

Divorce & Remarriage

Introduction

Dear Reader,

I must say, first of all, that this writing is not intended to be an electronic counselor to individuals who need help to make a decision regarding their present relationship. This writing is not a substitute for one-on-one counseling. Electronic text cannot and will not do what a Spirit-filled Pastor is ordained by God to do. If you find yourself nearing a final decision of divorce, and you have found this writing: BEWARE!

The final choice of divorce is only lawful in scripture and acceptable to God when every biblical means for reconciliation has been exhausted. The grounds for biblical divorce are very narrow and specific, otherwise it's sin! For good reason God said that He hates unlawful divorce in Malachi 2:16, my reader! Therefore before you undertake a study of this writing I must bring before your conscience one more matter, the chiefest Christian moral. Why would someone need to pursue and exhaust all the means of reconciliation righteously possible, you wonder? The apostle John declared, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 Jn. 4:16). Without biblical "love" a marriage may seem to be shipwreck, this is true... but my friend, without biblical "love" the soul is lost and without God! Therefore don't pursue an understanding of this doctrine in bitterness, hatred, and un-forgiveness, my friend, this is a dangerous place to be in before Almighty God. If your heart is in this place then you need pastoral care and counsel by a man of God from a biblical Church, my reader. The apostle Peter said, "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). This writing is intended to be of help and aid to those who are sincerely seeking an understanding of this subject while being surrendered to the answers of scripture, come what may. True Christians must be subject to God's will revealed through scripture no matter what the conclusion of any present or future circumstance. The audience to whom I write heretofore are of this spiritual frame, but if there be anyone else who is otherwise minded and you make a sinful decision after reading the following (because you were misguided by the hidden evils of your heart), "Your blood be upon your own heads" (Acts 18:6). Adulterers will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10, Heb. 13:4).

Matthew 5:31-32 is found within what is called, "The Sermon on the Mount". Because of this, I have found it necessary to look carefully at the context of this Sermon first of all. Those who hold to the view that there is no Lawful allowance for divorce and remarriage in the New Testament (the strictest no-exception view held most commonly by Anabaptists) do fundamentally misunderstand the purpose of this Sermon. At the end of reading through this address, first of all, it is my hope that the reader will understand the context of "The Sermon on the Mount": specifically that, the Sermon was not spoken to *reform* the Moral Law into a greater and more profound application which the Old Testament lacked. No, but rather, Jesus Christ spoke to *confirm* the true meaning and application of the Moral Law as God had always intended it to be in the Old Testament. The relevance of this I cannot address now, my reader, but I entreat you to follow with me in a thorough study of scripture which will lead into what I consider to be a conclusive presentation of biblical instruction concerning Divorce & Remarriage. May the Lord Jesus help us in this noble pursuit. Amen.

The Sermon on the Mount

Misconceptions of Jesus Christ's Reformation

Old Testament Righteousness & Regeneration - *in summary*

According to scripture, there are two separate categories of lifestyle which do characterize all mankind: *Ignorant Sinners* and *Willful Sinners*. With certainty, those who live a lifestyle free from the continuance of “willful sin” do so by the enablement of the Holy Ghost via regeneration. This is an observable fact, apparent in the Old and New Testaments made between God and man. We can understand, therefore, that these two categories of human lifestyle do contrast in equal proportion to the differing heart-conditions within mankind. In other words, what is displayed outside of the man is representative of what is inside of the man, according to the scripture. For example, it was written,

“For he is not a Jew, which is one **outwardly**; neither *is that* circumcision, which is **outward** in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one **inwardly**; and circumcision *is that* of **the heart**, in **the Spirit**, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.” – Romans 2:28-29

It is easy for some people to consider “the Law” as a yoke of mere ceremonies, something kept-up by carnal men without the empowerment of the Holy Ghost. This was impossible, for, not even the ceremonies of the Law could be kept without the Holy Ghost (see [The Gospel Calling](#))! Once this principle is understood, it is not hard for us to understand that, furthermore, a man cannot keep the Moral Law without the empowerment of the Holy Ghost. We, the saints of the New Covenant, must KEEP the Moral Law like as all true Jews of pastime, and though this does not mean sinless perfection, it does mean a life of radical obedience! For this reason it was written,

“For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the Law: but if thou be a breaker of the Law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision **keep the righteousness of the Law**, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is **by nature, if it fulfil the Law**, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the Law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.” – Romans 2:25-29

The contextual foreground of Romans 2:28-29 does specifically identify the accomplishment of inward salvation which is “of the heart” and “in the Spirit”, and what is it? Verses 25-27 declares it very plainly: Inward salvation is identified by those who do “by nature fulfill the Law”, which means that they do “keep the righteousness of the Law”. This is the expressed meaning of what it is to be a Jew inwardly. To be a Jew, meant, a man kept the Law inwardly – thanks be to God’s amazing grace! Salvation exists in the New Testament for the very same accomplishment, “that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4, 2:13, 6:12, 6:16, 13:8, 15:18, Gal. 5:7, 24, 6:7-9; for more information see [Legalism: Law, Grace, and Works](#)).

It is needful for us to understand salvation in the Old Covenant, my reader. Those who were able to keep the ceremonies of the Law by faith (i.e. believing in the Gospel), as God did originally intend, they were thereby enabled to keep the Moral Law by faith (through the empowerment of the Holy Ghost). In this order and by these means, saving grace was administered and experienced! Therefore the OT Moral Law was and is a standard of morality which was impossible to “fulfill” without the Holy Ghost via regeneration (Rom. 8:2-4). If this were not so, inward Jews would not have existed until the New Covenant. If this were not so, a man would have never kept the Law inwardly and by nature until the New Testament dispensation. Therefore because this is so, God spoke of many a man who found favor in His sight. For example, Noah was a “just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). Abraham “believed in the LORD; and HE counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). Abraham walked before God (Gen. 17:1-2, 48:15) and feared God (Gen. 22:12). He was even called “the friend of God”, and for good reason (Gen. 18:17-19, James 2:23)! Abraham was a man who was obedient to God’s voice (Gen. 22:16-18). The Lord Jesus understood that Isaac and Jacob followed in Abraham’s footsteps. Signifying this, the Lord said, “many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 8:11). Furthermore, Job was a “man that was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). Yes, and, according to scripture, Job was the most righteous man in all the earth during his time (Job 1:8, 2:3)! He was a man full of the Holy Ghost, truly! Thus he lived a lifestyle of utter obedience to God’s commandments (see the Christ-like description of Job’s life before he fell into sin during the trial of his faith - Job chapter 29). A host of other witnesses could be mentioned (see Hebrews 11, for example) but the point is clear: All these men, like Zacharias and Elisabeth, were “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6).

Misconceptions of Jesus Christ's Reformation

According to Hebrews 9:10, Christ came to bring a "reformation". This is undoubtedly true, but what was reformed? And, in what way exactly? Jesus Christ was careful to speak directly on this matter, lest we misunderstand the purpose of His reforms. The Lord Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19). This is a staggering opening to His most famous sermon in recorded history! Nevertheless, mind you, my reader, His point spoken was not a point well understood. The Jews did not understand what He was saying! They did not but we can, with the help of the Spirit of God... will you hear it, my reader? With all things understood and every mystery unveiled, Christ came to *fulfill the Law* – on earth, in heaven, and in us – both the ceremonial and the Moral Law! Even though this is the truth, it is not apparently true to the unlearned reader of the New Testament. Take for example, "The Sermon on the Mount" in its entirety.

When reading Matthew chapters 5-7 it appears that Jesus Christ was seeking a reformation from the Law in the sense that He was in disagreement with the Law. When the Lord said six different times, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time", quoting the Law (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43), it appears that he is disagreeing with what the Law said, but in fact, on the contrary, the Lord Jesus was quoting the "common-place" interpretation of the Law which had been disseminated by false Judaism in that woeful generation. Though Christ was quoting the Law, he was not disagreeing with the Law (Note: these six references to the Old Testament bring in view the Moral Law and not the Ceremonial Law). I say again, the Lord Jesus was denouncing the popular misinterpretation and declaring the true interpretation, quoting the Law as a reference point to what they have heard in comparison to what actually is! Generally speaking, the commonplace understanding of the Law in the 1st century popular Judaism was, shockingly, in utter oblivion to *The Spirit of the Law*, therefore what the people did hear ("Ye have heard") all throughout their lifetime was not a true interpretation of the Law.

The Spirit of the Law: to "fulfill the Law... by nature" (Rom. 2:27)

The Jewish leaders (the Pharisees and Sadducees) were not born again of the Spirit of God and, thus, how could they see the correct interpretation of the Law? The Pharisees did not see or understand The Spirit of the Law because they did not have the Spirit of God! For, verily, "the Law is spiritual" (Rom. 7:14), a converted Pharisee declared. Those who profit from the Law do, by necessity, have spiritual ears to hearken to what man cannot naturally understand or perceive! "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Christ was not bashful to declare this ancient truth, no! While rebuking the mass multitude of unconverted and heretical Jews, the Lord said, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47; for a more detailed explanation of "**The Spirituality of the Law**" please follow the link). All this being said, what "reformation" did Christ come to bring? In short, He came to fulfill the ceremonial Law in Heaven once and for all, so that He might fulfill the moral and typological applications of the Law in His people, the Church. All this being said, Christ did not come to disagree with six different moral commandments of Old Testament Law. Rather, He came to declare the correct application of those six moral commandments in their true interpretations, spiritually speaking, contrary the popular heresy which was helping to damn the multitudes. For example, consider the first of six which Christ addressed:

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #1

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, THOU SHALT NOT KILL; AND WHOSOEVER SHALL KILL SHALL BE IN DANGER OF THE JUDGMENT: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way;

first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” – Matthew 5:21-26

Firstly, let us consider the anatomy of Israelite civil justice and rule by judgment and councils.

Secondarily, let us consider the three offences Christ is warning against.

Christ was not speaking against the Law so as to reform it. My reader, do you see how the offender that is depicted here is commended to seek atonement by a “gift before the altar” after all necessary repentance and restitution was performed (Matt. 5:23-24)? This was contextual to Jewish society, justice, and rule (a rule whereby God reigned as KING through men). The offender of the Law stood threatened by physical and spiritual judgment, by God-appointed Judges on earth and the Lord’s judgment in heaven, exactly as the Law demanded (Matt. 5:22, 25-26). Judges were appointed throughout Israel for all matters of Law-breaking (minor and major), and thus the scripture speaks of being in danger of both judgment and councils (Deut. 1:16, 16:18-22, 19:17-18, 25:1). All controversies of Law-breaking were pointed toward the earthly Judges (Ex. 21:6, 21:22, 22:8-9, Num. 25:5). Upon their judgment all punishment would transpire, and in the case of civil disobedience to the Judges the death penalty was warned (Deut. 17:8-13). Therefore with the grounds of Israelite judgment so clearly placed into position so as to uphold all justice, there must be witnesses for every un-confessed crime. The witnesses of any crime (sin) committed were of vital importance (Deut. 19:15). Seeing that power to kill resided in the Judges verdict of every accusation, witnesses must be honest and true. In the case that a man was incriminated by a false accusation, retributive judgment was returned upon his own head to the same degree he thought to condemn another (“Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you” – Deut. 19:19).

With the former contextual foreground in place the situation depicted in Matthew 5:21-26 is simplified. The Lord Jesus was not disagreeing with the Moral Law. No, He was not nullifying it or reforming it even though it may appear that He is. As a new believer I once thought this way. At first glance it does appear that Christ was disagreeing with the moral commandment of the Law by saying, “But I say unto you” (Matt. 5:22). It does seem like the Lord was contradicting the Law because He believed it is too shallow. Therefore (in this view), Christ spoke out in contradistinction to the Law so as to deepen the application and extend the warning. Thus He does not condemn the act of murder, merely, but the thought of murder (which is anger) and the words of murder (which is “Raca” and “Thou fool”). At first glance this is a compelling interpretation, but with all things considered it is an impossible interpretation!

The former interpretation is based upon the premise that the Law does NOT condemn anger (“angry with his brother”), railing and reviling (“whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca”), and murderous incrimination (“whosoever shall say, Thou fool”). This is not the case!

“whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment”

Anger is explicitly forbidden and condemned in Leviticus 19:15-18. As you read it, take in the whole heart of the passage. It is written, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:15-18). Apart from the regenerating power of God’s grace through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, obedience to this was impossible. The manner of behavior which was obedient to this passage depicts a profound work of God’s grace! Furthermore, and, as further confirmation, anger, hatred, and grudges were condemned in the New Testament just like it was condemned in the Old Testament – with no reformation (Matt. 6:14-15, James 5:9, Gal. 5:19-21). [Note: If a man was angry with his brother without a cause and it led him to commit an act of harm or injury to his fellow brother, he would be endangered of the judgment (the assembly of judges which consisted of 23 men in 1st century Judaism).]

“whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca”

Those who were angry *with a righteous cause* were apt to act in temperance and self-control, being guided by the Spirit of God (2 Tim. 1:7). Those who were angry “*without a cause*” were apt to act upon that anger immorally, seeing that they were inflamed with the fires of iniquity (Prov. 14:17, 22:24, 29:22). “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” (Prov. 29:11). If a man durst not act upon physical violence or plots of murder for fear of the civil magistrates, he would be more likely to spew out defaming insults and slanderous accusations. Titles of honor or defaming insults in Jewish culture were connected to the moral standing one had according to the Law. Therefore to insult someone, the reviler would attack a man’s good reputation and good standing according to the Law. This means that for Israelites, insults were more like accusations - accusations of sinful or Law-breaking behavior. Therefore for someone to say to his brother, “Raca”, he was endangered by the Law which forbade false witnessing (Ex. 20:16, 23:1, Deut. 5:20, Prov. 19:5, 9, Prov. 21:28, Deut. 19:15-21). In proportion to any false accusation the reviler was to suffer, and if after repeated chastisements he was not corrected, he died (Num. 15:28-31). Remedial chastisements were a part of life in Israel, as it was written: “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes” (Prov. 18:6). In the New Testament the verdict is explicitly stated, “revilers” and “railers” are doomed to hell (1 Cor. 6:9-10, 5:11-13), and “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8). [Note: If a man is contemptuous and injurious so as to rail and revile, by means of false witnessing or false accusation, the proportion of his punishment would equal the magnitude of his false accusation. He, being brought before the council to be judged, was thus brought into the danger of the council (the assembly of judges known as the Sanhedrin which consisted of 72 men in 1st century Judaism).]

“whosoever shall say, Thou fool”

Is there hope for a fool? Scripture states, “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov. 29:20). According to Adam Clarke, “This term implied, among the Jews, the highest enormity, and most aggravated guilt.” This term was equivalent to calling someone an apostate (Psalm 14:1, 53:1) or a wicked man. According to the Jews, all such men were judged to die. Literally speaking, fools die (1 Sam. 26:21, 2 Sam. 3:33, Prov. 10:8, 23, 18:7)! Every Israelite knew it, but do we? My reader, inhale the thoughts of God on the matter: “A fool’s wrath is presently known” (Prov. 12:16), “a fool layeth open his folly” (Prov. 13:16), “the fool rageth and is confident” (Prov. 14:16), and finally, “Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly” (Prov. 17:12)! Yes. For this reason fools died! They were abominable apostates beyond all hope of correction or help of remedial punishment!

Fools ended up digging their own grave by false witnessing, lying, slandering, and reviling. Their hatred and anger drove them to the very gates of judgment! Why? Because if a false accuser incriminated another man, saying, “Thou fool”, a fool’s death he would die! To accuse the innocent with accusations of apostasy, was apostasy! Apostasy, or to be a “fool”, was a condition which was punishable by death (see Deut. 19:15-21), a condition obtained by punishable iniquity, therefore if someone falsely accused a man of crimes which pertained to a fool in the heat of his anger, this was to impose upon the accused the danger of death (enforced by the council). If the accusation was found to be false then the accuser would have died! It was written, “The Judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:18-21). Perhaps now we can understand why it was written by Solomon the Wise, “A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Prov. 18:7), and again, “He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth slander, is a fool” (Prov. 10:18).

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #2

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” – Matthew 5:27-30

Was the look of lust forbidden by the Old Testament? Yes. It was written, “Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids” (Proverbs 6:25). If the OT Law which Christ quoted did exclusively forbid the outward act of adultery (without condemning the inward thought of adultery), then Matthew 5:27-30 existed as a reformatory statement. As you can see by Proverbs 6:25, this was not the case. The Law did not merely forbid the look of lust. The Law required far more than mere self-denial! According to Proverbs 5:15-19, God required nothing less than a heart aflame with divinely empowered passion (“Song of Solomon” passion!) whereby a man would LOVE his own wife with intense loyalty and fidelity! Oh, my reader, loyal eyes do pale in comparison to a loyal heart! Therefore it was written, “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19). A true saint of God in the Old Testament lived a lifestyle far from the heart-adultery of wicked men! They freely confessed, “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave unto me” (Job 31:1, Psalm 101:3). They were not bound to the animal-like passions of depravity. No! They gazed upon the luster of God’s immortal majesty! “To behold the beauty of the LORD”, was their chief desire (Ps. 27:4)! God said, “keep My Law as the apple of thine eye”, and they were happy so to do (Prov. 7:2)!

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #3

“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.” – Matthew 5:31-32

Yet again, and, for the third time, Christ defended and confirmed the true teaching of the Law! The 1st century Jews were monsters of adultery! This “adulterous and sinful generation” needed a decrying voice in conflict with their widespread heresies (Mark 8:38). Thus, did their persecuted Messiah declare, “But I say unto you”! The Pharisees misinterpreted the grounds of Lawful divorce taught in the Law (Deut. 24:1-4). They broadened the grounds to make room for their wicked lusts. “Hate” and “no favour”, as seen in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, became relative to the husband’s carnal imagination, thus men fancied opportunities to divorce their wives for “every cause” which discolored their personal happiness. They asked the Lord in Matthew 19:3, “Is it Lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” The Lord responded in the very same way as Matthew 5:31-32. He narrowed down the grounds of Lawful divorce to the cause of fornication instead of “every cause” (see Matt. 19:3-9). Relative to every man’s short temper and transient favor, the apostate generation of Jews divorced their wives for any and every cause, but the Law allowed for only ONE CAUSE! – fornication. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matt. 19:9). [A more thorough address of Christ’s stance on Divorce and Remarriage in correlation with Old Testament Law is in the latter half of this writing.]

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #4

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, THOU SHALT NOT FORSWEAR THYSELF, BUT SHALT PERFORM UNTO THE LORD THINE OATHS: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” – Matthew 5:33-37

It appears that the Lord was disagreeing with and reforming the Law, for the fourth time. Nevertheless, let Albert Barnes articulate the meaning and significance of Christ’s decrying correction of Lawless swearing, a behavior which had become common-place in the 1st century.

*Note: The emboldened text signifies which portion of scripture Barnes is commenting upon.

“Thou shalt not forswear thyself - Christ here proceeds to correct another false interpretation of the Law. The Law respecting oaths is found in [Lev 19:12](#), and [Deu 23:23](#). By those Laws people were forbid to perjure themselves, or to forswear, that is, swear falsely.

Perform unto the Lord - Perform literally, really, and religiously what is promised in an oath.

Thine oaths - An oath is a solemn affirmation or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed, and imprecating his vengeance, and renouncing his favor if what is affirmed is false. A false oath is called perjury, or, as in this place, forswearing.

It appears, however, from this passage, as well as from the ancient writings of the Jewish rabbins, that while the Jews professedly adhered to the Law, they had introduced a number of oaths in common conversation, and oaths which they by no means considered to be binding. For example, they would swear by the temple, by the head, by heaven, by the earth. So long as they kept from swearing by the name Yahweh, and so long as they observed the oaths publicly taken, they seemed to consider all others as allowable, and allowedly broken. This is the abuse which Christ wished to correct. “It was the practice of swearing in common conversation, and especially swearing by created things.” To do this, he said that they were mistaken in their views of the sacredness of such oaths. They were very closely connected with God; and to trifle with them was a species of trifling with God. Heaven is his throne; the earth his footstool; Jerusalem his special abode; the head was made by him, and was so much under his control that we could not make one hair white or black. To swear by these things, therefore, was to treat irreverently objects created by God, and could not be without guilt. It is remarkable that the sin here condemned by the Saviour prevails still in Palestine in the same form and manner referred to here. Dr. Thomson (*The Land and the Book*, vol. ii. p. 284) says, “The people now use the very same sort of oaths that are mentioned and condemned by our Lord. They swear by the head, by their life, by heaven, and by the temple, or what is in its place, the church. The forms of cursing and swearing, however, are almost infinite, and fall on the pained ear all day long.”

Our Saviour here evidently had no reference to judicial oaths, or oaths taken in a court of justice. It was merely the foolish and wicked habit of swearing in private conversation; of swearing on every occasion and by everything that he condemned. This he does condemn in a most unqualified manner. He himself, however, did not refuse to take an oath in a court of Law, [Mat 26:63-64](#). So Paul often called God to witness his sincerity, which is all that is meant by an oath. See [Rom 1:9](#); [Rom 9:1](#); [Gal 1:20](#); [Heb 6:16](#). Oaths were, moreover, prescribed in the Law of Moses, and Christ did not come to repeal those Laws. See [Exo 22:11](#); [Lev 5:1](#); [Num 5:19](#); [Deu 29:12](#), [Deu 29:14](#).

But I say unto you, Swear not at all - That is, in the manner which he proceeds to specify. Swear not in any of the common and profane ways customary at that time.

By heaven; for it is God’s throne - To swear by that was, if it meant anything, to swear by Him that sitteth thereon, [Mat 23:22](#).

Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool - Swearing by that, therefore, is really swearing by God. Or perhaps it means:

1. That we have no right to pledge, or swear by, what belongs to God; and,
2. That oaths by inanimate objects are unmeaningful and wicked.

If they are real oaths, they are by a living Being, who has power to take vengeance. A footstool is that on which the feet rest when sitting. The term is applied to the earth to denote how lowly and humble an object it is when compared with God.

Jerusalem - See the notes at [Mat 2:1](#).

City of the Great King - That is, of God; called the Great King because he was the King of the Israelites, and Jerusalem was the capital of the nation, and the place where he was especially honored as king. Compare [Psa 46:4](#); [Psa 48:1-2](#); [Psa 87:3](#).

Neither shalt thou swear by thy head - This was a common oath. The Gentiles also used this oath. To swear by the head was the same as to swear by the life; or to say, I will forfeit my life if what I say is not true. God is the Author of the life, and to swear by that, therefore, is the same as to swear by him.

Because thou canst not make one hair white or black - You have no control or right over your own life. You cannot even change one single hair. God has all that control; and it is therefore improper and profane to pledge what is God's gift and God's property; and it is the same as swearing by God himself.

But let your communication - Your word; what you say.

Be, Yea - Yes. This does not mean that we should always use the word "yea," for it might as well have been translated "yes"; but it means that we should simply affirm or declare that a thing is so.

More than these - More than these affirmations.

Cometh of evil - Is evil. Proceeds from some evil disposition or purpose. And from this we may learn:

1. That profane swearing is always the evidence of a depraved heart. To trifle with the name of God, or with any of his works, is itself most decided proof of depravity.

2. That no man is believed any sooner in common conversation because he swears to a thing. When we hear a man swear to a thing, it is pretty good evidence that he knows what he is saying to be false, and we should be on our guard. He that will break the third commandment will not hesitate to break the ninth also. And this explains the fact that profane swearers are seldom believed. The man who is always believed is he whose character is beyond suspicion in all things, who obeys all the Laws of God, and whose simple declaration, therefore, is enough. A man that is truly a Christian, and leads a Christian life, does not need oaths and profaneness to make him believed." – Albert Barnes

With the help of Albert Barnes' commentary we are enabled to see the scriptural veracity and historical relevance of Christ's words. Amidst the whelming storm of heresy Christ stood forth to preach! Yea, His decriing voice was loud and His objective was clear: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these lest commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:17-20). In other words, let the reader understand: the Lord's words were not reformatory but confirmatory to the Law.

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #5

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the Law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." – Matthew 5:38-42

The matter brought into attention by our Lord is, namely, the Lawful grounds for revenge. The depraved religiosity of 1st century heretics already abused the Lawful grounds of "divorce and remarriage" and the Lawful grounds of

“swearing”, thus we can expect no change in behavior here. *Adulterous lust* drove the Jews to abuse the Law of “divorce and remarriage”. *Flagrant lying* and a *common-place fearlessness* drove the Jews to abuse the Law of “swearing”. So also, again, under the guise of keeping God’s holy Law, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH”, the people were intent upon fulfilling their *immoral hatred* of one another. What a disgrace to the Law of God! A Law which, mind you, demanded love and forgiveness to reign between all Israelites! Because of this, the circumstances in which Lawful and moral revenge was asserted by an Israelite citizen were case-sensitive.

Lawful & Moral Revenge

1. Made use of Magistrates (Judges).
2. Was compelled by true love (i.e. the goal of all revenge was not personal gain but, rather, the offenders repentance before God and man)
3. Was not compelled by intemperance, wrath, hatred, or any immoral desire.
4. Through faith, the outcome was put in the hands of the LORD who was mighty to save and powerful to recompense.

UnLawful & Immoral Revenge

1. Did not make use of Magistrates (Judges).
2. Was not compelled by true love. (i.e. the goal of all revenge was for personal gain and therefore, it was without an eye to the soul’s condition before God)
3. Was compelled by intemperance, wrath, hatred, and all manner of immoral desires.
4. Through unbelief, the matter was taken into their own hands to recompense and revenge by whatever means he felt equal to how he was betrayed and wronged (so to speak) - immoral evil for immoral evil.

UnLawful and immoral revenge did not make use of magistrates because, “violence covereth the mouth of the wicked” (Prov. 10:6, 11). The man himself was so much taken in violence he could not wait upon the Lord, but contrary to this, Solomon warned, “Say not thou, I will recompense evil; **but wait on the LORD**, and he shall save thee” (Prov. 20:22). Those that trusted in God waited upon God! Those that trusted in God refrained from any immoral and unjust means to take revenge. They knew that God would defend the right and bring justice, even if false witnesses were involved (Prov. 19:5, 9, Dan. 6:10). On this regard, also, it was written, “Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Prov. 24:28-29). Contrary to what was commanded, the 1st century Jews interpreted the Law in the guile of their own hate-filled, angry, and immoral souls. They held that, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH”, gave credence for revenge in all circumstances with or without magistrates, executed by their own hands, to the nullification of charity. This was exactly contrary to what was written, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). You see, the Lord Jesus was not reforming the Law but rather confirming its true meaning! He was preaching to the Israelites behaviors which they lacked, behaviors that the Law explicitly demanded. (Note: Contextually speaking, Leviticus 19:15-18 addressed the need for “the love of the Brethren” in the context of doing justice and judgment in Israel. So also in Prov. 24:28-29, unrighteous vengeance is specifically condemned by the Law.)

- **Christ-like Behavior is Demanded & Expected** (and ought never be nullified): Prov. 10:12, 12:16, 15:1, 18, 17:9, 19:11
- **Slowness to Anger**: Prov. 16:32, Eccl. 7:9, Prov. 27:4
- **Bridling the tongue** (arguments forbidden): Prov. 10:6, 11-14, 18-21, 23-32, 13:3, 29:11, 16:27, 28:25, 29:22
- **Temperance**: Prov. 25:28, 16:32
- **Violence Rebuked** (in word or deed): Ps. 11:5, 55:9, Prov. 4:17, 10:6, 10:11, 13:2, 16:29, Eccl. 5:8
- **Love of the Brethren**: Lev. 19:15-18, Prov. 3:27-31, 17:9, 24:28-29, 25:9, 25:21-22
- **Acts of Justice Suffocate the Furtherance of Evil**: Deut. 19:20-21

Therefore, Lawful revenge would never be taken in the anger of personal vendettas or the rash intemperance of acting upon angry desires: Because of wrath, hatred, pride, and self-esteem, one would disregard the purpose of magistrates (God-appointed judges who administer God’s proportionate revenge upon acts disobedience). They, being infuriated and intemperate, would attack and fight against those who do their persons harm. These men were personally

offended, not righteously offended. They would seek personal revenge not charitable and godly justice, therefore they would often conspire a plan of revenge with others who were not involved (Prov. 25:9) instead of relying upon the magistrates to exact what is right and just. True love would teach them to forbear and hide the shame of wrath, to diffuse the progress of strife or violence with soft answers and gentle demeanors, to love and forgive those who violently abused others – it was very hard for a fight to continue when such behavior was exhibited! Consider the scriptures,

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” – Proverbs 10:12

“A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.” – Proverbs 12:16

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” – Proverbs 15:1

“A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.” – Proverbs 15:18

“He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” – Prov. 17:9

“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.” – Proverbs 19:11

With such a character, strife was unstirred and appeased, wrath was turned away, divided friends were unified, and transgression was overpassed! Hardened backsliders could be brought to repentance, scripture promised, when such behaviors were exhibited to offenders! This is what the Lord had in mind when He said, “resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the Law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” This was repentance-working conduct which overcame evil! Yes, and this conduct was not in disagreement with the Law, was it? By no means, my reader! It was written, “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21-22). Hallelujah!

These acts of humility and self-sacrificial love were appropriate in their place, but when and if the aggressor was not pacified from his cause of harm even though an Israelite was utterly Christ-like, the injured may seek Lawful revenge. In this case-sensitive situation justice must be sought out of true love for the offender's soul. I repeat, this was NOT a pursuit of justice out of spite or personal grudge. Rather, justice was pursued in hopes that the offender would be brought to sincere and godly repentance for what he has done (Note: Righteous men had a love for the soul of the offender more than the bounty of personal gain!). If the magisterial justice inflicted a proportionate blow upon the offender's body, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH”, perhaps the offender will feel the evil of what he had done and repent! This very same charitable justice can be seen in the ministerial judgment of the apostle Paul (in one sense). It was said that Paul “revenged all disobedience” (2 Cor. 10:6), and how? In one case, for example, judgment was passed upon a New Testament offender, “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).

You see, God created the Law of moral revenge to save souls and not destroy them, though the flesh may be harmed. It is written, “the Law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). God knew that backsliding Israelites would need chastisement to help them repent of their rebellion (Heb. 12:11). Injurious persons who fell subject to the grasp of Israelite civil justice deserved what they received. The sin that was committed was not against a man, merely, but against God, and if the offender did abide without repentance he would eventually die (Prov. 13:13-14, Num. 15:30-31). If evil was not struck hard, impenitent behavior would fester like a leprous plague (Deut. 19:20-21). God knew, “the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them” (Prov. 11:3), and, “scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath” (Prov. 29:8). Therefore we can understand that the Law was of God (decreed by the KING of Israel who sat between the cherubims), and when the justice of His decrees were righteously apprehended and equally executed by Israelite magistrates, this was God's revenge executed by God's Law. Just revenge was, therefore, God's revenge... no man's.

My reader, let the goal of God's revenge be clear to you! His purposes are twofold: Firstly, as formerly mentioned, this revenge was asserted in the motivation of true love and universal forgiveness, and thus, the pursuit of revenge was for the sake of doing good to the offender's soul that stands in need of genuine repentance of his wrong-doing (being helped thereto by the infliction of judicial punishment); in this way we can call this revenge, God's revenge, seeing that it was an act of justice asserted by God's appointed judges enacted God's Law, used by loving Israelites who seek the well-being of backsliding brethren, which was, furthermore and secondarily, for the good of the whole Church (or Nation) because the evil must be repented of or else the wickedness would spread (Deut. 19:20-21). When justice was fulfilled upon individual offenders, "those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; *but* life *shall go* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 19:20-21). Hallelujah!

Old Testament MORAL COMMANDMENT #6

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR, AND HATE THINE ENEMY. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." – Matthew 5:43-48

In the former passage (Matt. 5:38-42), the Lord Jesus decried the common-place heretical practice of "Lawful revenge", as the 1st century Jews wrongfully understood it. The Jews, blinded by sin, failed to discern "Lawful revenge" from "UnLawful revenge". With great carefulness and exhaustive study, the true meaning of the Law becomes plain ("line upon line" as was formerly addressed). Even so, equal carefulness was necessary to correctly interpret and practice the Laws which Jesus Christ addressed in Matthew 5:43. Commanding the public's attention, Christ quoted two passages of scripture: (Firstly) "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR" (and Secondarily) "AND HATE THINE ENEMY". The two different passages of scripture are (Firstly) Leviticus 19:18, (and Secondarily) Deuteronomy 23:1-14 [exemplified in Psalm 139:21-22, 15:4, 31:6, 41:10, 2 Chron. 19:2].

Contextually, "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR", was a commandment to love the Jews (foreign converts or native-born citizens). It must be noted, this love must be divinely empowered through personal regeneration because, "he is a Jew which is one inwardly" (Rom. 2:29). This love was not originating from national, racial, or cultural pride. No! This love originated from God to whom they are vertically related to, as it is written, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to **walk humbly with thy God**" (Micah 6:8). Didn't the Law say, "Enoch walked with God" (Gen. 5:24)? Fulfilling the second greatest commandment of the Law, "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF" (Matt. 22:39), came from an overflow of grace which originated in the fulfillment of the first and greatest commandment, "THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND" (Matt. 22:37-38). That which divinely flows horizontally came as an overflow of what is channeled vertically, by the grace of God!

For a 1st century Jew, to love ones neighbor was more like fraternal comradery or competitive alliances. To them, love was a carnal bond between persons to achieve a nationalistic goal of self-interest. The Jews were bent upon heretical understandings of love because they unrighteously loved themselves and unLawfully hated everyone else. This was the issue, it was radical Jewish pride and nationalistic exclusivism whereby they hated all other nations and races with an immoral hatred. Not all nationalistic or race hatred was immoral (Lawfully speaking), depending upon how this hatred was contrived. Please let me explain.

A Moral Hatred

*"Do not I **hate** them, O LORD, that **hate** thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?"*

I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” – Psalm 139:21-22

For the Law to use the word “**hate**” or “**hatred**”, it meant to express the occasion when a true saint of Israel was *righteously repulsed* at legal abominations. Keep in mind, nations, kingdoms, races, and people can become legal abominations. This interpretation is easily proven by scriptural parallels. On a foundational level, for example, the Israelites were commanded by Law to utterly hate, abhor, and destroy certain peoples, but it was moral (Ex. 23:20-33, 34:11-14, Lev. 18:24-30, 20:22-27, Num. 33:51-56, Deut. 7:1-6, 16-19, 23-26, 12:1-4, 29-32, 18:9-14, 20:16-18, 23:1-17, Josh. 23:2-16, Judges 2:2-3; Note: see the word abominable and its derivatives; abominable = hateful). It was moral because God commanded it. God hated these people and Israel was required to be like God (i.e. in legal agreement with God; Lev. 20:23). In the sense that these individuals were legally repulsive, legally unclean, legally condemned, and legally penalized with total annihilation with no possibility of pity or mercy, Israel hated them. This was not a personal vendetta. These kinds of people included the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and more.

Certain peoples (by race) were to be thus hated and abhorred because of what they did against God, but others for what they did against Israel. The nations of the Promised Land sinned against God. The Amalekites, on the other hand, sinned against Israel (see Ex. 17, Deut. 25:17-19). Unto all the former peoples, utter destruction was determined by God. A hated people doing hated (abominable) things were thus hatefully repulsive to justice’s ambassadors, nevertheless NOT ALL were doomed to utter destruction.

God restrained Israel’s hatred of certain peoples in the case where the Lord foretold that Israel might err. Two of these cases were with the Edomites and the Egyptians. God said, “Thou shalt **not abhor** an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt **not abhor** an Egyptian; because thou was a stranger in his land” (Deut. 23:7). Do you see how the word “abhor” is used, a synonym of hate? The meaning of this commandment was very clear when taken in its surrounding context. Deuteronomy chapter 23 carried the same burden from verse 1 to verse 17 – legal holiness. All unholy or unclean things were to be utterly detested and hated, as it was written in Deuteronomy 7:25-26. Therefore when certain persons, objects, or races were permanently declared as unclean or unholy to God, they would need to be legally hated and detested as a cursed object. Israel was to keep the “congregation of the LORD” clean and clear of all things legally detestable to God. Therefore under this sense and emotion, Israel would obey the commandments given to them in Deuteronomy 23:1-17.

Verse 1 legally detested certain persons, by saying, “He...shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD” (Deut. 23:1). In verses 2 and 3, it was written again, “shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD”. In OT Law this was everything; no entrance into the congregation of the LORD meant no salvation; expulsion from the congregation of the LORD meant damnation. It is notable that, furthermore, the torments of damnation were the torments of those whom God hated, in this life or the next (Ps. 5:5, 10:3, Lev. 20:23, Prov. 6:16-19, Hos. 9:15, Zech. 11:8, Rom. 9:13, Mal. 1:2-3). Categorically, two different persons were forbidden entrance into Israel in verses 1-2. Categorically, two different races of people were forbidden entrance into Israel in verses 3-6 (under certain specifications); the Ammonite and Moabite. Categorically, two different races of people were explicitly allowed entrance into Israel in verses 7-8; the Edomite and Egyptian. Without this explicit commandment, Israel would have been inclined to repulse the Edomite and the Egyptian. Considering their history of opposition one against another, the Lord made room for peace.

In context, we can see that to “hate” means, to legally detest unto expulsion from the congregation. This was a moral abhorrence, an abhorrence of what God decided as unholy and unclean. For example, in verse 9, “every wicked thing” was grounds for temporary or permanent expulsion from the camp or congregation of the LORD (Deut. 23:9). In verse 10, it was the “uncleanness” whereby a man “shall not come within the camp” (Deut. 23:10). Only by the means of cleansing can the man “come into the camp again” (Deut. 23:11). All of these Laws were in connection to the personality of God! Therefore it was written, “For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of the camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deut. 23:14). Undoubtedly, then, and without controversy, the Law expressed legal detestableness and legal unacceptableness by the word “abhor” (Deut. 23:7), and for the obedient Jew this was a moral hatred. So also, my reader, the word “hate” found in Deut. 21:15, 22:13, and 24:3 did not mean anything different (see “Divorce & Remarriage”).

The nations and peoples who were to be hated with a moral hatred were case-sensitive. The Law was not providing liberty to immorally hate anyone you want! The Law explicitly forbids immoral hatred and commanded divinely empowered love. Like the examples formerly addressed, Edomites and Egyptians were not to be utterly doomed to damnation (as those who were forever expelled from Israel). Therefore they were not to be forever and utterly held in abhorrence, but, rather, they should be sought after for conversion to the One True God that they might become a Jew and dwell among God's holy people. Doubtlessly, Jonah's visit to Nineveh insulted the profane racism of unconverted Jews in his day, but God's true people rejoiced to hear a nation turned to the God of Israel!

Contextually, "HATE THINE ENEMY", was the Lawful command to morally hate those whom God had doomed to utter destruction as un-save-able castaways, but Israelites were to LOVE ALL OTHERS! 1st century Jews were using this command to hate anyone and everyone they wanted, and in their nationalistic pride they hated everyone who was not a Jew. According to one ancient source, the common-place immoral hatred of their day was evident:

"A Jew sees a Gentile fall into the sea, let him by no means lift him out; for it is written, Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbor: - but this is not thy neighbor." –Maimon

1st century heretical hatred was NOT contrived morally, segregating individuals or nations based upon their moral standing before God Almighty. No! The decision which belonged to God they decided upon themselves. They deemed as hopeless those whom God still hoped for. They did cast away those whom God was not casting away. They forsook those whom God would send His prophets to plead. 1st century heretical hatred was contrived immorally, according to every man's personal interest. The word of God is balanced and clear: Just as Daniel was called to yield to the God-sent punishment in The Babylonian Captivity, and during it, loved the foreigners among whom he dwelt, the Jews of the 1st century were called to love the Romans and not hate them. The truth be told, if they were true Jews ("a Jew which is one inwardly"-Rom.2:29) they would love all men and exclude NO MAN, except those whom the Good Lord required. A true Jew, like Daniel, Mordecai, Job, or Noah, would seek the conversion of those who were not reprobated by God! With all this in mind, it was no wonder that the Lord was instructing them, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the publicans so?" Aye! This is no new commandment, my reader! The Law did explicitly command likewise, saying, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21-22). What was written, the Lord Jesus defended and confirmed. Yes! And what was moral, the Lord Jesus did not reform! But that which was ceremonial, the Lord Jesus lived to reform from earth to heaven, according to the scriptures. To God be the glory, in Christ. Amen. [Note: For a more detailed addressed on [The Doctrine of Perfection](#) referenced by Christ in Matthew 5:43-48, follow the hyperlink provided.]

Divorce & Remarriage

When seeking an understanding regarding "Divorce and Remarriage" in the New Covenant, amidst the controverted opinions, one must firstly resolve to study the parameters laid out in the Law pertaining to un-lawful acts of sexual immorality. A thorough study will prove to show complexity, severity, and leniency, all dependent on the persons involved and their statuses.

Relevant Terms

Is there a difference between “Fornication” and “Adultery”? How do we know for sure?

*“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for **fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth **adultery**: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit **adultery**.” – Matthew 19:9*

Fornication: an all-encompassing word used for all sexual acts including intercourse, except in the event that one or both of the individuals are married and have committed intercourse.

Adultery: a word used for intercourse (sex) between one or more deviant married persons.

The word *fornication* is often times but not exclusively used for sexual acts which come short of actual intercourse (sex). In the event of intercourse (sex) between one or more deviant married persons, the word *adultery* would be used. In the event of sexual acts which come *short of* actual intercourse (sex) between one or more deviant married persons, the word *fornication* is used. Conveniently, *fornication* is used for sexual acts which come short of actual intercourse (sex) in the case of one or more married persons because – according to the law – acts of intercourse (sex) between deviant married persons is punished by the death penalty (Lev. 18:20, 20:10, Deut. 22:22-24, 22:20-21, Matt. 19:7-9). Therefore in the event of un-lawful sexual behavior that is short of intercourse, this is called “uncleanness” or “defilement” which remains unpunishable by the death penalty (Deut. 24:1-4). Therefore upon the discovering of this “uncleanness” there is allowance for divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:7-9). Notwithstanding, mind you, in the event of this very same woman being divorced again for the same defilement, she cannot return back to her first husband (Deut. 24:1-4)! In the case of all un-lawful sexual acts between two unmarried and un-betrothed individuals, the word “fornication” is used. In Matthew 5:32 & Matthew 19:9 the two exception clauses, “saving for the cause of fornication” and “except it be for fornication”, exist as an affirmation of Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (referenced in Matt. 19:7).

The Law Pertaining to Sex

Differing Penalties

My reader, pay close attention to the words used in this short summary of the Law. Take note of the status of the persons involved, the act of the persons committed, the death penalties demanded, and the leniency provided.

If a man has intercourse (fornication) with a free woman who is not betrothed, he must endow her as his own wife (Ex. 22:16), but in the case that the father refuses to give her to the man he must make the restitution of a dowry (Ex. 22:16-17, Deut. 22:28-29; Note: this is a very serious penalty, but it is lenient in comparison with death). In the case of intercourse (adultery) with a betrothed woman who is a slave, they shall not be put to death (Lev. 19:20-22; this is leniency). In the case of intercourse (adultery) with a betrothed or married free woman the penalty is death (caught in the act or found out on the night of first union with the husband [i.e. she was lacking the tokens of virginity]; see Lev. 18:20, 20:10, Deut. 22:22-24, 22:20-21). Furthermore, there exists one anomaly whereby the adulterous free woman can escape the death penalty: if, after she has committed adultery, she goes away secretly and hides the trespass, and then her crime is found out by way of Divine-trial, she is guilty of adultery and yet un-punished with death. Her punishment is by means of a Divine curse whereby she goes childless and diseased all the rest of her days, becoming an omen and a byword of shame among the people (see Num. 5:11-31). This is punishment, yes, but in comparison to the death penalty it is leniency.

The Anomaly: In the event that an innocent husband discovered that his wife was guilty of adultery by God’s curse (written in Numbers 5:11-31), surely divorce was allowed to him. Divorce was an option for sexual infidelity beneath this magnitude, thus how much more would the Law allow divorce in the occasion of adultery (the only occasion of adultery where the death penalty is not enacted)? As for the guilty wife, however, the most consistent interpretation of scripture would require that she would go unmarried the rest of her days (thus as the scripture states, she is a shame, a reproach, diseased, and childless).

“When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find **no favour in his eyes**, because he hath found some **uncleanness** in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband **hate** her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is **defiled**; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.” – Deuteronomy 24:1-4

What is the “uncleanness” of Deuteronomy 24:1? Biblically speaking, “uncleanness” can be used to describe any un-Lawful intercourse or sexual behavior, but the “uncleanness” of Deuteronomy 24:1 allowed for divorce and remarriage. Because of this allowance, two conclusions can be made:

1. The “uncleanness” was not un-caught adultery which resulted in the absence of virginity, found-out on the night of first-intercourse.
2. The “uncleanness” was not caught-in-the-act adultery discovered during the betrothal period prior to the day of ceremony.

In the case of a wife who was allowably divorced and able to live and remarry (found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4), it is impossible that the discovered “uncleanness in her” was the absence of virginity because the penalty for this was death (Deut. 22:20-21). If the betrothed wife is found to be without virginity on the night of first-intercourse, it was discovered by the act of intercourse which lacked the tokens of virginity (penalized by death, see Deut. 22:20-21). In addition to this scenario, it is impossible that the “uncleanness in her” was when the betrothed woman was caught-in-the-act of intercourse (adultery) with another man. Likewise to the former sin, the penalty for this was death (see Lev. 18:20, 20:10, Deut. 22:22-24). If the “uncleanness” referenced by Deuteronomy 24 was the two sins formerly addressed, the betrothed woman would not be allowed to live... let alone remarry. [Note: The betrothed or married were *never* able to divorce and remarry in the case of un-Lawful intercourse (during the betrothal period or after). The only case in which the woman was able to escape the death penalty, was in the event of un-caught adultery after marriage - adultery which is made manifest by God’s curse, thus the woman would suffer reproach, disease, and barrenness (becoming a woman which no Jew would Lawfully marry!).]

In conclusion, the “uncleanness” which allows for a wife to divorce and remarry was – by necessity – an un-Lawful act of sexual infidelity coming short of actual intercourse. Therefore this “uncleanness” must be what Christ was referencing by the word “fornication” in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12.

“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.” – Matthew 5:31-32

“The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it Lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 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. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” – Matthew 19:3-9

The Old Testament Law is clear: all acts of un-Lawful sex for the betrothed or married wife result in the death penalty (and the only anomaly to the death penalty disallows divorce and remarriage). Therefore if Jesus Christ was allowing for divorce and remarriage in the case of “fornication”, would He be in disagreement with the Moral Law? No, my reader.

Like in the former Old Testament references, Christ was not reforming the Law but restoring it. He was not discrediting it but defending the correct interpretation of it!

The word “fornication” was used here because Christ was not intent upon reforming the Moral Law in any wise. Upon this point, some assert that divorce and remarriage is disallowed to the innocent spouse in the case of adultery in the New Testament. They insist that “fornication” is used as an exception clause, not adultery. If Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12 were all the New Testament has provided on the subject of divorce and remarriage, this interpretation *appears* sound. If Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12 were the only exception clauses in all the New Testament, this interpretation *appears* sound. But if Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12 were not a comprehensive expression of the heart of God on the matter of divorce and remarriage, further explanation was needed. No epistle would give any more inspiration on the matter if no further explanation was needed. This is to say, in other words, if Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12 did give a sufficient amount of inspired instruction concerning biblical *exceptions* for divorce and remarriage, 1 Corinthians 7:10-40 would *not* have been written. Jesus Christ was quoting and clarifying *the exception* to divorce in the Law (following suit with Deuteronomy 24:1-4), but inspired teaching had not yet addressed future scenarios which would exist exclusively in the New Testament dispensation. Think of it, my reader. There would have been no confusion in Corinth if the Lord Jesus had said enough on the matter in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12.

There was obviously enough confusion on the matter of divorce and remarriage so that the Corinthians wrote to Paul with questions. The Corinthians had the teachings of Jesus on divorce and remarriage already (as seen in the Gospels), and yet they wrote to Paul with *unanswered* questions. Paul gave reference to these questions in 1 Corinthians 7:1, saying, “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me...”. Evidently, Paul was introducing the purpose of 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Furthermore, also, Paul affirmed the teachings of the Lord Jesus in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Therein we read,

“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.”

Paul did here apply the heart of what the Lord confirmed in the days of His incarnation (Matt. 5:32, 19:9, Mark 10:11, Lk. 16:18) – one man with one woman, for life: which meant, in other words, NO divorce and remarriage for any cause or circumstance, except fornication (which God allowed because of the hardness of their hearts; Matt. 19:8). Paul was here, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, addressing the circumstance where two married believers get a divorce which was not lawfully allowed, and, yet, they were still seeking to abide in *the faith* of Jesus Christ in some manner (though unsuccessfully). Seeing that this divorce was not committed for the cause of “fornication”, Paul affirmed the teaching of the Lord that they are to be reconciled or otherwise remain unmarried (i.e. no divorce and remarriage). Adam Clarke is helpful to comment,

“**But, and if she depart** - He puts the case as probable, because it was frequent, but lays it under restrictions.

Let her remain unmarried - She departs at her own peril; but she must not marry another: she must either continue unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband.

And let not the husband put away his wife - Divorces cannot be allowed but in the case of fornication: an act of this kind dissolves the marriage vow; but nothing else can. It is a fact that, among the Jews, the wife had just as much right to put away her husband as the husband had to put away his wife. As divorces were granted, it was right that each should have an equal power; for this served as a mutual check.” – Adam Clarke

The sheer fact that the two divorced believers can be reconciled seems to imply that the divorce was not recognized by God (“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”-Matt. 19:6), thus the two faulty believers must agree with the Divine instruction which Jesus Christ confirmed: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). If this divorce were because of “fornication”, then divorce and remarriage would have been allowed (as the Lord had said; Matt. 19:9), but because the cause was *other than* fornication, and because the marriage *consisted of two believers*, the teachings of the Lord Jesus were applicable to this situation.

After quoting the words of the Lord Jesus which pertained to divorce and remarriage, Paul said, “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:12). Of course Paul was not saying this to affirm his words were without inspiration. Paul had just finished quoting the teachings which the Lord Jesus spoke by His own mouth in the days of His incarnation, and, thus, Paul saw a need to make a clear delineation between what was already said and what he was about to say (in and through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus via inspiration). The Lord Jesus spoke to confirm the parameters of Lawful and un-Lawful divorce and remarriage according to the Old Testament, a context which included the marriage of true Jews, Jew-to-Jew (or in other words, believer-to-believer). Frankly put, my reader, unbelievers would have been publically executed in Israelite territory. Unbelievers could not Lawfully cohabit with and mix-marry among Israelites. Therefore necessity was upon Paul to address the circumstance which was unaddressed by Old Testament Law or Jesus Christ’s teachings in the days of His incarnation - a marriage which consisted of a believer and a non-believer who abode under Gentile Civil Law. I repeat, such a mixture would not have existed in Old Testament Law because the unbeliever or sinner would have been converted or executed, according to Israelite Civil Law. Paul addressed this un-addressed situation in distinction from what the Lord Jesus was addressing, by saying, “But to **the rest**” (1 Cor. 7:12). Who are “**the rest**”? They are those Christians who were bound in the Covenant of marriage to an unbeliever, a scenario the Lord Jesus did not speak on. Consider the text carefully, my reader.

“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. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 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 Corinthians 7:10-15

I repeat, in this passage Paul provided further explanation on cases of allowable divorce which were un-addressed by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, cases which involved a believer and a non-believer. The Lord Jesus was preaching so as to confirm the statutes of the OT Law which pertained to the divorce and remarriage of believer-to-believer under Israelite Civil Law, but Paul spoke into scenarios non-existent in Israel (Lawfully) and peculiar to believers in the New Testament¹. So what did Paul say about the situation?

Paul said that if the unbeliever is “pleased to dwell” with the believer, they should dwell together (1 Cor. 7:12). This means that the unbeliever is peaceable with and accepting of Christian faith and practice. In this situation Paul disallowed divorce. In the case of either spouse, Paul wrote, “let him not put her away” and “let her not leave him” (1 Cor. 7:12). As I stated before, in Old Testament Israel this would have been impossible, lawfully speaking. Vast explanation could be given on why this was impossible in the Old Testament, but let it suffice us to understand that it was because the unbeliever is an *unsanctified, unholy, unclean, sinner* who would defile the Holy Land in which God dwelt! “For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore **sanctify** yourselves, and ye shall be **holy**; for I Am **holy**...” (Lev. 11:44), GOD said. We can tell this was in Paul’s mind because he gave reference to this aspect of the Law in 1 Corinthians 7:14. Paul was presenting a scenario which begged an answer from anyone who knows the God of the Bible (namely, His demand for corporate **holiness, separateness, and sanctification**; see 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Giving commentary on how this New Testament scenario could exist, lawfully speaking, when in fact it could not lawfully exist in the Old Testament, Paul spoke of this New Testament allowance in terms of the dilemma it would appear to create. Paul wrote, “For the *unbelieving* husband IS **sanctified** by the wife, and the *unbelieving* wife IS **sanctified** by the husband: else were your children **unclean**; but now are they **holy**” (1 Cor. 7:14).

After Paul completely addressed the scenario of a mixed marriage (believer-to-unbeliever) which existed in peace, he moved into the ulterior case – NO PEACE. If there was no peace between the spouses of the mixed marriage, Paul wrote, “But if the unbelieving depart, LET HIM DEPART. A brother or sister is **not under bondage** in such cases: but

¹ “Not that [Paul] commanded anything of his own hand, or upon his own authority. Whatever he commanded was the Lord’s command, dictated by His Spirit and enjoined by His authority.” – Matthew Henry

God hath called us to **peace**. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife” (1 Cor. 7:15-16)? Can you see the clear flow of logic in Paul’s instruction in these several cases which were exclusive to the New Testament? Now, my reader, there is a need that we focus on the terms Paul used; terms like, “put her away”, “depart”, and “not under bondage” (see 1 Cor. 7:10-15).

The terms “put away” or “depart” express the act of divorce, literally speaking. This interpretation is consistent and easily proven by a brief overview of all scripture pertaining to marriage in the Bible. The act of separation (“putting away” or “departing”) was the deed of divorce, essentially speaking. At this point of action the abandoned spouse is to understand that the bond of fidelity had been broken, lawfully speaking. How do we know that this is lawful terminology? The lawful terminology used by Paul to express that the marriage was dissolved was in the words, “not under bondage” (1 Cor. 7:15). Before I address this any further, my reader, let us remember one thing: In the case of departure (or divorce), the departing spouse was an unbeliever who was NOT pleased with Christ or Christians, thus it can be expected that they are being driven by lust for wickedness at least and fornication/adultery at most.

Driven in the lust of insatiable desire, the unbelievers depart. Woe to them! “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin”, they go on (2 Pet. 2:14). “Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20). Whatever the case may be, or, whatever sin the departing spouse has left to pursue (the world, fornication, or adultery), the scripture declares a *loosing of the Law* upon their departure. It is written, “But if the unbelieving **depart**, let him **depart**. A brother or sister is not **under bondage** in such cases: but God hath called us to peace” (1 Cor. 7:10-15). To no longer be “under bondage” means that the spouse is **un-bound** or **loosed** by the Law. The statement, “not under **bondage**”, is legal terminology (see Gal. 2:4, 4:3, 4:9, 4:24-25, 5:1, Acts 15:10). A person is either “**bound** by the Law to” their spouse, or, “**loosed** from the Law” of their spouse (Rom. 7:2, 1 Cor. 7:27-28, 39). Because this is a *loosing of the Law*, the brother or sister who is not under bondage is at liberty to remarry. This interpretation is explicitly confirmed in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28.

“Art thou **bound** unto a wife? seek not to be **loosed**. Art thou **loosed** from a wife? seek not a wife. **But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned**; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.” – 1 Corinthians 7:27-28

The use of the word “**bound**” means, Law-bound by a marriage covenant. The word “**loosed**” means, released from the Law of a marriage covenant. This **loosing** (according to 1 Corinthians 7:10-15) transpired by the departure of either spouse (it is supposed that this departure included a filing of divorce, at least, fornication and/or adultery at most). In any case, this event is peculiar to the New Testament because it lacks the accountability of Israelite Civil Law which would call for the physical death of the guilty party, as addressed below.

It appears that 1 Corinthians 7 allows for divorce and remarriage if the divorce is accomplished as a result of an unbelieving wife or husband departing (or filing). This would or could mean circumstances purely spiritual and not sexual infidelity. In such a case under Israelite Law, God does not allow divorce to an unbelieving Israelite. No! This would be considered an abomination. Rather, if an Israelite did not believe and obey God he or she would be publically executed, and upon his or her death the believing spouse would be free to remarry. Likewise, also, if an Israelite committed adultery the guilty spouse would die, and upon his or her death the innocent spouse would be free to remarry. The death penalty was the means of setting at liberty the innocent spouse, not divorce. But in Greek society or Barbarian Law, what is to be expected? Can the heart of God depicted by the Law be maintained?

New Testament scenarios exist which require the attention of inspired instruction beyond what the Law has given because New Testament saints are not governed by Israelite Civil Law. Understanding this dilemma, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. According to 1 Corinthians 7:15 and 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, the heart of God to release the innocent spouse from all penalty is upheld in the New Testament! It is the heart of God that the innocent spouse would not be punished for the adultery of a guilty spouse. Paul said, “Art thou **loosed** from a wife? Seek not a wife. **But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned**” (1 Cor. 7:27). The context of divorce (or loosing) was already introduced in 1 Corinthians 7:15, and the remarrying of those who were divorced is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28. It is *the heart of God* that the innocent spouse would not be confined to a lifetime of singleness as a result of an adulterous spouse, but *this heart* is not upheld in the New Testament if, indeed, Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12

are isolated and interpreted at the expense of the rest of scripture. It is for this reason that 1 Corinthians 7:10-40 was written.

Think of it, my reader. Imagine if the New Testament did not contain this liberty granted by the OT death penalty. Imagine if the New Testament did not maintain the heart of God depicted by the Law. This would mean that divorce and remarriage is allowed in the case of non-intercourse sexual behavior (“fornication”) but disallowed for sex itself – which means that the liberty of divorce is allowed for a lesser offense and denied for a greater offense; which means that the liberty of divorce is allowed for a crime which is less marriage-covenant-defiant but disallowed for a crime which is more marriage-covenant-defiant. This would be contrary to both reason and justice. The greater the sin is (committed by the defiant spouse) the more detrimental and destructive it is to the marriage both physically and spiritually, therefore the *greater sin* should dissolve the marriage bond much more than the *lesser sin*. It is true that the Law only allows for divorce and remarriage in the case of non-intercourse sexual acts, but in the event of un-Lawful sex the death penalty loosed the innocent spouse to remarry. Even though there was no divorce in the latter case, there was an allowance for remarriage.

Matthew Henry’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 is of helpful consideration to us, my reader, seeing that he was in perfect unanimity to what we have heretofore interpreted in the scriptures. With insights which are both informative and confirming, Henry wrote,

“In this paragraph the apostle gives them direction in a case which must be very frequent in that age of the world, especially among the Jewish converts; I mean whether they were to live with heathen relatives in a married state. Moses's law permitted divorce; and there was a famous instance in the Jewish state, when the people were obliged to put away their idolatrous wives, [Ezr 10:3](#). This might move a scruple in many minds, whether converts to Christianity were not bound to put away or desert their mates, continuing infidels. Concerning this matter the apostle here gives direction. And,

I. In general, he tells them that marriage, by Christ's command, is for life; and therefore those who are married must not think of separation. The wife *must not depart from the husband* ([1Co 7:10](#)), nor the *husband put away his wife*, [1Co 7:11](#). This *I command*, says the apostle; *yet not I, but the Lord*. Not that he commanded any thing of his own head, or upon his own authority. Whatever he commanded was the Lord's command, dictated by his Spirit and enjoined by his authority. But his meaning is that the Lord himself, with his own mouth, had forbidden such separations, [Mat 5:32](#); [Mat 19:9](#); [Mar 10:11](#); [Luk 16:18](#). Note, Man and wife cannot separate at pleasure, nor dissolve, when they will, their matrimonial bonds and relation. They must not separate for any other cause than what Christ allows. And therefore the apostle advises that if any woman had been separated, either by a voluntary act of her own or by an act of her husband, she should continue unmarried, and seek reconciliation with her husband, that they might cohabit again. Note, Husbands and wives should not quarrel at all, or should be quickly reconciled. They are bound to each other for life. The divine law allows of no separation. They cannot throw off the burden, and therefore should set their shoulders to it, and endeavour to make it as light to each other as they can.

II. He brings the general advice home to the case of such as had an unbelieving mate ([1Co 7:12](#)): *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord*; that is, the Lord had not so expressly spoken to this case as to the former divorce. It does not mean that the apostle spoke without authority from the Lord, or decided this case by his own wisdom, without the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He closes this subject with a declaration to the contrary ([1Co 7:40](#)), I think *also that I have the Spirit of God*. But, having thus prefaced his advice, we may attend,

1. To the advice itself, which is that if an unbelieving husband or wife were pleased to dwell with a Christian relative, the other should not separate. The husband should not put away an unbelieving wife, nor the wife leave an unbelieving husband, [1Co 7:12](#), [1Co 7:13](#). The Christian calling did not dissolve the marriage covenant, but bind it the faster, by bringing it back to the original institution, limiting it to two persons, and binding them together for life. The believer is not by faith in Christ loosed from matrimonial bonds to an unbeliever, but is at once bound and made apt to be a better relative. But, though a believing wife or husband should not separate from an unbelieving mate, yet if the unbelieving relative desert the believer, and no means can reconcile to a cohabitation, in such *a case a brother or sister is not in bondage* ([1Co 7:15](#)), not tied up to the unreasonable humour, and bound servilely to follow or cleave to the malicious deserter, or not bound to live unmarried after all proper means for reconciliation have been tried, at least of the deserter contract another marriage or be guilty of adultery, which was a very easy supposition, because a very common instance among the heathen inhabitants of Corinth. In such a case the deserted person must be free to marry again, and it is granted on all hands. And some think that such a malicious desertion is as much a dissolution of the marriage-covenant as death itself. For how is it possible that *the two shall be one flesh* when the one is maliciously bent to part from or put away the other? Indeed, the deserter seems still bound by the

matrimonial contract; and therefore the apostle says ([1Co 7:11](#)), *If the woman depart from her husband upon the account of his infidelity, let her remain unmarried.* But the deserted party seems to be left more at liberty (I mean supposing all the proper means have been used to reclaim the deserter, and other circumstances make it necessary) to marry another person. It does not seem reasonable that they should be still bound, when it is rendered impossible to perform conjugal duties or enjoy conjugal comforts, through the mere fault of their mate: in such a case marriage would be a state of servitude indeed. But, whatever liberty be indulged Christians in such a case as this, they are not allowed, for the mere infidelity of a husband or wife, to separate; but, if the unbeliever be willing, they should continue in the relation, and cohabit as those who are thus related. This is the apostle's general direction." – Matthew Henry

John Gill, as well, confirms this interpretation in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:15. Gill wrote,

“But if the unbelieving depart,.... If the unbelieving party, man or woman, separate themselves from the believing party on account of religion, and in hatred to it, and will not live with the believer unless Christ is denied, his Gospel abjured, and his ordinances and worship relinquished:

let him depart; he or she, though not without making use of all proper means to retain them; but if, after all, they will go, unless such things are complied with as are unreasonable and sinful, they are not to be held, but let go; and the deserted person may sit down contented, being not to be blamed, the fault entirely lying upon the deserter:

a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. The Ethiopic version reads it, "to such an one"; one that is called by grace a church member, and so a brother or sister in Christ, is not to be subject to an unbeliever in matters of conscience, in things appertaining to the worship of God, and the service and glory of Christ; nor, being in such circumstances, that either Christ must be forsaken, or the unbeliever will depart, are they obliged to yield to such an one, but rather suffer a departure; nor are they bound to remain unmarried, but are free to marry another person, after all proper methods have been tried for a reconciliation, and that appears to be impracticable; desertion in such a case, and attended with such circumstances, is a breach of the marriage contract, and a dissolution of the bond, and the deserted person may lawfully marry again; otherwise a brother, or a sister in such a case, would be in subjection and bondage to such a person:

but God hath called us to peace; which ought to be sought after and maintained, so far as it can be consistent with truth, the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and interest of religion. The believing party being threatened with a desertion, ought as much as possible to seek for peace and reconciliation, and do all that can be to prevent a departure; for saints are called by the grace of God, to follow after and cultivate peace, not only with one another in their Christian communion as saints, but with all men, even their enemies, and especially with such as are so nearly allied; wherefore the departure should not be easily admitted, or a new marriage be suddenly entered into, reconciliation, if it can be obtained, being most eligible and becoming a Christian." – John Gill

In conclusion please remember, my reader. In the case of all un-Lawful sexual acts between two unmarried and un-betrothed individuals, the word “fornication” is used. In Matthew 5:32 & Matthew 19:9, the two exception clauses (“saving for the cause of fornication” and “except it be for fornication”) exist as an affirmation of Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (see also Matt. 19:7). But 1 Corinthians chapter 7 (verses 15 & 27-28) does contain more *exception clauses* applicable to New Testament scenarios which go beyond the specifications of Old Testament Law – but these other exception clauses bring the New Testament allowances into alignment with the heart of God depicted by the Old Testament Law. These additional exception clauses do not deviate from but bring alignment to the Mosaic Law.

The Heart of the Law is key: When adultery was committed the guilty spouses did suffer the death penalty. In this case, according to the Law, the living spouses were free to remarry - this is the heart of God depicted in the Law. Therefore when confronted with similar situations in the New Testament, situations which lacked the punishment of death enforced by Civil Law, are the innocent spouses bound by the Law nevertheless (even when, if they lived in the Old Testament, they would have been loosed from their guilty spouses because of their death)? Being persuaded of the heart of God depicted in the Law – an act of justice which provided freedom to remarry in the cases of adultery – and if we took into consideration the limitations of Civil Law in non-Israelite territories, we would expect the New Testament to allow remarriage in the cases of adultery.

A Moral Hatred

*“And if the latter husband **hate her**, and write her a bill of divorcement...” – Deut. 24:3*

The Lord was compelled to narrowly specify the true and biblical allowance of divorce and remarriage because most in that day were in the very act of adultery. They believed that a man was allowed to divorce his wife for mere displeasures and frivolous contentions – “every cause”. They were an “adulterous generation”, physically and spiritually speaking (Matt. 12:39, 16:4, Mark 8:38). Adultery was rampant and unchecked because they misinterpreted Moses’ Law (Matt. 19:7). They taught and believed that there were allowances for divorce and remarriage if the husband hated his wife, carnally speaking. To them, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 allowed for this. They thought that if the husband “**hated**” his wife, or if she found “**no favour in his eyes**” carnally speaking (like Deut. 24:1-3 *seems* to signify), the man had a Lawful right to divorce his wife. This is NOT the case!

For the Law to use the word “**hate**” or “**no favour**”, it meant to express the occasion when a true saint of Israel was *righteously repulsed* at his wife. This interpretation is easily proven by scriptural parallels. On a foundational level, for example, the Israelites were commanded by Law to utterly hate, abhor, and destroy certain peoples, but it was moral (Ex. 23:20-33, 34:11-14, Lev. 18:24-30, 20:22-27, Num. 33:51-56, Deut. 7:1-6, 16-19, 23-26, 12:1-4, 29-32, 18:9-14, 20:16-18, 23:1-17, Josh. 23:2-16, Judges 2:2-3; Note: see the word abominable and its derivatives; abominable = hateful). It was moral because God commanded it. God hated these people and Israel was required to be like God (i.e. in legal agreement with God; Lev. 20:23). In the sense that these individuals were legally repulsive, legally unclean, legally condemned, and legally penalized with total annihilation with no possibility of pity or mercy, Israel hated them. These kinds of people included the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and more.

Certain peoples (by race) were to be thus hated and abhorred because of what they did against God, but others for what they did against Israel. The nations of the Promised Land sinned against God. The Amalekites, on the other hand, sinned against Israel (see Ex. 17, Deut. 25:17-19). Unto all the former peoples utter destruction was determined by God. A hated people doing hated (abominable) things are hatefully repulsive to justice’s ambassadors (“in whose eyes a vile person is contemned” –Ps.15:4), nevertheless not all were doomed to utter destruction.

God restrained Israel’s hatred of certain peoples in the case where the Lord foretells that Israel might err. Two of these cases were with the Edomites and the Egyptians. God said, “Thou shalt **not abhor** an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt **not abhor** an Egyptian; because thou was a stranger in his land” (Deut. 23:7). Do you see how the word “abhor” is used as a synonym of hate? The meaning of this commandment is very clear when taken in its surrounding context. Deuteronomy chapter 23 carries the same burden from verse 1 to verse 17 – legal holiness. All unholy or unclean things were to be utterly detested and hated, as it is written in Deuteronomy 7:25-26. Therefore when certain persons, objects, or races were permanently declared as unclean or unholy to God, they would need to be legally hated and detested as a cursed object. Israel was to keep the “congregation of the LORD” clean and clear of all things legally detestable to God. Therefore under this sense and emotion Israel would obey the commandments given to them in Deuteronomy 23:1-17.

Verse 1 legally detests certain persons, by saying, “He...shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD” (Deut. 23:1). In verses 2 and 3 it is written again, “shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD”. In OT Law this is everything; no entrance into the congregation of the LORD meant no salvation; expulsion from the congregation of the LORD meant damnation. It is notable that, furthermore, the torments of damnation are the torments of those whom God hates, in this life or the next (Ps. 5:5, 10:3, Lev. 20:23, Prov. 6:16-19, Hos. 9:15, Zech. 11:8, Rom. 9:13, Mal. 1:2-3). Categorically, two different persons are forbidden entrance into Israel in verses 1-2. Categorically, two different races of people are forbidden entrance into Israel in verses 3-6 (under certain specifications); the Ammonite and Moabite. Categorically, two different races of people are explicitly allowed entrance into Israel in verses 7-8; the Edomite and Egyptian. Without this explicit commandment Israel would have been inclined to repulse the Edomite and the Egyptian. Considering their history of opposition against one another, the Lord made room for peace.

In context we can see that to “hate” means, to legally detest unto expulsion from the congregation. This was a moral abhorrence, an abhorrence of what God decided as unholy and unclean. For example in verse 9, “every wicked thing” is grounds for temporary or permanent expulsion from the camp or congregation of the LORD (Deut. 23:9). In verse 10 it is the “uncleanness” whereby a man “shall not come within the camp” (Deut. 23:10). Only by the means of cleansing

can the man “come into the camp again” (Deut. 23:11). All of these Laws were in connection to the personality of God! Therefore it was written, “For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of the camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deut. 23:14). Undoubtedly then, and without controversy, the Law expressed legal detestableness and legal unacceptableness by the word “abhor” (Deut. 23:7), and for the obedient Jew this was a moral hatred. Now I ask you, my reader. Could the word “hate” found in Deut. 21:15, 22:13, and 24:3 mean anything different?

Surely the Law is not providing means of liberty for those who immorally hate their wives or children! This is impossible. The Law explicitly forbids immoral hatred! The Law explicitly commands divinely empowered love!

Deuteronomy 21:15-17 emphasizes moral hatred when taken in the light of verses 18-23. A wife and child that could be morally hated (in a legal sense) are those who are “stubborn” and “rebellious”, those who are committing sins “worthy of death”, therefore the righteous man is morally aggravated to expel them from Israel through the death penalty (in the case of a presumptuously sinning wife, see Numbers 15:30-31). These rebellious Israelites – whether wife or child – are to be dealt with after the same legal abhorrence as those in Deut. 23:1-6. For this reason, when “hate” is used in Deuteronomy 22:13-19 and it is sinful hatred, the sinning Israelite seeks to disguise his immoral hatred with moral hatred, therefore he makes false accusations against his wife (see Deut. 23:14). If it were really true that the wife was legally “evil” (one who is worthy of “an evil name”), the woman would suffer the death penalty. But if the “evil name” is found to be false then the man is punished for immoral hatred! For a wife to suffer divorce, expulsion from Israel, or death, it could not be as a result of immoral hatred. No! It must be moral hatred motivated by sins worthy of death (making the woman legally repulsive to God and Israel). Therefore in the case that the husband does “hate” his wife and the hatred be moral (with the accusations proving true), “the men of the city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father’s house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you” (Deut. 22:21). In all scenarios leading into Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the interpretation is consistent. The context teaches us that any moral “hate” or ill-favor must be a result of illegal sin committed, sin committed which merited legal abhorrence to the point of excommunication or death (Note: all lesser forms of moral hatred would fluctuate in proportion to the crime committed).

The reason that Jesus Christ extolled the miraculous effect of marital union was because the Pharisees despised it. These were heretical, foolish, sin-loving, marriage-desecrating, divorce-loving, and adulterous Pharisees! They wanted to divorce their wives on the grounds of their own devilish hatred and immoral disfavor! Wickedness. For good reason it was written, “He hateth putting away” (Mal. 2:16)! The pervading heresy of 1st century Jews could be detected in the question, “Is it Lawful for a man to put away his wife for *every cause*” (Matt. 19:3)? Is it Lawful for “every cause”, ABSOLUTELY NOT! It was Lawful to divorce a wife on very specific and justifiable causes, and that alone! From king to country, it was a generation of adulterers... No wonder that John the Baptist suffered martyrdom for decrying the sin of adultery (Matt. 6:17-28)! “It is not Lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife”, John said.

Appendix #1: Opposing Arguments

There are two main arguments I wish to address in this appendix. Argument #2 stems from Argument #1. Considering them in order their correlation is evident.

Argument #1: Joseph’s contemplation was just and exemplary, signifying the Lawful allowance of divorce upon the act of “fornication” (intercourse) in the betrothal period.

Argument #2: The miraculous union which results from intercourse (sex) is the essence of marriage, therefore divorce was only allowed during the betrothal period and not after. Divorce is forbidden beyond the day of marriage ceremony (the night of first-union between the betrothed) because intercourse (sex) is a God-made indivisible union. Therefore all of Jesus’ exceptions to divorce on the account of “fornication” (Matt. 5:32,

19:9) were exemplified in the situation that Joseph was in. [Note: This argument presumes that the word “fornication” means intercourse (sex) in Matthew 5:32 & 19:9, but this has been proven to be impossible.]

The proponents of these arguments cite Joseph’s contemplation of private divorce as an allowable action provided by the Law (Matt. 1:19). Joseph’s espoused wife, Mary (a free woman), was found to be with child. Joseph suspected that this happened by the act of human intercourse (sex). “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily” (Matt. 1:19). The proponents argue in favor of the righteousness of Joseph, specifically speaking – that he was minded to put her away privately, that he was refusing to make her a public example – *but is this emphasis correct?* Did Joseph desire to divorce Mary because the Law allowed him to in the case of un-Lawful intercourse (sex) of a betrothed wife? No. The Law does not allow divorce on these grounds. It was not Lawful to divorce a wife on account of un-Lawful intercourse before, during, or after the betrothal period (with one exception and one anomaly)! The penalty of this crime is death (with one exception and one anomaly). [Note: If Mary was a betrothed slave she could escape the death penalty (Lev. 19:20-22); this is an exception. If Mary was a wife who had passed beyond the betrothal process and then she was discovered as an adulterer by means of God’s curse – meaning that she committed un-caught and un-Lawful intercourse (sex) with another man – she could escape the death penalty (Numbers 5:11-31); this is an anomaly.]

In Joseph’s situation, it was unLawful for him to divorce her (“put her away privily”-Matt. 1:19). The Law demanded that she would be put to death as a public example (Deut. 22:20-21), but the proponents of this argument believe that Joseph is in disagreement with the Law. Would a “**just man**” like Joseph, disagree with and rebel against **the justice of the Law**? No! Just men do heartily confess, “O how love I Thy Law” (Ps. 119:97)! Just men do not contemplate means to transgress the Law, no! They contemplate means keep the Law at all costs! And when in times of temptation, they say, “I hate vain thoughts: but Thy Law do I love” (Ps. 119:113)! That is to say, “I hate the thought of disobedience!” Therefore if just men do sin against the Law they do it ignorantly and not presumptuously, because they love the Law of God (Num. 15:22-31). This being the case, what meaneth the scripture in Matthew 1:19? Why was the contemplated act of forbearing Mary’s public execution emphasized as an act of justice on Joseph’s part? Matthew Henry’s commentary provides helpful clarity on the matter:

“III. Joseph's perplexity, and his care what to do in this case. We may well imagine what a great trouble and disappointment it was to him to find one he had such an opinion of, and value for, come under the suspicion of such a heinous crime. *Is this Mary?* He began to think, “How may we be deceived in those we think best of! How may we be disappointed in what we expect most from!” He is loth to believe so ill a thing of one whom he believed to be so good a woman; and yet the matter, as it is too bad to be excused, is also too plain to be denied. What a struggle does this occasion in his breast between that jealousy which is the rage of man, and is cruel as the grave, on the one hand, and that affection which he has for Mary on the other!

Observe, 1. The extremity which he studied to avoid. He was *not willing to make her a public example*. He might have done so; for, by the Law, a *betrothed virgin*, if she played the harlot, was to be stoned to death, [Deu 22:23](#), [Deu 22:24](#). But he *was not willing* to take the advantage of the Law against her; if she be guilty, yet it is not known, nor shall it be known from him. How different was the spirit which Joseph displayed from that of Judah, who in a similar case hastily passed that severe sentence, *Bring her forth and let her be burnt!* [Gen 38:24](#). How good it is to *think on things*, as Joseph did here! Were there more of deliberation in our censures and judgments, there would be more of mercy and moderation in them. Bringing her to punishment is here called *making her a public example*; which shows what is the end to be aimed at in punishment - the giving of warning to others: it is *in terrorem* - *that all about may bear and fear*. *Smite the scorner*, and the simple will beware.

Some persons of a rigorous temper would blame Joseph for his clemency: but it is here spoken of to his praise; because *he was a just man*, therefore he was not willing to expose her. He was a *religious, good man*; and therefore inclined to be merciful as God is, and to *forgive* as one that was *forgiven*. In the case of the betrothed damsel, if she were defiled in the field, the Law charitably supposed that she *cried out* ([Deu 22:26](#)), and she was not to be punished. Some charitable construction or other Joseph will put upon this matter; and herein he is a *just man*, tender of the good name of one who never before had done anything to blemish it. Note, It becomes us, in many cases, to be gentle towards those that come under suspicion of having offended, to hope the best concerning them, and make the best of that which at first appears bad, in hopes that it may prove better. *Summum just summa injuria* - *The rigour of the Law is* (sometimes) *the height of injustice*. That court of conscience which moderates the rigour of the Law we call a *court of equity*. Those who are found faulty were perhaps *overtaken in the fault*, and are therefore to be *restored with the spirit of meekness*; and threatening, even when just, must be moderated.

2. The expedient he found out for avoiding this extremity. He was *minded to put her away privily*, that is, to give a bill of divorce into her hand before two witnesses, and so to hush up the matter among themselves. Being a *just man*, that is, a strict observer of the Law, he would not proceed to marry her, but resolved to *put her away*; and yet, in tenderness for her, determined to do it as privately as possible. Note, The necessary censures of those who have offended ought to be managed without noise. *The words of the wise are heard in quiet*. Christ himself *shall not strive nor cry*. Christian love and Christian prudence will *hide a multitude of sins*, and great ones, as far as may be done without having fellowship with them.” – Matthew Henry

You see, my reader. Joseph admired Mary’s godliness and thus chose her to be his wife. And, lo, when Mary was discovered to be with child, her godliness did not decrease but increase! This was a shock to Joseph. He was thinking, “Look at her, she has no fear!” Think of it, my reader. Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes.

Mary gave no account of being raped in a field against her will (a means whereby she might Lawfully escape the death penalty, if it were true). She did, rather, testify of seeing an angel sent from God! Mary was not frantic or intemperate but shameless and bold, as one who had committed no crime! Shockingly, Mary was more filled with the Holy Ghost than she had ever been before! Joseph could tell. If the Spirit of God in Joseph drew him to Mary’s godliness before the betrothal process, how much more now! Any “just man” could have detected that the Spirit of innocence did rest upon Mary as a mantle. Did not Elizabeth say, “Blessed art thou among women” (Lk. 1:42)! Did not Gabriel say, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee” (Lk. 1:28)! Even so, what about Joseph? The truth be told, Joseph was being compelled by the Holy Spirit to believe that Mary was innocent of this crime, somehow, though he did not understand it. Being so moved by the Holy Ghost, Joseph was considering any Lawful means to “put her away privily”. The most charitable avenue the Law provided was if, haply, Mary was raped in a field. Thus Joseph thought on... amidst contemplation on such thoughts as these, behold, “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream” (Matt. 1:20)! When it was written, “while he thought on”, it meant that Joseph was thinking on just, righteous, and Lawful things, trusting in God. Therefore, lo, the Lord directed Joseph’s thoughts into His will. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6)!

The fornication (“some uncleanness”) which allowed for a Lawful divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Matt. 5:31-32, & Matt. 19:7-9 was NOT un-Lawful sex (intercourse) during the betrothal period, this would have resulted in death (Deut. 22:20-21). Likewise it was not un-Lawful sex (intercourse) after the marriage ceremony, this also would have resulted in death (Lev. 18:20, 20:10, Deut. 22:22-24, 22:20-21). Whatever the period (whether during the betrothal period or after the marriage ceremony was completed), sexual infidelity *short of* actual intercourse allowed for divorce (Deut. 24:1-4, Matt. 5:31-32, 19:7-9). I say again, divorce is allowable during the period before the actual first-time intercourse between the betrothed partners, or, after the wedding ceremony was completed. Of these two stages of marriage, neither were specified by the Law to localize the capability of Lawful divorce in either stage, in the case of fornication (“some uncleanness”). Only one characteristic is necessary for a Lawful divorce - *fornication*. Furthermore, in the case where the woman who was divorced is then married to another man, and he turns out to “hate her” as well (a “hatred” which is grounds for legal divorce), this hatred must be motivated by the wife’s infidelity through un-Lawful fornication with another man. The time period in which this allowable divorce has taken place is after first-intercourse has taken place with the husband and wife of the second marriage, but then, alas, the woman was found in some sexual infidelity short of intercourse with another man. Deuteronomy 24:4 emphasizes the significance of the two-time divorced wife’s defilement, evidencing that the second husband did indeed have intercourse with his wife. This means that the infidelity and divorce happened after the wedding ceremony had come and gone. This detail is important for those who would seek to limit divorce as a potential only before the union of intercourse takes place between the betrothed husband and wife. Proponents of **Argument #2** view this point as “the point of no return”, but according to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 this is not the case.

The insights found in **Argument #2** do emphasize the miraculous union which results from sex. These insights, however edifying they are to consider, are not meant to be applied to the conclusions the proponents of that argument make. They argue that fornication (sexual behavior short of intercourse) was a crime which allowed divorce and remarriage because, namely, the act of sex is both sacred and miraculous - “they are no more twain but one flesh” (Matt. 19:6). On this basis, they argue that marriage is an indivisible union made by God (“What therefore God hath joined

together, let no man put asunder”-Matt. 19:6). I agree that the act of sex is a joining together by God, but the act of Lawful divorce is a separation made possible by God – a separation whereby a man was enabled to be miraculously joined to another woman yet again. In this event the happenings are clear: the former union was dissolved by God and the latter union was made by God. Also in cases of polygamy – is the husband “one flesh” with one, both, or all three wives (2 Sam. 12:8, Ex. 21:10, Deut. 21:15)? It is, of course, with all three. According to the Law, the miraculous event whereby God joins together two into one was never limited to one wife, dead or living. All of scripture needs to be taken into consideration, including the exception clauses of 1 Corinthians chapter 7; exceptions which are relevant and peculiar to New Testament scenarios. [Note: the reference made to polygamy was intended to bring to remembrance the practices and allowances of the OT, a practice which has been disallowed by precedent in the NT ([1 Tim. 3:2](#), [Titus 1:6](#)).]

Appendix #2: A Needful Clarification

Reconciling 1 Corinthians 7:39 to 1 Corinthians 7:15, 27-28

A look at 1 Corinthians 7:39, standing alone, appears to forbid all exceptions for divorce and remarriage. Even though 1 Corinthians 7:15, 27-28 does grant further exceptions for allowable divorce and remarriage (beyond that which Matthew 5 & 19 have granted), if one would read 1 Corinthians 7:39 standing alone there appears to be a contradiction.

The notable perplexity at hand is how 1 Corinthians 7:39 seems to break the flow of the whole chapter. It is not that this statement has never been stated before (see Rom. 7:2-3 & Matt. 19:4-6). It is the placement of this statement which presents difficulty to our unlearned eyes. Paul spent a good portion of the chapter justifying Lawful divorce and remarriage while the spouse of the divorced is *still alive*, and yet 1 Corinthians 7:39 states, “The wife is **bound by the Law** as long as *her husband liveth*; but if her husband be dead, she is **at liberty** to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” Before this, Paul had just made plain the grounds for biblical divorce saying that the divorced is “**not under bondage**” even while the spouse is still alive (1 Cor. 7:15). Also speaking to the divorced with living spouses, Paul affirmed, the “**loosed**” (the divorced) are able to be married again: “But if thou marry, thou hast not sinned” (1 Cor. 7:27-28). Those who were just declared to be “not under bondage” and “loosed” appear to be brought into bondage by 1 Corinthians 7:39. Knowing that this contradiction is impossible, my reader, let us take a closer look at the context of 1 Corinthians 7:39 starting from verse 25.

“Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. **Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned.** Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. The wife is bound by the Law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” – 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

If 1 Corinthians 7:39 exists to forbid divorce and remarriage without any exceptions, Paul addresses this subject completely at random. Verse 32-40 is an unbroken address to virgins not married people who are forbidden to divorce. So, why did Paul quote the Law in verse 39? It must have to do with his counseling concerning virgins somehow. From verse 25 onward the main subject matter pertains to virgins. The emboldened text is Paul's parenthetical references to those who are divorced and remarried. After this short parenthetical, Paul continues to counsel virgins. His main emphasis is, to glorify singleness and virginity. Paul said, "it is good for a man so to be". Why? Because marriage has disadvantages: it brings "trouble in the flesh", by caring for "the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife". Being unmarried has advantages: it sets at liberty the individual to care for the "things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord", "without distraction". Nevertheless, Paul affirmed, "if a virgin marry she hath not sinned" (1 Cor. 7:28). Therefore in the case where the virgin passionately desires to be married (emotionally and/or physically), "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:9). Paul acknowledges that not all women have the "gift of God" whereby they are enabled to stay single, righteously speaking (1 Cor. 7:7).

Paul addresses the fathers of virgins in verse 36 because with them was the authority to keep back or give away their daughters in marriage. Paul sought to make the fathers with virgin daughters aware of legitimate grounds whereupon marriage SHOULD not be denied to a desirous daughter. Such a time is, namely, when she is burning (1 Cor. 7:9). Such a time is when she is manifesting the evident token of God's sovereignty that she does NOT have the gift of celibacy – behold, she is burning. If a father withholds a burning daughter from marriage, this is behavior which is "uncomely toward his virgin" (1 Cor. 7:36). Paul spoke against this, lest it happen. A father with a burning daughter should be compelled to give his daughter away in marriage, "having necessity" – for, behold, she burns! The father who has decided that his daughter is to stay celibate and, behold, the sovereignty of God is in agreement with him (manifest in that the daughter is not burning), he is decided upon his desire to keep his virgin "having no necessity" to change (1 Cor. 7:37). The primary characteristic that the father needs to focus upon is, does she burn? If she burns, she is fervently desirous to be married. Paul's counsel to the father of such a daughter is to let her be married to whom she will, only in the Lord. To get this point across, Paul quotes the Law (see 1 Cor. 7:39). Paul references the authority structure of the Law when it has loosed a woman to be remarried to show that the Law values the liberty of the woman in that, "she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). So also Paul addresses the fathers of their virgins to do likewise, to set their virgin daughters "at liberty to be married to whom [they] will". By addressing the authority structure which has the power to forbid the marriage of a virgin of Israel, Paul encourages them (the fathers of the virgins) to guide their daughters into the liberties which God values according to the Law (namely, that the virgin would be "at liberty to be married to whom [they] will; only in the Lord"). Therefore 1 Corinthians 7:39 is quoted to emphasize the good will of God toward those who are worthy to be set at liberty to marry whom they will. Without mistake, Paul spent much of the chapter teaching fathers the value, necessity, and goodness of allowing their virgins to marry whom they will, only in the Lord... but if their daughters don't desire to be married and the father keeps the virgin, he has done better!

Appendix #3: Verses of Significant Implication

Spiritual Divorce God-to-Man: A Divine Hatred

The Prophet Jeremiah

"They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD... The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. **And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.** And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than

treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” – Jeremiah 3:1, 6-15

The Prophet Isaiah

“Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.” – Isaiah 50:1-3

The Prophet Hosea

“Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” – Hosea 2:1-23