marriage after divorce as legitimate marriages:
http://www.allgodsword.com/Marriage.htm

This site claims "Divorce and remarriage for the Christian has always been a provision by God in the Bible." In 1Corinthians 7:27, 28 it says, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned:"

http://www.divorcehope.com/christiandivorceandremarriage.htm

A discussion of Malachi 2:16 which agrees with this article:
https://www.divorcehope.com/godhatesdivorce.htm

Claims that divorce results in widowhood:
http://www.divorcehope.com/widoweddivorcedandsingle.htm

Explains that the Greek in Matt 19 does not say that the person who remarries is in a continuous state of adultry. The bible does not teach "living in adultry", which is a 15th century Catholic doctrine: https://www.blogos.org/exploringtheword/GG-divorce.php

Links to a news article where some Orthodox Jews were arrested for torturing a man into signing a *get*.
https://www.newsweek.com/2015/04/17/fighting-be-free-lengths-orthodox-jewish-women-will-go-get-320536.html

Advocates remarried people divorcing and seeking reconciliation with the first spouse:
http://www.biblicalresearchreports.com/divorce-and-remarriage-why-didnt-we-see-this-before/

Divorce and Moses in Mat 19: Commanded vs permitted:
http://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/matthew/mt-193-12-is-adultery-the-only-reason-for-divorce-are-other-reasons-permitted/

Jesus avoids the Pharisees trap in Mat 19 by acknowledging the legitimacy of divorce as per Moses. Author concludes that when someone remarries they commit adultery against their first spouse, but this does not close the door on second marriages. Jesus was presenting a legal argument to the Pharisees. This does not override the pastoral concern over the quality of intimacy that a husband and wife are nurturing in their relationship:
https://thebibleisinmyblood.wordpress.com/2018/03/14/jesus-and-divorce/

Discussion of remarriage for abused women:
http://www.abigails.org/Divorce/remarriage.htm
https://www.theaquilareport.com/divorce-remarriage-and-abuse/

Here we see how Hillel's Divorce-for-any-cause became the norm within Judaism today.
http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5238-divorce
http://www.jesuswalk.com/manifesto/5_divorce.htm