

Is a DIVORCED CHRISTIAN free to MARRY AGAIN?

*Discussed here by three
Christian teachers.*

*By Olan Hicks,
last by Robert Waters, but
First, by Patrick Mead*

I just comforted a 73 year old woman who was told by her preacher to leave her husband because the preacher didn't approve of her divorce decades ago. Lord, give me patience with those who still preach what I used to preach.

As I write this, my post has 91 comments and 120 "Likes." The comments were almost entirely supportive and I kind of felt sorry for the lone commenter who wanted to argue for the traditional teaching in my religious tribe. I also got a dozen Facebook messages, mostly positive, and a few emails – again, mostly positive. The interest is so high that I promised I would post a fuller version of the story and an explanation of my decision to comfort the woman rather than confront her.

NOTE: I am going to change a few particulars here to make sure this woman's confidentiality is kept absolutely safe. The story is true, but blurred a bit out of love. I'm sure you understand why I need to do that. Her name has been changed in this account.

I knew this woman nearly 16 years ago when I worked in Morgantown, West Virginia. She no longer lives there and neither do I. At that time, we all knew Mary's story and we knew it was true. Her husband had been caught fondling their infant daughter. He would take her hands and use them to masturbate. He used her body like that for years and was caught several times. Don't ask

2 why she didn't leave immediately – love and life are more complicated than that.

After her daughter came to her and told her that her daddy made her undress (she was now 10) to “see what I created” Mary knew it was time to get out. She divorced her husband but she didn't go through the court system to put him away because she had no evidence. The testimony of her daughter wasn't going to be enough and Mary knew her hesitation to leave him years before would poison her case and leave her open to ridicule and doubt at the hands of a defense attorney. She took her daughter and her younger son and left.

Years later, she met a man who loved her deeply. Her kids were grown and safe now. She married this man and she has been married to him for the last 13 years. It is a happy marriage. She is now around 73 years old and has been fighting diabetes. She also recently received a diagnosis of cancer. She now lives in a small town in a state that neighbors West Virginia. In that town is a Church of Christ run by a loud, combative preacher who revels in “naming names” and calling others false teachers. He and a couple of other like minded ministers even have a TV program where they attack any other religious teacher and all Church of Christ ministers who do not toe the doctrinal line they've drawn.

Mary called me in distress. She told me she loved her preacher, that he was famous all over the world, and that he was a man of God who preached the Bible faithfully. Recently, she had gone to him for prayer and comfort and he asked her questions about her life. That is when he found out she had been married before. He asked her if she was “divorced on the grounds of adultery” and she said no, but that she had left her husband because of his sexual abuse of their daughter. The minister then told her that she wasn't really married to her second husband, that she must move out of the house immediately, and that she had to repent of living in sin with that man. Seriously. Why?

He said that the divorce had to say “adultery” in the papers or it wasn't a real divorce and her marriage never ended. He then went on to say that since her husband hadn't actually had intercourse with their daughter, there was no adultery. I'll let you read that sentence again. Back? Calmed down?

She was so desperate to please this preacher who had convinced her that he was a powerful, faithful, book-chapter-verse man of God that I had to break into her description of him and say “No. He is not a good man. He is not teaching the truth and he is not speaking to you with the words or heart of Jesus. And he is not famous except in a tiny area of a rural state and, even there, he is not respected or loved.” That was a shocker to her. Then, I went on to explain to her why she should go home and hug her husband and then, together, find another church to attend. And it wouldn’t hurt to shake the dust off her feet along the way.

Some of you have been in similar situations. And some of you have been either the woman or the preacher (I taught a lot of what that man taught but, perhaps out of vanity, I dare to believe I was never that harsh or absolute). For those of you outside the Churches of Christ, you need to know that we have a history with the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. And for those of you inside the Churches of Christ, you need to know that that history is FAR more complex than you’ve been led to believe.

For a lot of us, the church has “always taught” that any divorce, except on the grounds of sexual sin by one or both parties is not a dissolution of the marriage. The guilty party was told that they could never remarry. Most Churches of Christ taught that the innocent party could remarry if the divorce was for adultery – some demanded that that was on the court documents while others said it had to be the proximate cause but, understanding how reluctant courts are to accept adultery as the cause, they said it didn’t have to be on the papers.

Other Churches of Christ leaders actually said the divorced person, even if innocent, could never remarry. Anyone who remarried was viewed with suspicion. I can’t begin to count how many times I’ve heard a sneering voice say something like “I’m not really sure there ever is an innocent party. She/he might have done something to drive him/her to it.” Again... seriously?

This teaching became codified in Churches of Christ doctrine. You might wonder how a fellowship that has no official headquarters, no official seminary, and no official publishing house, creed, or manual of discipline can establish doctrine and hold all of their churches to it.

¶ The answer is, through intimidation. “Brotherhood papers” and lectureships (city wide, college based, etc.), websites and podcasts all conspire to declare what is true and declare anyone who disagrees as a false teacher. Since we are a fellowship built on absolute fealty to Jesus and the Bible, calling a minister “unfaithful to the written Word” is as much a curse as carving a 666 on their forehead. That fear is then driven deep in church leaders. How deep? A couple of examples.

When we worked in Irvine, Scotland – a nice town on the west coast of that lovely nation – we found that a splinter group of the Jehovah’s Witnesses was already in town using the name “Church of Christ.” They had made a real nuisance of themselves in the town so we decided we would call ourselves another name. It would have to be Biblical because that was our teaching. We floated several examples of Biblical names for the church back to our supporting churches in the US. All of them told us that we HAD to use the name Church of Christ even if it meant that we couldn’t reach the locals. We were flummoxed and stunned.

We asked why and one eldership said “what if visitors or tourists come through looking for the Church of Christ? If you don’t have that name on your (rented) building and in the phonebook, how can they find you?” I told them that I wasn’t interested in providing a congregation for Americans who might be passing through, but for the locals.

The truth finally came out: “If other churches find out that we are supporting a church that isn’t named Church of Christ, that will cause a break in fellowship.” Fear kept us from reaching people an ocean away.

My father once asked me if I would watch video tapes of a lectureship with him. It was on the Book of John, perhaps my favorite book, so I said I would. Each speaker was to take a different chapter. The first man got up – a well known minister in the Churches of Christ. I was interested to see what he would do with that fantastic chapter about light and darkness and the coming of the Word. Instead, he touched on marriage, divorce, remarriage, instrumental music, liberalism in the church, etc. He hit all the hot buttons and came down firmly in the conservative, far right camp. I was frustrated but I waited for chapter two.

The next man did the same thing, hit the same points, and John barely got a mention. After four speakers I asked my father to stop the tapes. I told him my heart was broken because not one speaker had yet spoken about the beauty and power of the Book of John. All of the men were terrified that someone might not think they were a “sound” preacher. Their careers and reputations were on the line.

They have tried to use fear and intimidation against me as well. I well remember in 1988 being told by a preacher who is now in charge of one of the largest brotherhood papers that if I preached a certain sermon and if I published it, I would never be asked to speak in a church of Christ again. I preached it and published it anyway.

Some in the far right have written articles against me and then sent them to my aging parents (who are very conservative). They didn’t send them to me, but to my parents. That was a better way to hurt/stop me, in their mind. My father was so devastated by what his far right friends told him about me that 18 years ago he told me “I can’t get a preaching job anywhere anymore because you’ve ruined our name.” He doesn’t treat me like that today, but we went through some bad years. Very bad years. Now, although he is still as conservative as ever, we are friends.

People ask how that is even possible and I tell them that he knows I love him. I’ve proven it by never failing to love him even when he wouldn’t take my calls or talk to me in public or private (that went on for nearly six months back in the early 90’s). He was terrified that being near me would taint him.

Fear and intimidation allied with media is how the Church of Christ establishes and enforces its unwritten creeds. Here, however, is the good news. No, the GREAT news. The vast majority of members of the churches of Christ and the majority of its ministers are no longer playing the game. Churches that wrote articles against me twenty years ago are now on a two year waiting list to have me come help them by working with their elders or giving them a seminar on the faith.

That sounded a little arrogant, didn’t it? I apologize. The fact is, I am the most unqualified minister I know. I have no degrees or preaching school credentials. I am a broken individual with so

6 many faults that, frankly, I sometimes fight with depression at how poorly I've turned out. I'm a loner who doesn't like travel or public speaking and yet... look at what God is doing with me. I am amazed at His power, His grace, and His love. That drives me forward – without fear.

In the first 120 years of the Churches of Christ there was no single doctrine on marriage, divorce, and remarriage taught by all our congregations. That is because those who led the Restoration Movement intentionally pushed the Biblical example of autonomous congregations having no central leadership but, rather, led locally by elders they picked themselves.

What would become the “standard teaching” on marriage, divorce, and remarriage was nothing like the mainstream teaching in our churches until after 1930. Why? Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Instead, let's look at what has become the standard doctrine in the Churches of Christ.

- 1. Marriage is for life between one man and one woman.*
- 2. Any breaking of that marriage is adulterous unless it was for the express and stated cause of (preferably provable or admitted) adultery on the part of one of the marriage partners.*
- 3. That “adultery” was defined as sexual intercourse.*
- 4. Any remarriage by the guilty partner was not a real marriage. It was an adulterous marriage and any sexual activity between the new partners was adultery.*
- 5. Repentance required remarrying the first mate, even if the second “so-called” marriage had produced children. If it was impossible to remarry the first mate, you were to remain single the rest of your life.*
- 6. Guilty partners were never allowed to remarry even if they later came to Christ.*
- 7. Any divorce for any other reason was not a real end to the marriage. The marriage would continue “in God's eyes.”*
- 8. Any remarriage after a divorce for any other cause than sexual sin (including battery, alcoholism, various forms of abuse, abandonment, etc.) would be “an adulterous*

marriage” and the sin of adultery would only end with the second liaison ended and the original mates reconciled or remained single for life. **7**

- 9. Baptizing divorced and remarried people was useless for they had not repented (or they would be back with their first mate). They were not to be considered Christians or members of the church.*

You need to know something: this doctrine was really the brainchild of a small group of men. Alexander Campbell certainly didn't believe this doctrine (except I think all of us agreed on #1). None of the early great leaders of the Churches of Christ taught this. It started with two young preachers who gained control of one of the brotherhood's most important papers, *The Gospel Advocate*, around 1930.

They began publishing articles proclaiming this as the only biblical way to view marriage, divorce, and remarriage and naming those who taught otherwise as “unsound” or “unfaithful” which, I would remind you, is the worst thing you can call a Church of Christ preacher. It destroys his ability to preach, teach, write, honor his calling, or support his family. And they destroyed many.

Great names in the Churches of Christ at the time preached against this teaching, but they did not have control of the media and so their voices were muted and faded away one by one. Gus Nichols tried to remind us that adultery took place in the dissolution of the marriage and that remarriage and the sexual activity within that marriage was NOT adulterous at all; those marriages were real and not “so called.” Though he was a highly respected scholar in the Churches of Christ – one of the top three or four at least, he was ignored and didn't get his teachings published.

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was one of the most conservative firebrands the Church of Christ has ever produced. He called this new teaching a “damnable heresy” and correctly said that the *Gospel Advocate* was creating a new sacrament in marriage and dragging us into Roman Catholic style doctrine. And he was right.

There is much in common between the Roman Catholic clergy style and their sacramental view of marriage, baptism, communion, and worship and that in the Churches of Christ. The styles

8 and beliefs differ, of course, but their view of these elements of the Christian faith and their power and permanence are very similar.

Other voices came out against this new teaching – C.R. Nichols, R.L. Whiteside, G.C. Brewer, B.C. Goodpasture, N.B. Harde- man, H. Leo Boles, and Leslie G. Thomas all wrote and spoke against the teaching but what was true then in religion is true to- day in religion, culture, and politics: whoever controls the media controls the debate. Those great old voices in the Churches of Christ were slowly muted and shut down. The writings of Camp- bell and Walter Scott and other first-generation Restoration Movement leaders were forgotten or edited out of church history books. Other papers didn't want to lose their circulation and they saw how being called "unsound" could cost them subscribers and a platform. Most competing papers faded away while a few others decided to up the ante by saying they were even more faithful than the Gospel Advocate and they were even more strict on marriage, divorce, and remarriage (by teaching, for example, that even the innocent party could never remarry).

Preachers such as Roy Lanier, Thomas Warren, and Garland Elkins led the charge for this new teaching. As far as I can tell, all were sincere in their belief. None of them wanted to be mean. They thought they were being biblical. I met them all when I was much younger and they were nothing but kind to me. But they were wrong on this and their teachings have caused unnecessary heartache and pain.

Lanier would often say again and again during debates on this topic that "What God has joined together let no man put asunder!" However, he didn't realize that by saying this he had undermined his argument that marriage was permanent in God's eyes and couldn't be broken by divorce. To prove his point he would have to have said "What God has joined together is impossible for man to put asunder." The fact is that marriage law is like all other laws of God – it is possible to break them. The Old Testament is full of teachings showing that marriages end and new ones begin (Deu- teronomy 24; Ezra 10; Nehemiah 13; Exodus 21:4). Not only could marriage end, sometimes it was breakable by permission of God and, other times, God expressly ordered the break of the marriage!

In scripture we find time and time again that marriages do, indeed, end even when the parties to the marriage remain alive. In an attempt to disprove this, some have pointed to John the Baptist's statement to Herod that it was sinful for him to have his brother's wife as evidence that – in God's eyes – her divorce was not recognized and God still viewed her as married to her first husband. That isn't even close to being true. John the Baptist was not talking about the permanence of marriage but about the law of incest (see Leviticus 18:16; Deuteronomy 24). Herod was not allowed to take a former sister in law as wife. Again, a "proof text" used by proponents of the standard doctrine among us proves nothing of the sort.

Jesus never referred to "so-called" marriages or "so-called" divorces. In Matthew 19:9 he speaks of one divorcing their mate and marrying another, indicating that it is possible to do so. Neither he nor any other biblical writer ever referred to a marriage as "an adulterous marriage" or as a "so-called marriage." If fact, if we look for the Standard Doctrine (or the Lanier-Warren-Elkins doctrine) in history we find it first taught in ... drumroll please... 1563 at the Roman Catholic Council of Trent. It is there that for the first time we are taught that marriage is permanent, sacramental and, therefore, cannot be dissolved.

Forgive me for going so long on this blog, but I'd like to get in a point and then expand it next time. We need to talk about what the Bible means when it says "adultery."

Words change meaning. And we make a grave error when we try to prove what the Bible is teaching by heading to Webster. English is the fastest changing of all languages, which is why it is so powerful and worldwide. Words such as gay, wicked, and sick change meanings quickly. In Shakespeare's time a housewife was called a "hussy" and the worst name you could call anyone was "mischievous."

Too many times, preachers go to modern legal definitions of adultery and teach that it means "sex between two people who are married but not to each other" and they define fornication as "sex between two people who are not married." While that fits dictionary and legal definitions, it does not fit with the use of the word in

10 scripture. Simply put – adultery is the breaking of a sacred covenant and fornication is any sexual sin.

We'll examine this in detail in the next day or two. We will also ask the question “what constitutes a marriage?” and examine objections levied against those of us who don't hold to the Standard Doctrine. And a quick word to those reading this who are not of the Churches of Christ.

Don't think the Church of Christ is full of haters. The fact is that the vast majority of its members and the majority of its leaders do NOT hold to this “standard doctrine” any more nor do they hold to any of the other angry, divisive doctrines of the past. Each congregation varies widely in its practice and character but, in my experience, they are wonderful people and I am proud to be a part of what the Spirit is doing in our churches today.

There are many issues in the marriage, divorce, and remarriage question that are very rarely raised. One of the biggest should make all of us step back and think again about what we teach: the passages we use on this are – in the main – from a time when the Old Law was in effect. Jesus answered questions about marriage in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 while the Law of Moses was the Law of God. Jesus came to set us free from that law and bring us to a law of grace and love.

There are some ramifications here that might lie beyond the current discussion, but this is a reality we need to factor into our discussions on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.

If you look closely at Matthew 19 you will see what most of our ministers saw before the mid-30s and what most are seeing and saying today: the adultery occurs when the marriage is broken. It isn't broken by adultery; the act of breaking the marriage is adultery. Jesus says that the marriage law of his time was that you were not to break your covenant unless one of the covenant partners (spouses, for those not tuned into religious-speak) was guilty of sexual sin.

In Jesus' time there were those who taught that “fornication” meant any form of uncleanness including – and I'm not making this up – burning a meal. That is why he was asked if it was all right to put away a wife “for any cause.” Jesus could not have been more plain in his rejection of that idea. The breaking of a vow was

not and is not something to be taken lightly and it could only be done if there was something terribly wrong in the marriage. Jesus acknowledged that it was God who devised the first divorce law; crafting it and delivering it to Moses because of the hardness of men's hearts.

Now, let's talk about definitions. There are many who will run to their favorite lexicons and grab the first (or their preferred) definition of a Greek word and declare that adultery is always about sex. They are wrong. The Bible says so and so does linguistics.

I've done this disclaimer several times before but I'd better do it again for those who are new to Tentpegs: I have a BA in Linguistics and I speak a handful of languages, including Hebrew, but I am not a scholar when it comes to language. However, as a scientist I bring a logical mind to this and as an avid amateur historian I bring context to this discussion as well. And since I am well aware I know just enough about language to be dangerous, I rely on experts in the field as often as I can. However, I pick those experts carefully.

In most denominations (at least, during the 20th century – things seem to be improving rapidly on this front) ministers, professors, and church leaders all read from their own authors who quote each other, do seminars with each other, and set up courses in their seminaries based on their work. It is all rather incestuous. I prefer to pick my scholars from a broad spectrum of religious and academic experts so I don't suffer from the echo chamber that infects so much discussion in religion (and science, and politics, and...).

How does God use the word we translate as "adultery"? In Jeremiah 3:6-9, the prophet says that Israel committed adultery with stone and wood. Nothing sexual there! Their adultery was committed when they broke their covenant with God by worshipping idols and allowing those idols into sacred places God had reserved for Himself.

In both Matthew 12:39 and James 4:4 the word "adultery" is used to describe unfaithfulness to God, not sexual activity. The usual term for sexual sin is "fornication," and "adultery" is the result. Look at Matthew 5:27,28. Lust is an act of adultery – unfaith-

12 fulness to the wife. It wasn't called fornication, but adultery.

That's a pretty important point that eludes way too many people.

A married person who commits sexual sin commits adultery because they have broken the covenant with their marriage partner. If a man puts away his wife in divorce when she has not committed sexual sin, he commits adultery against her by breaking his oaths to stay with her forever. And here we hit a HUGE point.

Jesus says that putting away a wife who has not committed adultery causes her to commit adultery (Matthew 5:31,32). If adultery always means sexual sin, this statement makes no sense at all. I've heard preachers actually say (are you sitting down?) that this is because the woman will eventually have to marry someone else to satisfy her sexually and THAT is when she commits adultery. I've heard more absurd things but they usually come from Washington, DC rather than a pulpit.

No, she commits adultery – unwillingly – when she is forced away from the marriage and, therefore, unable to keep her commitment, her covenant, her vow. It has nothing to do with the oft-repeated myth that the woman will have to find someone else to sexually satisfy her. Many women never remarry and live happy lives without sexual activity and others aren't happy about being forced to be chaste but they keep their vow to God and remain honorable women... who should be honored by all.

Anyway, my friends who are experts in Greek (professors and linguists) tell me that the verb here in “causes her to commit” is in the passive voice and so cannot possibly refer to any choice or action on her part even in the future. It is the same voice that is used when we say “Jesus was crucified.” It was done to him. He didn't do it or cause it. Once again, those who claim that “adultery” always refers to sexual sin are wrong. This woman did not sin but committed adultery due to events outside of her control.

Now go back and look at God and covenants. That would fill another six or seven blogs so let me summarize and simplify, if you will. God made a large number of covenants with Israel which Israel agreed to and later broke, thereby freeing God to make new covenants or not as His wisdom and will directed. He did not want those covenants broken, but was placed in that position by man's

rebellion. If anyone understands the broken heart of the “one put away” and forced to break the covenant, it is God. And yet, that did not deny God or Israel the right to try again and to make new covenants.

Let’s look at the Standard Doctrine (which isn’t so standard any more, thank God) and take it apart.

- Is marriage for life and only dissolvable by death? Jesus didn’t think so. Some say that Paul believed that and they run to Romans 7 to prove it... except Romans 7 won’t help them. Paul refers to the Old Law to show that death ends the marriage vow but nowhere does he say that that is the only thing that ends it. He wasn’t speaking about marriage and divorce law, but about the Old Law and the New Law in Christ. He does not say that subsequent marriages are not real nor does he say that there is no such thing as divorce. No, instead he says that if a woman sexually engages with another man while her husband lives, she has committed adultery. We all agree with that!
- Interestingly enough, some atheists use this passage and Deuteronomy 24 to attack God as a woman hater. They say – correctly – that the man could put away the woman for sexual sin but the woman was given no right to put away the husband for sexual sin. However, they forget that the woman – while she couldn’t divorce him – could report him to the community. They were required to stone him to death. As a widow, she was free to remarry or stay single. I’m not seeing how the man is getting the best end of this deal...
- Adultery is not the sexual sin but the breaking of the vow that sexual sin causes. The distinction is important, for adultery is a broader word that covers much more than sexual sin. In Malachi there is an odd phrase that is hard to translate into English that speaks of men who “cover their wives with violence like a cloak” (your version may vary). Most experts in that culture and linguistics agree that the phrase means that the men were abusing their wives... and the passage is about God divorcing Israel because the men were acting like that.

- The breaking of covenant might be through physical abuse, neglect, desertion, refusal to work and support the family (which Paul says makes the man worse than a heretic), etc. There is more to the marriage vow than sex. Paul used a legal term when he talked about those who refused to live with their spouse. He said that under those conditions the remaining spouse was “no longer bound” to stay in the marriage. Desertion is adultery.
- Remarriages were a fact of life in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus referred to them as real marriages. Forgiveness was offered even to the “guilty party” as evidenced by the story of David and Bathsheba. After David committed fornication and murder, he took Bathsheba as his wife. However, she is called “the wife of Uriah the Hittite” until Nathan confronts David and David repents. From that point on, Bathsheba is referred to as “David’s wife.” Repentance matters to God. It changes things.
- Some say that the only way to show we have repented is to leave the current union and rejoin the first mate (or stay single if reunion is not possible). This is absurd on its face for it says that the only way to repent from divorce is to divorce! In a breathtaking example of casuistry, some reply that the second divorce isn’t really a divorce because their marriage wasn’t really a marriage – all concepts that are never found in scripture. And should the fathers abandon their children from that second marriage? That someone would go so far to hold to a harsh, unbiblical doctrine breaks my heart.
- They tell us that guilty parties can never remarry but in the Bible they can and do. And if they have repented, they are forgiven and the new union is recognized.
- Any divorce that isn’t on the grounds of adultery isn’t valid? Paul disagrees and adds desertion saying it frees the other spouse from obligation. We could go on but I fear I’ve made this long enough already.
- We’ve dealt with this one – remarrying is not adultery.

- Can divorced people be forgiven? Not only do we have the example of God forgiving David, when we go to the New Testament we find NO example of a person having to leave a current mate and find a new one or stay celibate.

So are we loosing up the rules and encouraging divorce? By no means. Divorce is a horrible evil and, like God, we hate divorce. But we also, like God, love people. We will open our doors, our hearts, and our arms to those who have been through a divorce just as we open them to liars, the greedy, the gluttonous, the sharp tongued, and the addict. We will not be so absurd as to accept a man who slept with a hundred women and consorted with dozens of prostitutes and then, finally, married a woman while rejecting someone who kept themselves sexually pure before marriage... and then that marriage failed.

I am proud of the Churches of Christ for their openness to re-examining everything. Few churches have that kind of freedom built into their DNA. We returned the Lord's Supper to the people. We gave the Bible to our people and gave them permission to think. We restored baptism to its high place in our faith.

There is SO much good in this brotherhood and it thrills me to see more and more open some previously locked boxes and, like the Bereans, examine them in the light of day with an open Bible. This is just one of those boxes and it is time we threw it away.

next, by Olan Hicks

16 *A Sacrament of Marriage Theory*

In the year 1545 in the Italian town of Trent a Roman Catholic Council convened and, with interruptions, over the next 18 years rendered decisions that were to have far-reaching effects on religious concepts around the world. Did they affect YOU? Although it was not at first thought to be a very important council, this one produced rulings of such a nature that in later years many Roman Catholic historians have referred to the Council of Trent as the most significant of all the councils. Several ideas that had been under discussion for centuries were finalized at Trent.

It was here that “tradition” was ruled to be equally inspired with the scriptures and equally authoritative. But the decree most directly relating to problems of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in our time is the one in which this council “defined” that marriage is a “church sacrament.” What this means is that marriage is an institution in which heaven directly participates. It is seen as not subject to breakage by human hands. In effect, what the council decreed is that each marriage contract is enacted in heaven, is entered into permanent records there, and is accessible only to God as far as any further action upon it is concerned. Thus they ruled that for a wedding to be valid, a Roman Catholic priest must preside as a representative of God.

The council ruled also that at least two witnesses are required and that any marriage contracted otherwise is “invalid,” and not legitimate. Further, it was declared that once the marriage contract is solemnized it continues to remain intact in heaven’s record regardless of the will or actions of the involved human parties on earth. The church, represented by its officers, is seen as obligated to protect God’s interests in the matter and to impose judgments upon the people in harmony with these premises, including the refusal to recognize any marriage contracted in any other way as being a marriage at all.

Protestantism neither fully accepted nor fully rejected this viewpoint. Its basic premises seemingly floated around the world and permeated the thinking of all religious groups in varying degrees. Actually there seems to have been little to no examination of the “sacrament theory of marriage” or comparison of its tenets

with scripture. Apparently it has been accepted or rejected with little study by most church people. In our own generation several prominent brethren in our Christian congregations have risen up vigorously determined to establish this concept as orthodox and to enforce the judgments demanded by that viewpoint. They imagine that it is in agreement with what Jesus said in Matthew 19:9.

Under the press of these very aggressive and dogmatic efforts, the issue now is forced toward a showdown. Christians now must determine whether or not these tenets are accurate Biblically. To reject them results in being by many church leaders considered to be outside “the fellowship.”

Identifying the Issues

In the heat of the battle many false issues have been raised and many mistaken allegations lodged. But as the smoke clears away the real issues to be dealt with are becoming clearer. Christians may choose to make a thorough study of the Bible on the subject to determine whether or not Jesus said what in the traditional theory He is interpreted as saying. This is not a philosophical question and therefore philosophy cannot supply the answer. It is a Biblical question and therefore requires a “thus says the Lord” for the answer. Nor is it a case of people on one side being in favor of divorce and people on the other side being against it.

Both sides agree, at least on the surface, that sundering marriage is wrong. Today’s great problem is not one of widespread approval of divorce. It is rather a widespread incidence of divorce. Like the high crime rate, everybody is against it, but it keeps happening anyway. Divorce is looked upon, even by those to whom it happens, as involving sin and as an occasion of failure and personal tragedy. Most all religious people regard it as involving sinful infractions against God’s law. So it is not in the for or against area that we have the controversy.

But we find very strong disagreements when we come to the matter of what must be done about it and to the matter of repairing those damaged lives. These disagreements revolve around the premises legislated upon by the Council of Trent. It is important that we understand what these premises are and what the Bible

18 says in regard to each one. A premise is not proven wrong by the mere fact that it occurs in a human creed. It is shown to be either true or untrue *by what the Bible says on the point.*

Questions to be decided

Is it impossible to destroy a marriage wrongly?

A widely accepted viewpoint which lies at the core of the present controversy is the “divorce in the eyes of God” concept and the “marriage as God sees it” idea. According to this theory there are two kinds of divorce, one that is a divorce in the eyes of God and one that is not. Likewise there are two kinds of marriage, one that is marriage in the eyes of God and one that as God sees it is not a marriage at all.

It is here that the “sacramental” concept comes into play. The reasoning is that marriages are made in heaven in the sense that God actually marries each couple and in fact participates in the contract. It is seen then as a three-way contract between the man, the woman, and God. Since Jesus said that man is not to put asunder what God has joined together, if a man tries to do so God simply does not recognize the “divorce” if it is not based on fornication. Thus it is reasoned that in such a case the marriage remains intact in God’s eyes and if this man marries another woman he “has two living wives” and is “living in a constant practice of adultery.” Is this accurate to the text of any scripture passages? No, it is not.

The problem begins with a mishandling of Matthew 19:6. Here Jesus said, “*What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*” Does this text say it cannot be done, or does it say it is wrong to do it? Does it say “do not” or “can not”? Does it say it is impossible to break a marriage wrongfully or does it say it is sinful to do so? This text is a statement of prohibition, not a statement of impossibility. The grammar of the passage indicates this was something that was being done at the time and was here ordered stopped. A. T. Robertson discusses this kind of construction on page 890 of his grammar and says it is used to “*forbid what one is already doing.*” Dana & Mantey say of this type of sentence struc-

ture that it “*means to forbid the continuance of an act; it commands to quit doing a thing*” (Grammar, page 301).

So the Lord’s reference here is to the fact that men were putting marriages asunder contrary to the will of God and he simply said it is prohibited. He did not say man is incapable of it any more than he said man is incapable of murder, or any other sin. The difference is between “do not” and “can not.” It may seem to some to be only a slight difference, but actually this is one of the most significant misunderstandings of all time.

Is the next marriage an adulterous relationship?

When the “cannot” idea is carried forward and imposed on verse 9, it changes the entire verse and, in fact, negates every statement made there. In this verse Jesus speaks of a hypothetical case of a man who does this, i.e., “puts away his wife except for fornication.” If that is seen as not possible, then the statement of the text is inaccurate at this point. The man in question only attempts to put away his wife. In God’s sight he does not succeed. This idea is opposite to what Jesus in fact did say. The next statement in the passage is that this man then “marries another.” But again the “cannot” idea disputes it. The theory is that he marries the next wife “only as man sees it, not as God sees it.” This again is the opposite of what Jesus said.

When is adultery committed in divorce and remarriage?

The third statement in the passage is that the man who does these two things commits adultery. But the tradition emanating from Trent insists that the adultery here referred to occurs in the subsequent relationship of marriage. Thus it would not necessarily be true that every man who puts away his wife except for fornication and marries another commits adultery. If adultery can only be a sexual act and cannot be committed by divorcing one and marrying another, then the statement of Jesus is again inaccurate, for He says in this text that a man who does those two things does commit adultery.

In this scripture Jesus actually said four things, as follows:

1. If a man puts away his wife, except for fornication

2. and marries another

3. he **commits adultery by doing so**. And,

4. If a man marries a put-away woman he **commits adultery by doing so**.

In ruling that it is not possible for a man to put away his wife except for fornication, as God sees it, we would deny number 1, the statement of Jesus that here is a man who does exactly that. In ruling that “in God’s eyes” such a man is not married to the second wife, we would deny number 2, the statement of Jesus that he **does** marry another. In ruling that the “adultery” in such a case consists in the sexual relationship which follows the two acts of divorcing and marrying, we would deny number 3, the Lord’s statement that the man who does **those two things** commits adultery. If adultery cannot be committed by doing those two things, how can it be said that whoever does those two things commits it?

Reasoning upon the same basic premises produces also a denial of number 4 in traditional theology. Jesus said that a man who **marries** a put-away woman commits adultery. But the traditional view is that adultery is not committed until later, when they cohabit sexually.

Thus the sacrament theory has caused a total misreading of the divorce passages. The two central premises of it are two erroneous assumptions:

1. That marriage cannot be broken sinfully, and
2. That adultery can only be committed in a sex act.

A careful reading of Matthew 19:6-9 itself would dispel both of these mistakes. We have already referred to verse 6, the grammar of which indicates that what Jesus prohibited was something that was being done at the time. This shows it to be possible. Then in verse 9 Jesus cites the hypothetical case of a man who does it, again showing that it is possible. The message of the passage is that it is wrong to do the two things mentioned, not that it is impossible to do them.

To illustrate, take the command “Do not kill.” Is it impossible to kill? What if you kill someone anyway, could you say, “He isn’t really dead because God forbids us to kill”? No, *he is really dead*,

and you have committed a sin in that you have done what God said to not do.

This is precisely what the text says is the situation of the man who divorces his wife without fornication as the cause, and marries another. The marriage is destroyed and the next marriage is actual. But this man has committed a sin in that he has done what God said to not do. The sin he commits, Jesus said, is the sin of adultery.

The second erroneous assumption, that adultery can only be committed sexually, is also negated by this verse. Divorce is not a sexual act. Marry does not refer to a sexual act. Since these two things the verse specifies as being what the man does who commits adultery, and neither is a sex act, then obviously it can be committed in ways that are not sexual. That “adultery” does often refer to non-sexual acts in the Bible is also seen by merely taking a good concordance, looking up the word, and reading those passages where the word occurs.

For instance the word adultery is used of idolatry. In Jeremiah 3:9 the prophet says that Israel committed adultery with stones and with stocks. In the New Testament Jesus used this word to describe some people who were seeking after a sign (Matthew 12:39). Certainly that is not a sex act. In James 4:4 we read that friendship with the world made them adulterers and adulteresses. And in our text here (Matthew 19:9) we find Jesus using this word in reference to divorcing a wife and marrying another. That is four different meanings given the word in scripture in addition to the passages where adultery is committed sexually:

1. idolatry
2. sign seeking
3. friendship with the world, and
4. divorce and remarriage.

When we go to the text and just read what it says, it presents no problem about divorce . The simple idea that a man commits adultery when he destroys his marriage without due cause and enters another marriage is stated there. But human opinion has introduced three foreign ideas not written in the text:

1. indestructibility of marriage,
2. invalidity of next marriage,

22 3. adultery means sex act and that only..

The conflict thus produced between tradition and Jesus is illustrated below:

1. **Jesus said**, “*Whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication.*” — Tradition says, “Not possible to put away wife except for fornication.”

2. **Jesus said**, “*and shall marry another.*” — Tradition says, “is not married to the next wife in God’s sight.”

3. **Jesus said**, “*commits adultery.*” — Tradition says, “adultery not committed until later sexual intimacy.”

4. **Jesus said**, “*Whoever marries a put-away woman commits adultery.*” — Tradition says, “Adultery not in marrying, but in sexual intimacy which follows.”

A More Recent Theory

Some brethren, upon seeing that the three premises just discussed do indeed contradict the statements of the text, yet seemingly determined to deny marriage to divorced people, revised their approach to saying it. These agree that the sinful divorce does destroy the marriage and also that the subsequent union is a marriage, as per the text. But they contend that the second marriage stands in perpetual violation of God's will. They base this contention on the premise that God has not authorized a person in that circumstance to remarry. They grant that God has authorized marriage for the entire human race to the extent of a first marriage. But as respects “remarrying” they insist that God has authorized it only for:

1. those who divorced their mate on the grounds of fornication,
2. those whose mate has died, and
3. those reconciling to their original mate.

They admit that a divorce for fornication destroys the marriage both for the guilty party and the innocent party. But they say that while the innocent party may remarry, the guilty party is forbidden to remarry, not because he remains married to the first mate but because he is “not authorized” to remarry.

This theory is no more scriptural than the traditional one. Like the rulings emanating from Trent, this one also rests upon erroneous premises derived from human assumption. The Bible does not

speak of “remarrying” as different from “marrying.” It does use the expression “be reconciled” in the sense of recovering a love relationship. But forming a marriage is simply called “marrying” whether or not it is the first marriage.

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus spoke of a man who puts away his wife, without fornication as the cause, “and shall marry another.” In 1 Corinthians 7:27,28 Paul said of a man who has been “loosed from a wife,” that “If thou marry thou has not sinned.” Mistake number 1 in this theory then is the arbitrary creating of a distinction between the act of marrying and the act of remarrying.

The second erroneous assumption is the idea that God gave the marriage institution as a sort of special privilege for those who have never sinned against it. Thus God's original appointment of marriage as the way for mankind on earth is seen as not applicable to those who have sinned against it. Their right to participate in marriage is nullified on the ground of an alleged “absence of authority to remarry.” Like the concept issued at Trent, this one also, when examined in comparison with God's word, is found to be without foundation and contradictory to expressly stated Biblical premises.

Take for example the Bible premise that marriage is a necessity because of the natural drives and appetites God has built into people. God stated that as His reason for creating marriage in the beginning (Genesis 2:18). Jesus referred to it as God's way for mankind (Matthew 19:4-6), and when the idea of avoiding marriage was mentioned, said, “Not all men can receive that saying” (v. 11).

Human opinion has introduced three foreign ideas not written in the text:

1. indestructibility of marriage,
2. invalidity of next marriage,
3. adultery means sex act and that only.

The conflict thus produced between tradition and Jesus is illustrated below:

1. *Jesus said, “Whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication.”* — Tradition says, “Not possible to put away wife except for fornication.”

24 2. *Jesus said, “and shall **marry** another.”* — Tradition says, “is not married to the next wife in God’s sight.”

3. *Jesus said, “commits adultery.”* — Tradition says, “adultery not committed until later sexual intimacy.”

4. *Jesus said, “Whoever **marries** a put-away woman commits adultery.”* — Tradition says, “Adultery not in marrying, but in sexual intimacy which follows.”

Paul cited this basic premise repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, and concluded that for anyone who is not married “it is better to marry than to burn.” But this human theory just sweeps all that aside and rules that in the case of a person who has sinned against marriage at any time in life, it is good for the man to be alone, all men can receive that saying, and it is better to burn than to marry. They seek to overrule God, they in fact overrule Christ, and they would overrule Paul on the matter.

*One does not have to oppose marriage
in order to oppose divorce.*

Apparently it is not easy for some to keep the real issue clearly in mind. As we said earlier, the dispute is not about the wrongness of divorce. It is rather about the rightness of marriage for people who have been divorced. The Biblical focus is on the wrongness of sundering marriage. It is prohibited (Matthew 19:3-9). But in the human theories we speak of here, the focus is on prohibiting marriage itself for as many as possible. In most such cases divorce is seen as posing no problem, even an unscriptural divorce, just so long as the violators do not marry.

I teach that all men do well to take a wife. Some of my strongest opposition has come from men who are divorced, and without fornication as the cause. They see the disruption of the marriage as pardoned, cleansed in the blood of Jesus, but marriage itself they see as forbidden to them. In most cases where a church will disfellowship those who remarry after unscriptural divorce, they do not disfellowship the unscripturally divorced if they remain divorced and do not marry again. Thus the focus is upon forbidding marriage for the divorced rather than upon forbidding divorce for the married.

To see the seriousness of this error notice what the Holy Spirit through Paul said about it in 1 Timothy 4:1-3: “Now the Spirit

speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron; *forbidding to marry* and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

Forbidding divorce (the sundering of marriage) is Biblical. Jesus did that. But forbidding marriage itself is another matter altogether. There is a great difference between the two. The Holy Spirit said the idea of forbidding marriage comes from demons and consists of lies in hypocrisy. Why would the devil want marriage forbidden? For the very reasons God wants it practiced. “It is not good that the man should be alone” and the purpose for marriage is “to avoid fornication.”

Satan does not want fornication avoided. He wants it practiced! So if marriage prevents it, then of course he will want to destroy marriage by getting people to divorce in the first place. Then after getting a marriage destroyed, of course he wants to prevent any rehabilitation or repair of that situation. Satan is simply opposed to marriage. This is why it is very disturbing to see brethren giving heed to theories whose emphasis is upon preventing marriage rather than upon preventing divorce.

What did the APOSTLES teach?

In regard to the statements of Jesus in the “divorce passages,” we find two facts which are totally hostile to the human theories we have mentioned: (1) There is no precedent in scripture for anyone being seen as “ineligible to be married,” and (2) All apostolic statements on the point say the opposite, that marriage is right for every person who wants and needs it. Starting on Pentecost in Acts 2, the apostles preached the gospel of repentance and reconciliation to God in an empire whose laws had permitted divorce and remarriage quite freely for centuries, and among a nation of people accustomed to that practice. Yet when the question was asked, “What shall we do?,” their reply was simply that the seekers were to “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

26 Nothing was said about their marriages, as far as the record states, and none were required to get another divorce before they could be baptized as some are demanding today. As evangelization of the empire continued over the next half century or more, the apostolic record never does include any account of such an idea being imposed on anyone in any way. If the apostles had understood Jesus to mean what later traditionalists say he meant, then action upon divorce cases would have had to be a daily occurrence, for divorces were as common then as they are now.

Sometimes brethren offer the case of Herod and Herodias of Mark 6 as an example of someone's eligibility for marriage being denied. But the case, as recorded in the text, does not fit that theory at all. Neither person was told that he or she was "*ineligible to have a marriage.*" Instead John told Herod that it was wrong to have this particular marriage. He said, "*It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.*" If you look to the law under which they lived you see why John said that. In Leviticus 20:21 a man was forbidden to marry his brother's wife while the brother lived. That verse says it is an unclean thing. This is not at all the same as saying that some person may not have any mate at all because of a previous divorce.

The scriptures do indeed give instances of certain specific marriages being disallowed. In Ezra 10, for example, marriages of Jewish men to non-Jewish (foreign to faith in Jehovah God) women were ordered broken up because God had forbidden that. But those men were not ordered to have no wife at all! Again, in 1 Corinthians 5:1 a man who "had his father's wife" was told that it had to stop. But neither he nor she was said to be "*ineligible to have a mate at all.*" Again there is a great difference between what the Bible says and what some men interpret it to mean.

God's word does indeed forbid certain specific kinds of relationships which might be called "marriage." In the first chapter of Romans homosexual relationships are said to be an abomination to God and are strongly condemned. So we say again, it is important to keep clearly in mind what the question at issue is. What we are contending for here is not that all kinds of marriages are right. That is not so. What we are contending for is that all people have a right to be in a marriage. The Bible does not approve such things

as incest, homosexuality, promiscuity, etc. But the Bible does approve marriage between a man and a woman and states expressly that the sexual relationship therein is not wrong (Hebrews 13:4).

Marriage for how many?

When we take the questions in dispute to apostolic writings for an answer we find a repudiation of the answers men have given. On the question of which persons may marry Paul wrote, “*to avoid fornication let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband*” (1 Corinthians 7:2). On the question of whether a man who has been divorced by his wife would sin by marrying, Paul wrote, “*Are you loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife. But if you marry you have not sinned*” (1 Corinthians 7:27,28).

In this text the word translated “loosed” is formed on the stem word “luo,” surely referring to divorce. The statement of Paul here is completely contradictory to the tenets of human tradition in such a case. But someone will ask, “*What about verses 10 and 11? Is that not an order to remain unmarried if one separates from a mate?*” No. She has the option of being reconciled to her husband. This order is not given to divorced people, here or elsewhere. The passage starts out, “*Unto the **married** I command...*” This is an order to people who are married. And the order is do not depart from your mate, but if you do, remain unmarried and be reconciled. This is what married people ought to do. But the problem comes about when men try to take this passage, written to the married, and apply it to the theories—if a man divorces her instead, no amount of repentance, reformation, application of the blood of Jesus, nor anything else can ever remove that sin from his record. It stays with him to the grave!

This is one of the most frightening aspects of the theories forbidding marriage. They rest on a concept which sets aside the atonement idea and substitutes restitution in its place. When you stop to realize that the entire ground of hope underlying the gospel message is the availability of the atoning blood, then you see that to cast this away is to throw out the bulk of the New Testament. Any doctrine of redemption by restitution instead of atonement is indeed a great evil. In some cases of sin restitution is the only right

28 thing to do. In other cases it is not even best for all who are involved. But in any case the blood of Jesus is the only thing in the universe that can remove sin.

Jesus said, “All manner of sins and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 12:31). Seeing sins as forgivable does not mean condoning them. It is still a fact that from the beginning God has never approved marriage breaking (Matthew 19:3-9). Neither has he approved any other sin. But He has arranged for all who are guilty of sins to have opportunity to leave the practice of sin and to be cleansed and given a new start — to find the “land of beginning again.” The tremendous price for this was paid in the death of God’s own son on the cross. It is the only way sin can be dealt with effectively. The sins are destroyed but the sinner is saved.

Regardless of the number of times, God’s word calls upon the person who has been guilty of marriage destruction to realize the wrongness of that act, and to repent by turning away from divorcing again. In obeying the gospel (or rededication if you’re a fallen Christian) the blood of Christ is applied and the sin no longer exists. If you were unfaithful to marriage vows, that is what you must repent of and resolve never to do again. But the practice of marriage itself is not sin. To repent of that is to turn against the basic way of God for men and women on earth and to reject the one and only arrangement in which sex is approved.

Men may ridicule and say, “You think all one must do is say ‘I am sorry’ and continue sinning.” But it is still a fact that faithfulness in marriage is the opposite of unfaithfulness in marriage. It does represent a complete turnaround, or repentance. God is not against marriage. He is against sundering marriage, or sinning against it in any way (Hebrews 13:4).

Let us strive on behalf of moral purity God’s way — one man and one woman committed to each other in a marriage until death, regardless of past conduct. Let’s avoid fornication God’s way — by letting every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband, including those who in the past have sinned against marriage. May God help us to put away sin from among us — His way! — **Olan Hicks**

then, by Robert Waters
*Rules to help understand
difficult Bible passages—
especially about divorce
and remarriage*

Is the Bible unintelligible when it comes to the subject of divorce and remarriage? Did God intend for people to have difficulty with this subject, or is it only difficult because of the error that has been taught and because of the influence of those who teach it? A possible reason that some people miss the true teaching of the Bible about remarriage is because of a failure to use good hermeneutics. Surely there is a simple explanation for Matthew 19:9 that contains the phrase “except it be for fornication” that is free of unacceptable consequences and that does not require one to ignore hermeneutical difficulties.

There undoubtedly is one such explanation; otherwise, the Bible is unintelligible and not inspired by God. To find what our loving God wants us to know, we cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper study of the context of key passages. Matthew 19:3–13 is one such passage.

Does it make sense to argue that a divorce frees one person in a marriage contract but not the other? Where is the sense in teaching that one is “bound” to a previous spouse but not still married to him/her? Does it make sense to insist that a faithful woman, legally divorced by her husband so he could marry another, must remain celibate? She may even be the innocent party and actually have had opportunity to divorce him first—and therefore, assure her “right” to marry according to tradition.

Do defenders of the traditional doctrine make sense when they, seeking to avoid the force of an argument, assert that their doctrine does not have Jesus contradicting Moses because Jesus’ teachings were not applicable until after the cross?

30 One must follow some simple rules when studying any Bible subject. Those who refuse to acknowledge these rules while continuing to teach and practice questionable and potentially harmful doctrines are simply being foolish, thoughtless, and imprudent, if not outright rebellious. Below are some rules that are applicable to the issue of divorce and remarriage by Christians:

1. Consider in any Bible passage who is being addressed and all surrounding circumstances such as the intentions of the questioner and the dispensation or law in effect at the time. The Pharisees were attempting to entrap Jesus by tempting him to take sides and to contradict the law of Moses regarding divorce (Deuteronomy. 24:1–4). They knew that Jesus, who lived under the Law of Moses, was obligated to respect and follow that law. Obviously, the Jews would have charged Jesus with sin had he contradicted Moses. It is interesting to note that the enemies of Jesus did not make such a charge, but that so-called “friends” are now saying he did contradict Moses.

2. Use common sense in studying the Bible just as you would in studying any book. Are teachers really using good common sense when they assert that one who has no marriage, having been legally divorced by his/her spouse, is still “bound” or still “married” to the spouse who divorced him/her? Indeed, because Jesus clearly addressed the Jews, they knew his words applied to them; and if Jesus did not mean what he said to be applicable at the time he said it, then he lied—making people feel guilty when they had not yet broken a law which was in effect.

3. Do not interpret one statement in a manner that contradicts other clear statements or principles in the Bible. The statement of Jesus recorded in Matthew 19:9 is interpreted to mean that a divorced person cannot marry another. This idea contradicts the Old Testament teaching that “it is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18) and New Testament teachings that a spouse is needed to avoid fornication: “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

4. Study the context of a statement and all of the related material in the rest of the Bible. A statement taken out of context is a pretext. If one’s theory is based upon a passage taken out of con-

text and is not in complete harmony with other scriptures on the matter, it must be rejected.

5. Obscure (difficult) passages may be understood in light of other passages on the same subject that are clear in their meaning. One must not draw a conclusion based solely on an obscure passage and then twist all the other passages on the same subject to harmonize with the preconceived conclusion.

6. A correct understanding is what the passage says, not what someone else says it says. Dictionaries, lexicons, and commentaries were written by men who were known to have been influenced by tradition. Such helps may be beneficial as we study but the Bible itself is the best commentary.

7. On important issues God will provide sufficient evidence for an honest person to have a confident and clear understanding. Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (Mark 7:7). There is nothing like having the truth and being free from the traditions and doctrines of men that Jesus says cause religion to be vain.

8. Do not seek to derive something from a passage that is not there, or is more than what the author intended. This rule is always important but is particularly important when studying divorce and remarriage. The three main passages that are used to support the position that denies people who have no marriage the right to marry are Matthew 19:9, 1 Corinthians 7:11, and Romans 7:1–3. None of these passages say what many, seeking to defend the traditional teaching, assert that they say. When other rules are applied, it becomes apparent that celibacy for the divorced is not being taught.

9. A correct understanding of the passage will violate no logical hermeneutical rules and will be in harmony with all truth. The correct understanding of a passage may contradict tradition, but it should not be our intention to harmonize a passage with the teachings of men. Rather, we must seek to learn what the inspired writer intended. One can be confident he is correct if his position is based upon diligent and honest study using good hermeneutics.

10. Have a love for truth and a determination to find it regardless of what the earthly consequences might be. The life of any disciple can be difficult when he/she bucks tradition. But only the

32 truth can make us free. God speaks to us through the Bible. We do well to listen to him and trust him for the outcome. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b)

The author offers a book which addresses this topic. He writes:

My new book, *Put Away But Not Divorced*, would make a great gift for someone you love who is hurting because of traditional teaching and practice on divorce and remarriage. *Put Away But Not Divorced* is a unique and compelling book on divorce and remarriage, by Robert Waters. Go to:

<http://www.put-away-but-not-divorced.com/>
to learn more about this book.

**Robert Waters, 26140 Hwy 23
Huntsville, Arkansas 72740
Retail Price: \$16.99**

RAY: I invite others to join me in speaking out for truth and for unity in Jesus. My doing so is as Mission Outreach Publications, with mailing address in 2012 as P O Box 265, Joplin MO 64802-0265. For a gift of \$10 I can mail you 5 copies of this booklet you can share with others.

As well as sharing publications with others, you can help by sharing in expenses of the mission. It is not at this time a non-profit corporation, so gifts are not tax deductible. But gifts will go toward publishing and promoting written material such as the booklet you have in your hands or are reading otherwise.

Gifts are needed also to enable the continuing e-mail and internet ministry of Ray Downen. I have worked long past retirement age, but am no longer employed, so I need support from friends now. Gift checks should be made to RAY DOWNEN and mailed to me (if handing to me is not easier) at P O Box 265, Joplin MO 64802-0265.