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A Personal Note

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, before you begin, I want you to know that I have not yet attained the high calling to which God has called me, to be in perfect obedience and faithfulness to Him. I struggle daily against the temptations of selfishness, pride, anger, self-pity and all the other sins of the flesh. When I speak of the evils of the age, I am often speaking to that which I have known personally. When I refer to the great need of repentance and personal Holiness before God, I include my own continuing need each and every day to do the same. When I speak about the Church, I do not mean any individual denomination, or even any particular theological construct, but the true, universal body of believers in the Great and Glorious God and Savior, Jesus Christ. I also know that He is able to restore the Church if we will but seek Him with all our hearts! "I pray He will use this humble work to bless you and help you to further understand the God with which we have to do." – Stephen Wilcox

Restoration of Christian Marriage

A Call for Reformation

(Revised August 2008)

By

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1.

My fellow Christians,

As we experience what it is like to live in the world at the beginning of the third millennium it's only right and proper that we should evaluate where we stand in the true faith handed down to us by the Church of Jesus Christ and the written Word of God. Indeed, we are strictly commanded to do such an evaluation by the Apostle Paul when he said:

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves, Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you - unless of course, you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5 NIV)

It is essential that we take the Apostle's command seriously and subject ourselves to God's plumb line, His revealed written Word, the Holy Bible. This work is an attempt to do just that in an area of Christian morality.

Knowledgeable reformation minded Christians are concerned about many aspects of the lowered standards and conduct displayed in much of the present day Church. Being prompted by the Holy Spirit, many have spoken out, putting forward suggested corrective remedial actions worthy of the most sincere consideration. Notwithstanding the many crises' facing the Church, this particular reformation plea is purposely focused on the marriage, divorce and remarriage issues, which are so central to Christian morality and holiness in this generation

2.

The Key to the Front Door of the Church

The primary building block of society is the biblical based male - female family unit. It is what separates us from a complete social and spiritual breakdown. Without it we are threatened with an unrestricted immoral free for all of hate, lust and selfishness not unlike that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Satan hates marriage and loves divorce. It allows him to curse the minds and hearts of all involved, turning what once was love into hate, bitterness and deceit.

3.

Death

Brothers and Sisters, when God designed the world, He knew what choices our race, and what we as individuals would make. He created mankind, as both male and female, making each sex different, but in complementary ways. Where one sex was weak He made the other strong. That is why "*opposites attract*" in courtship. However, because of our fallen natures, these same beneficial differences between a man and his wife will always become the basis for friction, disagreement and estrangement without the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

When mankind fell and inherited a sinful predisposition, the basis for a balanced, equal relationship between male and female fell with it. The resultant separation caused by sin broke not only the backbone of the intimate friendship between God and man, but also between a man and wife. The seeds of unrepentant sin and the full-grown death crop it produces are always at the center of every broken home.

Behind each divorce lie the broken laws and the rejected love of God. This is why there can be no solution to the present collapse of morality within the Church except by the pure application of the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing else will do!

4. Breath

When God, the Father revealed the Mystery of Salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord by his atoning death and resurrection, he provided the means of escape from the eternal consequences of our individual sin into a state of unending fellowship with him. Everything changed!

This miracle is attained freely by sincerely asking God to forgive us for our sins and turning our lives over to him. God then forgives us of our sins by laying the penalty for them on Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do beyond that point to earn or merit our salvation. He freely breathes new life into our dead souls thereby giving birth to the Spirit of God within us.

This supernatural act of spiritual creation reconstitutes us from being dead in our sins, translating us into eternal spirit beings capable of intimate relationship with him. With this “conversion” all things become new in Christ Jesus. Through His shed blood, He heals and restores the friendship with Him that we had lost because of our sin and rebellion. He changes our whole nature, deep inside, and leads us into a closer and closer walk with Him.

5. Life

A “relationship” with God that does not have Jesus Christ at its center, leading into Holy and Spirit filled living, is not a real saving relationship at all. A man or woman who has had a soul saving encounter with Jesus Christ will joyfully wish to follow and obey Him. If this is not the case, then they have attained a mere counterfeit faith, a useless forgery. For as He said:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10: 27 – 30 NIV)

Before the Father sent us his Holy Spirit, we were unable to live for Him as we should, for sin had an irresistible hold on us. But Jesus Christ changed the rules and the power supply with His death and resurrection. We no longer have the excuse or a reason to continue to sin against God and each other. Each of us has all the power in the universe available for us to appropriate His power into our lives so we may obey him.

6.

A Need for True Reformation

Today, in almost all forms of Christian persuasion, the validity of the Word of God, the unique leadership of the first apostles, and even the authority of Jesus Christ are being questioned and redefined along liberal lines. With very few denominational exceptions, historical Christian beliefs regarding entertainment, sexual sin, and separation from the world are no longer commonly taught, accepted or practiced among Christians.

Consequently, an epidemic of immorality is sweeping away a large part of the Church. The resultant corruptions of its teachings are compromising the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is being taught and modeled to the nations. Much of the Church is falling away from many of the core Biblical doctrines and beliefs as the memory of past revivals and holiness reformations slip further into the distant past. The author of Judges described such a time this way:

"In those days Israel had no King, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." (Judges 21:25 NLT)

7.

Leading the World in Immorality

The low moral and ethical standards of the Church, as defined by the only measurable benchmark, the divorce rate, exceed that of much of the unbelieving pagan world. According to one of the latest divorce statistical studies (d), there is a significantly higher divorce rate amongst those identifying themselves as "born again" Christians, than the rest of society as a whole, even amongst those claiming to be atheists and agnostics. Another survey has the divorce rate in the whole Church identical to that of the world. Evangelical Churches, proud of their "Bible Believing" theology most often take the lead in the divorce increase (d).

According to the latest statistics, in the "Bible belt" of America, where the greatest concentration of evangelical Christians practice their faith, the divorce rate is a staggering 50% higher than the nation as a whole. In addition, a recent study determined that ordained ministers themselves now have the second highest divorce rate of all the recognized professions in North America.

Such statistics come as no surprise to those who have been scientifically tracking the trends. For a number of years the levels of

“Christian” ethical behavior in areas involving honesty, integrity and sanctity of life have matched or led the freefall of those practiced in society as a whole. Notwithstanding expectations to the contrary, there is little real difference in the lifestyle choices that these “Christians” make on a daily basis, than those who openly follow their own fallen natures without restraint.

If these polling measurements reflect anything even close to reality, it goes without saying that both the majority of those claiming new life in Christ, and those that do not, share common moral principles and levels of Godliness, contrary to God’s Word.

When we consider that public morality itself is at its lowest point in modern history, is it really unjust that social popular opinion has judged our Savior, the Church and Christians so severely as of late? For the last few decades we have been increasingly ridiculed by many outside of the Church as being both dishonest and hypocritical. Now, widespread immorality and marital unfaithfulness are being rightfully added to the charges as well. This will not be the end of it either. Sin breeds sin. The worst is yet to come.

These negative perceptions are not illusions created by those who hate God and the Church, but rather the harsh truth of those who must depend on us to lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, or be forever lost in eternal punishment. Jesus Christ provided for, we were commissioned with, and they expect and deserve much better than we are delivering.

8. Missing the Mark

The Church has lost the respect of the society it has been commissioned to transform, along with the power and authority of the Living God needed to accomplish such a task. The failure is not found in the Gospel of Christ, but in the Church’s refusal to live according to the Divine message it was given to model and teach.

Most of us do not need to have social scientists telling us what we ourselves have seen, felt and experienced in our own families and local Church bodies. The evidence of a great falling away from God by the Church as we have known it is everywhere. Something is wrong, terribly and overwhelmingly wrong! I suggest we now look back behind us to a period at the beginning of the Christian Church, when Christians were still swimming in the living water, long before the Church became corrupted and confused.

9. **The Authoritative Teachings of the Early Church on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

The early Fathers of our faith were much more personally familiar with the culture and context of New Testament times than we are today. I do not, however, hold to the belief that the authority of the Church Fathers can be equal to that held by the Apostles who were personally appointed and taught by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In my view, their teachings do not add to, take away, or supplement the inspired Word of God contained in the Holy Bible. They claimed the same limitations for the authority of their teachings.

10 **Ignatius**

In 110 A.D, while on his way in chains to Rome to be put to death by wild animals in the coliseum for his faith, Ignatius, the great leader of the Syrian Church, wrote an epistle to the Ephesians. He claimed certain limitations to his own personal authority.

Even though he was revered as a great Church leader, he was careful not to infer special “apostolic status” either to himself or to his writings as divinely inspired Scripture. He positions himself, the Christians in Ephesus, as well as the other Bishops who served throughout the known world, as equally running together in accordance of the will of God. It was not until centuries later, after much of the Church evolved into an early form of Roman Catholicism, that Apostolic authority began to be claimed.

If, as some maintain, the Church was intended by God to have leaders operating in the office of “Apostle” beyond the lifetimes of the original disciples and Paul, it seems that the early Church knew nothing about it. In fact, as shown here, quite the opposite was the case:

Ignatius wrote:

“I do not issue orders to you, as if I were some great person. For though I am bound for the name of Christ, I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For now I begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me. For it was needful for me to have been stirred up by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and long-suffering.”

“But inasmuch as love suffers me not to be silent in regard to you, I have therefore taken upon me first to exhort you that you would all run together in accordance with the will of God. For even Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the manifested will of the Father; as also bishops, settled everywhere to the utmost bounds of the earth, are so by the will of Jesus Christ.” (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians) (a)

Their doctrinal position statements were based on the same Biblical sources we use today, as well as additional direct interpretations and clarifications passed on to them by the Apostles and their immediate successors. Even though not first hand, they give an accurate portrayal of what Jesus taught, early Christians practiced, and what the Apostles believed and enforced throughout the Body of Christ.

Those Church Fathers who were in positions of responsible authority, called and appointed by God to serve His Church, were required as shepherds of His sheep, to walk as He walked, and to talk as He talked. Their words are good counsel, and should be weighted most heavily in today’s court of Christian opinion, but in no wise should their teachings be considered infallible or without possible error. They were after all, as we are, privileged to be standard bearers and light holders for the God of the Universe in their generations, but who were, like us, faulty sinners saved by Grace.

However, those first Christians were close to ground zero, at the very epicenter of the Christian earthquake that shook the world. This proximity in time and place to the ministry of Jesus Christ and His personally appointed Apostles gave them a much clearer vantage point than we ourselves enjoy. We can only look back through their writings, to evaluate their legacy by the lives they lived, and the fruit of their labors.

These men of God had the initial responsibility to accurately define and defend what the teachings and redemption Gospel of Jesus Christ meant, not only to the millions of lost in their world, but also to the billions in ours. They had their theology rooted in Christ, their lives poured out in their present, and their minds looking to the future.

11. Complete Agreement

Of all the early recognized Church Fathers who ever wrote, all who were written about, concerning every discussion and every debate, in thousands of surviving documents, over hundreds of years, there is not a single dissenting authoritative voice on the essential core

doctrines of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Each taught the same doctrine, each held the same opinion and each enforced the same morals standards you read here:

12.
Hermes
A.D. 90

Hermes was sold into slavery and sent to Rome as a boy. He was later set free by his owner, a woman called Rhoda. He became known as one of the authoritative Fathers of the Church and an influential Christian writer, noted for his detailed description of early Christianity. His surviving book, "The Shepherd", was considered to be an inspired book of the Holy Bible until the fourth century A.D.

To quote the translators: "The Shepherd of Hermas is in form, an apocalypse. It consists of a series of revelation made to Hermas by the church, who appears in the form of a woman, by the shepherd, the angel of repentance, and by the great angel who is in charge of Christians. Each revelation is accompanied by an explanation, and from these it can be seen though the form of the book is apocalyptic and visionary, its object is practical and ethical."

Hermas wrote:

"I charge you," said he, "to guard your chastity, and let no thought enter your heart of another man's wife, or of fornication, or of similar iniquities; for by doing this you commit a great sin. But if you always remember your own wife, you will never sin. For if this thought enter your heart, then you will sin; and if, in like manner, you think other wicked thoughts, you commit sin. For this thought is great sin in a servant of God. But if any one commit this wicked deed, he works death for himself.

Attend, therefore, and refrain from this thought; for where purity dwells, there iniquity ought not to enter the heart of a righteous man." I said to him, "Sir, permit me to ask you a few questions." "Say on," said he. And I said to him, "Sir, if any one has a wife who trusts in the Lord, and if he detect her in adultery, does the man sin if he continue to live with her?"

And he said to me, "As long as he remains ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no transgression in living with her. But if the husband know that his wife has gone astray, and if the woman does not repent, but persists in her fornication, and yet the husband continues to live with her, he also is guilty of her crime, and a sharer

in her adultery." And I said to him, "What then, sir, is the husband to do, if his wife continue in her vicious practices?" And he said, "The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he put his wife away and marry another, he also commits adultery."

And I said to him, "What if the woman put away should repent, and wish to return to her husband: shall she not be taken back by her husband?" And he said to me, "Assuredly. If the husband do not take her back, he sins, and brings a great sin upon himself; for he ought to take back the sinner who has repented...In this matter man and woman are to be treated exactly in the same way. –The Shepherd 4:1-10

(a)

Hermas taught:

1. If a wife persists in adulterous behavior the “innocent party” may, and should, divorce in order to separate away from the sins of the offender
2. If a husband divorces his wife for such a reason he must remain single and not remarry.
3. If a wife repents of her offence the husband must forgive her and receive her back as wife.
4. If the husband does not forgive his repentant wife he brings a great sin upon himself.
5. Men and woman are to act and be regarded exactly the same in this matter.

13.
Justin Martyr
A.D. 151

Justin Martyr was one of the great, early theologians and apologists for the Church. He had the distinction of presenting a defining explanation and defense of Christianity to Caesar and the Imperial Roman Senate.

His “Apology for the Christians”, written to refute charges of sedition to the Roman state, is a magnificent legal testimony of the power of early Christians to live Holy and pleasing lives in an evil and corrupted society. Justin was beheaded for refusing to sacrifice to pagan Gods.

Justin Martyr wrote:

“In regards to chastity, Jesus has this to say: ‘If anyone look at lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his

heart.’ And, ‘Whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery.’ “

“According to our teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it is in accord with human law, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desires at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts.” (First Apology 15) (a)

Justin Martyr taught:

1. **To indulge in lust is to be guilty of adultery of the heart.**
2. **Whoever marries a divorced person commits adultery.**
3. **Whoever contracts a second marriage is sinning against God. (while a former spouse lives)**
4. **God does not, and the Church must not, take into account human law when it is in violation of God’s law.**
5. **God judges motives and intentions, private thought life and actions. All is known and exposed to the God with which we have to do.**

14. Clement of Alexandria A.D.208

Titus Flavius Clemens, known as Clement of Alexandria, was a Greek theologian who served as head of the famous Catechetical School in Alexandria. His writings were designed to guide mature Christians to a more perfect knowledge of God and a pure moral character. His defense of the faith exhorted morals, kindness and patience.

He taught that the thoughts and will of God in the Scriptures exhorts, educates and perfects the true Christian. Many scholars believe he founded the great Alexandrian School of Theology. He is listed as a martyr for his faith.

Clement of Alexandria wrote:

That scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union, is expressly contained in the law: “You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of adultery.” And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive.

“Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery,” it says; for “if anyone divorce his wife, he debauches her;” that is, he compels her to commit adultery.

And not only does he that divorces her become the cause of this, but also he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning; for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband.”(Miscellanies 2:23:145:3) (a)

Clement of Alexandria taught:

- 1. The Scriptures encourage Christians to enter a marriage relationship.**
- 2. The marriage union covenant is permanent and does not allow anyone to be released from the union.**
- 3. The only legitimate reason for divorce is adultery, otherwise separation is prohibited. A remarriage while a former spouse lives is living in the state of adultery, therefore expressly forbidden in Scripture.**
- 4. A man who divorces his wife violates and corrupts her, for if she remarries, for any reason except for the death of her husband, she becomes an adulteress.**
- 5. The one who marries a divorced spouse sins not only by committing adultery with another’s spouse but also sins against God by acting as an impediment to reconciliation of the original marriage.**
- 6. If the divorced spouse had remained single she would have, if possible returned the first union.**

15.
Origen
A.D. 248

Origen is known as the most accomplished and significant theologian of the early Church. As a student and exegete of the Old and New Testaments, he influenced the critical thinking of the Church in his day to such an extent that his works still have major impact on doctrine and practice. He was the first teacher known to use the “allegorical” method of Scriptural interpretation.

It is estimated that he wrote some 5,000 thesis, tracts, epistles and books in his lifetime of service. Much of his work concentrated on refuting dangerous error and heresy. Origen was imprisoned during the reign of Emperor Decius. He was tortured to such an extent that he died from his ordeal after being released.

Origen wrote:

For confessedly he who puts away his wife when she is not a fornicator, makes her an adulteress, so far as it lies with him, for if, "when the husband is living she shall be called an adulteress if she be joined to another man;" and when by putting her away, he gives to her the excuse of a second marriage, very plainly in this way he makes her an adulteress...

Just as a woman is an adulteress, even though she seems to be married to a man, while a former husband yet lives, so also the man who seems to marry who has been divorced does not marry her, but, according to the declaration of our Savior, he commits adultery with her. (Commentaries on Matthew 14) (a)

Origen taught:

1. A man that divorces his wife who is not guilty of fornication causes her to become an adulteress if she remarries, and the man that marries her is an adulterer.
2. The marriage covenant between a man and a woman is permanent, as long as both husband and wife are alive.
3. No matter what the legal circumstances may appear to be to the contrary, a remarriage relationship when either or both parties are divorced, while a former partner lives, is adultery.
4. The intimate relations between the man and the woman remarried while former spouses still live are adulterous, and considered sin.
5. A remarriage is not an actual marriage whatsoever, but disguised adultery.

16.
Basil the Great
A.D. 375

Basil was born in Caesarea and educated in Athens. He is considered one of the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church. His writings include "On the Holy Spirit" and "Moralia." He was asked by the Church to help defend against the Arian heretical doctrines and subsequently became Bishop of Caesarea in 370.

Basil became Basil the Great because of his outstanding personal integrity and holiness as well as his brilliance as a theologian and defender of the faith.

Basil the Great wrote:

The man who has deserted his wife and goes to another is himself an adulterer because he makes her commit adultery; and the woman who live with him is an adulteress, because she has caused another woman's husband to come over to her...The woman who lives with an adulterer is an adulteress the whole time.

The woman who has been abandoned by her husband, ought, in my judgment, to remain as she is. The Lord said, "If any one leave his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, he causes her to commit adultery;" thus, by calling her adulteress, He excludes her from intercourse with another man. For how can the man being guilty, as having caused adultery, and the woman, go without blame, when she is called an adulteress by the Lord for having intercourse with another man?

A man who marries another man's wife who has been taken away from him will be charged with adultery... - Amphilochius 199 (a)

Basil Taught:

- 1. A man that deserts his wife and she remarries another makes his wife commit adultery.**
- 2. The woman who a divorced man marries is guilty of adultery.**
- 3. The second woman is guilty of taking another woman's husband.**
- 4. An adulterous relationship is continuous adultery, not a onetime sin.**
- 5. An abandoned wife is to remain as she is and not remarry.**
- 6. an abandoned woman that takes another man and has sexual intercourse with him is committing adultery.**
- 7. If a man is guilty of adultery, so is a woman.**
- 8. It is a serious offence for a woman to take another woman's husband and will be charged with adultery.**
- 9. It is a serious offence for a man to take another man's wife and will be charged with adultery.**

17.

Ambrose of Milan

A.D. 387

Ambrose is known as one of the four original Doctors of the Church. Born in Germany and educated in Rome, he was asked to be Bishop of Milan because of his extraordinary kindness and wisdom, earning him the love and esteem of his people. History records that he

publicly confronted rebuked and led to repentance Caesar Theodosius over the slaughtering of thousands of Thessalonians.

He wrote major treatises on Christian morality and personal Holiness, warning against adopting the world's standards. He was by all accounts a most extraordinary man, equal to his times. He was influential in bringing Augustine into a saving personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and receiving him into the Body of Christ.

Ambrose of Milan wrote:

But what shall I say about chastity, when only one and no second union is allowed? As regards marriage, the law is, not to marry again, nor to seek union with another wife. It seems strange to many why impediment should be caused by a second marriage entered on before baptism, so as to prevent election to the clerical office, and to the reception of the gift of ordination; seeing that even crimes are not wont to stand in the way, if they have been put away in the sacrament of baptism.

But we must learn, that in baptism sin can be forgiven, but law cannot be abolished. In the case of marriage there is no sin, but there is a law. Whatever sin there is can be put away, whatever law there is cannot be laid aside in marriage.- On the duties of Clergy:1:257 (a)

And what else did John have in mind but what is virtuous, so that he could not endure a wicked union even in the king's case, saying: "It is not lawful for thee to have her to wife."[118](#) He could have been silent, had he not thought it unseemly for himself not to speak the truth for fear of death, or to make the prophetic office yield to the king, or to indulge in flattery. He knew well that he would die as he was against the king, but he preferred virtue to safety. Yet what is more expedient than the suffering which brought glory to the saint. - On the duties of Clergy, 3:89 (a)

No one is permitted to know a woman other than his wife. The marital right is given you for this reason: lest you fall in a snare and sin with a strange woman. "If you are bound to a wife do not seek a divorce," for you are not permitted, while your wife lives to marry another." – Abraham 1:57:59 (a)

You dismiss your wife, therefore, as if by right and without being charged with wrongdoing; and you suppose it is proper for you to do so because no human law forbids it; but divine law forbids it. Anyone who obeys men should stand in awe of God. Hear the Word of the Lord, which even they who propose our laws must obey:

“What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” –
Commentary on Luke, Sec. 8:5 (a)

Ambrose of Milan taught:

1. **Sex is a marital right that is limited to one’s own husband or wife. Legitimate sexual relations with one’s spouse protects from sexual sin.**
2. **Extramarital sex is sin and a snare that will catch and kill.**
3. **It is forbidden by God for a spouse to divorce and to remarry another.**
4. **Ambrose interprets Paul’s writings in Corinthians to mean that it is forbidden for a man or woman to remarry another while a former or earlier spouse lives.**
5. **It is a wrong understanding to believe that it is simply one’s right to divorce a spouse. Even though human law may permit such a thing, God strictly forbids it.**
6. **Anyone who follows human customs and laws regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, instead of Divine laws should stand in fearful awe of God.**
7. **All lawmakers, in and out of the Church are warned, to their peril, to hear and obey the Word of the Lord.**
8. **Jesus’ command is reaffirmed: “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”**
9. **Conversion to Christianity forgives past sin but does not nullify or set aside God’s laws.**

18.

Jerome

A.D. 396

Jerome was another great Father and Doctor of the early Church whose most important work was the translation of the Bible into Latin (The Vulgate). He wrote works defending the Church from Jovinian, Vigilantius and Pelagianism heretics that were threatening the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jerome wrote:

In explaining the testimony of the apostle, "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise, also, the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife," we have subjoined the following: "The entire question relates to those who are living in wedlock, whether it is lawful for them to put away their wives, a thing which the Lord also has forbidden in the Gospel.

Following the decision of the Lord the apostle teaches that a wife must not be put away saving for fornication, and that, if she has been put away, she cannot during the lifetime of her husband marry another man, or, at any rate, that she ought, if possible, to be reconciled to her husband. In another verse he speaks to the same effect: `The wife is bound ...as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband; she is at liberty to be married to, whom she will; only in the Lord.

I find joined to your letter of inquiries a short paper containing the following words: "ask him,(that is me,) whether a woman who has left her husband on the ground that he is an adulterer and sodomite and has found herself compelled to take another may in the lifetime of him whom she first left be in communion with the church without doing penance for her fault." As I read the case put I recall the verse "they make excuses for their sins."

We are all indulgent to our own faults; and what our own will leads us to do we attribute to a necessity of nature. It is as though a young man were to say, "I am over-borne by my body, the glow of nature kindles my passions, the structure of my frame and its reproductive organs call for sexual intercourse." Or again a murderer might say, "I was in want, I stood in need of food, I had nothing to cover me. If I shed the blood of another, it was to save myself from dying of cold and hunger."

Tell the sister, therefore, who thus enquires of me concerning her condition, not my sentence but that of the apostle. "Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband, so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress." And in another place: "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."

The apostle has thus cut away every plea and has clearly declared that, if a woman marries again while her husband is living, she is an adulteress. You must not speak to me of the violence of a ravisher, a mother's pleading, a father's bidding, the influence of relatives, the insolence and the intrigues of servants, household losses. A husband may be an adulterer or a sodomite, he may be stained with every crime and may have been left by his wife because of his sins; yet he is still her husband and, so long as he lives, she may not marry another.

The apostle does not promulgate this decree on his own authority but on that of Christ who speaks in him. For he has followed the words of Christ in the gospel: "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." Mark what he says: "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." Whether she has put away her husband or her husband her, the man who marries her is still an adulterer.

I have not been able quite to determine what it is that she means by the words "has found herself compelled" to marry again. What is this compulsion of which she speaks? Was she overborne by a crowd and ravished against her will? If so, why has she not, thus victimized, subsequently put away her ravisher? Let her read the books of Moses and she will find that if violence is offered to a betrothed virgin in a city and she does not cry out, she is punished as an adulteress: but if she is forced in the field, she is innocent of sin and her ravisher alone is amenable to the laws.

Therefore if your sister, who, as she says, has been forced into a second union, wishes to receive the body of Christ and not to be accounted an adulteress, let her do penance; so far at least as from the time she begins to repent to have no farther intercourse with that second husband who ought to be called not a husband but an adulterer. If this seems hard to her and if she cannot leave one whom she has once loved and will not prefer the Lord to sensual pleasure, let her hear the declaration of the apostle: "ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils," and in another place: "what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" –Letters 55, 58 (a)

Jerome taught:

- 1. The Lord has forbidden divorce and remarriage in the gospel.**
- 2. Christians must stop making excuses for and trying to find justification for divorce and remarriage. None of it stands before God, and must not be considered at all when applying the Word of God in the Church or to our individual lives.**
- 3. A marriage is for life, and no matter what a spouse turns out to be, or how they may act, or the sins they commit, the covenant remains fully in effect. God does not divide the one flesh relationship.**
- 4. A spouse that is separated or divorced for any reason, no matter how provoked, or how circumstances came to be as they are, is still bound to the marriage covenant, and cannot be remarried to another, as long as both live.**

19.
Augustine
A.D. 419

Augustine is widely regarded to be the single greatest Church leader and theologian between the time of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and the reformation period, and perhaps beyond. His personal testimony of seeking and finding God after an early life of sin is as fresh and new today, and as transparently Spirit filled as it was then.

His place in the Church, among his peers, can be compared to what Paul's was among the Apostles. He rigorously and effectively defended the faith from enemies on all sides. His writings are credited with influencing to an enormous extent the thinking of the great leaders of the reformation.

Augustine wrote:

This we now say, that, according to this condition of being born and dying, which we know, and in which we have been created, the marriage of male and female is some good, the compact whereof divine Scripture so commends, as that neither is it allowed one put away by her husband to marry, so long as her husband lives; nor is it allowed one put away by his wife to marry another, unless she who have separated from him be dead.

Our Lord, therefore, in order to confirm that principle, that a wife should not lightly be put away, made the single exception of fornication; but enjoins that all other annoyances, if any such should happen to spring up, be borne with fortitude for the sake of conjugal fidelity and for the sake of chastity; and he also calls that man an adulterer who should marry her that has been divorced by her husband. And the Apostle Paul shows the limit of this state of affairs, for he says it is to be observed as long as her husband liveth; but on the husband's death he gives permission to marry.

For he himself also held by this rule, and therein brings forward not his own advice, as in the case of some of his admonitions, but a command by the Lord when he says: "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." I believe that, according to a similar rule, if he shall put her away, he is to remain unmarried, or be reconciled to his wife.
-Commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels (a)

For whosoever putteth away his wife except for the cause of fornication, maketh her to commit adultery. To such a degree is that marriage compact entered upon be a holy Sacrament, that it is not made void even by separation itself, since so long as her husband lives, even by whom she hath been left, she commits adultery in the case where she marries another, and he who hath left her is the cause of this evil. But I marvel, if, if it be allowed to put away a wife who is an adulteress, so it be allowed, having put her away, to marry another.

For holy Scripture makes a hard knot in this matter in that the apostle says, that, by commandment of the Lord, the wife ought not to depart from her husband, but, in case she shall have departed to remain unmarried, or to be reconciled to her husband...I can not see how the man can have permission to marry another, in the case where he left an adulteress, when a woman can not be married to another when she left an adulterer.

Seeing that the compact of marriage is not done away with by an intervening divorce, so that they continue as wedded persons one to another, even after separation, and commit adultery with those with whom they be joined, even after their own divorce, either the woman with the man, or the man with a woman.

Neither can it rightly be held that a husband who dismisses his wife because of fornication and marries another does not commit adultery. For there is also adultery on the part of those who, after the repudiation of their former wives because of fornication, marry others...

No one is so unreasonable to say that a man who marries a woman whose husband has dismissed her because of fornication is not an adulterer, while maintaining that a man who marries a woman dismissed without the ground of fornication is an adulterer. Both of these men are guilty of adultery. -Adulterous Marriages 1:9:9 (a)

A spouse, therefore, is lawfully dismissed for cause of adultery, but the laws of chastity remains. That is why a man is guilty of adultery if he marries a woman who has been dismissed even for this very reason of adultery. -ibid., 2:4:4 (a)

A woman begins to be the wife of no later husband unless she has ceased to be the wife of a former one. She will cease to be the wife of a former one, however, if that husband should die, not if he commit adultery. -ibid., 2:4:3 (a)

Therefore to serve two or more (men), so to pass over from a living husband into marriage with another, was neither lawful then (in the Old Testament), nor is it lawful now, nor will it ever be lawful. To apostatize from the One God, and to go into adulteress superstitions of another, is ever an evil. -On the Holy Spirit; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises. (a)

Augustine taught:

1. It cannot be rightly held by those wishing to believe so that anyone who divorces their spouse for adultery and then marries another is in the will of God and avoids the sin of adultery.
2. It is adultery to marry another if someone is divorced and then chooses a new husband or wife.
3. Whether or not a spouse commits adultery or fornication does not matter insofar as remarriage is concerned. Whoever remarries while a divorced spouse lives is in the state and sin of adultery.
4. When a spouse remarries according to the law of the land, after a divorce, they are still married to the former spouse as long as that spouse lives. Therefore the sexual and intimate relationship they have with a new spouse is simply engaging in a forbidden relationship by sinning with a person they are not married to in the eyes of God and the Church. Chastity refers to sexual abstinence. To have sexual relations with a remarried spouse is to be living in sin, in direct disobedience to God's Word.
5. A spouse can if they must, divorce their husband or wife who is guilty of adultery, but must not have a relationship with another as long as the original partner lives, for they are still in a binding life long covenant with them.
6. It is forbidden for a man or woman, even if they themselves were never previously married, to marry or have sexual relations with a divorced person whose spouse is still alive. They would be guilty of having sexual relations with another person's spouse, which is the very definition of the sin of adultery.
7. It never has been lawful, it is not now lawful, and it never will be lawful to divorce and remarry. To say and do otherwise is to adopt the adulterous superstitions of a different God than the one to which we have to do.

20.
Summary of
Early Church Doctrine on Marriage, Divorce and
Remarriage

90 A.D. – 419 A.D.

1. If a spouse persists in adulterous behavior and there is no other alternative, the marriage relationship can be terminated by the innocent party. **(Hermes, Clement, Jerome, Augustine)**
2. Spouses that are divorced for any reason must remain celibate and single as long as both spouses live. Remarriage is expressly prohibited. **(Hermes, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)**
3. To indulge in lust with the mind is to be guilty of adultery of the heart. **(Justin Martyr)**
4. Whoever marries a divorced person commits adultery. **(Hermes, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)**
5. Whoever contracts a second marriage, whether a Christian or not, while a former spouse lives is sinning against God. **(Justin Martyr, Ambrose)**
6. God does not, and the Church must not, take into account human law when it is in violation of God's law. **(Justin Martyr, Origen, Ambrose)**
7. God judges motives and intentions, private thought life and actions. **(Justin Martyr)**
8. The marriage covenant between a man and a woman is permanent, as long as both husband and wife are alive. **(Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)**
9. It is a serious offence against God to take another person's spouse. **(Basil)**
10. The Church must charge all persons who are in possession of another living person's former husband or wife with adultery. **(Basil)**

11. Sexual relations are a marital right that is limited to one's own husband or wife. (Hermes, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)

12. Sexual relations with one's legitimate spouse protects from sexual sin. (Ambrose)

13. Marriage and sexual relations with a remarried spouse while a former spouse lives is the sin of adultery. (Hermes, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)

14. It is a serious mistake to believe that it is simply one's right to divorce a spouse and take another. Even though human law may permit such a thing, God strictly forbids it, and cannot, and will not honor it. (Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)

15. Anyone who follows human customs and laws regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, instead of God's Divine instructions should stand in fearful awe of God Himself. (Clement, Ambrose)

16. All lawmakers, in and out of the Church are warned, to their peril, to hear and obey the Word of the Lord in regard to His commands on marriage and divorce. (Ambrose)

17. Christians are to stop making excuses and trying to find justification for divorce and remarriage. There are no valid reasons acceptable to God. (Jerome, Augustine)

18. A marriage is for life. No matter what a spouse turns out to be, or how they may act, what they do or don't do, or the sins they commit, the covenant remains fully in effect. A remarriage while a former spouse lives is not marriage at all, but sinful adultery. God does not divide the one flesh relationship except by physical death. (Hermes, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine)

19. Marriage is a lifelong covenant that will never be invalidated by God while both parties live. (Hermes, Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Augustine)

20. It never has been lawful, it is not now lawful, and it never will be lawful to divorce and remarry. To say and do otherwise is to worship and adopt the adulterous superstitions of a different God than the one to which we have to do. (Augustine)

21. **How Firm a Foundation**

The understanding of our Christian forefathers is substantially different from that of the present generation of Church leadership, especially in matters concerning the necessity of Christians to maintain strict separation from worldly corruption.

These doctrines, taught by the early, authoritative leaders of Christianity are in serious disagreement with those being commonly taught and modeled to Christians today. Forgotten are the millions of Christians, whom for over hundreds of years, lived and died by these very same laws of Christian conduct. Many of them were martyred for their faith, sealing in blood their obedience to the Word of God.

The Gospel being taught today in many “Bible believing” Churches, insofar as the moral standards required by Christianity are concerned, is diametrically opposed to that taught by Jesus Christ and His early Church. I believe that the modern Church is presenting a different, powerless version of a Christianity that denies the essential Truth of God, that does not recognize the complete transforming power of the Holy Spirit to regenerate degenerate man.

22. **Broken Walls**

In this generation most denominations we recognize as evangelical, along with more traditional Churches, have lowered the same moral standards that were universally held by the Christian Church for all of its nearly 2,000 year history. Until recently it was considered "Anathema" for anyone professing to be any type of Christian to divorce and remarry.

In a recent survey of Pastors and evangelical Church leaders only 4% (e) believed that remarriage is a sin that the Church should refuse to either participate in, or to recognize. A full 96% (e) believed that remarriage while a spouse lives could be acceptable under at least certain conditions.

Many of these believe that the “understanding” of the Church should be broadened to allow more acceptances of those living in such states of sin. Acceptance to them means full fellowship, with no real distinction being made between those that are rightfully married and those that are not. A common sentiment seems to be “Since we are all sinners anyway, why should they be singled out and made to feel guilty or condemned for their actions?”

No longer part of the debate is the notion that such relationships, made contrary to New Testament stipulations, that are contrary to the will of God, be forsaken. To their credit, some at least give a vague recognition that God is “concerned” and hope against hope that once the divorced and remarried, while still practicing their sin, are accepted and blended into the body, a new line can someday be drawn in the sand that will be respected in the generations to come. Some don’t care very much one way or the other.

23. **A fish out of Water**

Many have conceded defeat, allowing the enemy to occupy the battleground by believing the falsehood that in any case, it is futile to try to separate the sin from the sinner. Their lack of faith dictates that any further attempt at maintaining Biblically required holiness standards, in the face of such enormous pressure will fail, causing the Church to fold, rendering the whole point redundant anyway.

As the Church begins to flounder like the fish out of water it is, thinly disguised polygamy becomes sanctified. Homosexuals are next in line to have their marriages sanctioned by virtual of their same need for Christian community. “Why not?” it will be said, “what’s the difference anyway? The New Testament does not make any real distinction between practicing adulterers and practicing homosexuals anyway.” -So the doors are thrown wide open, and in marches the conquering forces of darkness.

24. **Ignatius**

Ignatius addressed these same types of compliance and obedience issues to the early Church in his “Epistle to the Ephesians.” His words echo the love and concern Ignatius modeled after the great Apostle John. These are stern warnings against not living an obedient Holy life and the necessity of being ever so careful not to fall into error. By the way he identifies our condition, and delivers his clear warning, you might think he was writing with our generation in mind:

Ignatius taught:

“None of these things are hid from you, if ye perfectly possess that faith and love towards Christ Jesus which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end is love. Now these

two, being inseparably connected together, are of God, while all other things that are requisite for a holy life follow after them.”

“No man truly making a profession of faith sins, or does he that possesses love hates any one. The tree is made manifest by its fruit; so those that profess themselves to be Christians shall be recognized by their conduct. For there is not now a demand for mere profession, but that a man be found continuing in the power of faith to the end...”

“...Do not err, my brethren. Those that corrupt families shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If, then, those who do this as respects the flesh have suffered death, how much more shall this be the case with any one who corrupts by wicked doctrine the faith of God, for which Jesus Christ was crucified!”

“Such a one becoming defiled in this way shall go away into everlasting fire, and so shall every one that hearkens unto him.”
(Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians) (a)

Contrary to all written instructions, there is now a new form of “religion”, one that has denied the power of the Cross of Christ. The Apostles of Jesus Christ and the early Christians would not be confused however by today’s babel of voices proclaiming various mutations of truth, for this new Gospel is not new at all, but simply the latest version of an old lie: “God is not God, His light is dark, His will is weak, and His Word can not be trusted!” It seems that most now believe, as an article of faith, that Jesus died to redeem their sin, instead of having died to redeem them from their sin. This subtle twist of Satan makes all the difference in the world.

25.

The Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World

The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetius

130 A.D.

Mathetes, a Christian whose identity has been lost in time wrote a letter to an unknown man named Diognetius. From the opening salutation we can derive that Diognetius is a seeker after Jesus Christ and truth, or perhaps a new believer. Mathetes, wrote him in order to explain the fundamental beliefs of Christianity and what it means to live for Jesus at that time, in their world.

His brief but eloquent portrayal of the Christian community shining a light on their dark world is both heart warming and sorrowful. But that we would be so filled with the faith and holiness of our forefathers in Christ! Here is his description of the true, spotless Body of Christ Jesus.

Mathetes wrote:

“For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.”

“The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines.”

“But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.”

“They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.”

“They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.”

“They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life.”

“They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers.”

“When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.”

“To sum it up all in one phrase- “what the soul is in the body, therefore are Christians in the world”. The soul is dispersed through

all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world.”

“The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world...God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake.”
(Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetius) (a)

26.

The First Protestant Reformation

The first major seeds of doctrinal corruption in regard to marriage, divorce and remarriage were planted during the period of the great protestant reformation. Nearly all historical doctrines held and practiced by the then current Roman Catholic Church were viewed, rightly or wrongly, with equal suspicion and disdain by protestant reformers.

Great and long lasting good has resulted from God's people of that time being obedient in evaluating the Church's faithfulness in the light of Biblical revelation, and having repented of their error, turned from evil to walk in His paths of Righteousness.

Hence, the new “protesting” Churches that sprang up corrected many long-standing evil heresies and abuses. However, mistakes were made, serious errors in doctrinal judgment and Christian practice that mitigated to some extent the purity and integrity being so desperately sought after.

In 1545 Martin Luther wrote in the preface to a collection of his theological works a plea for understanding that his theology and understanding, especially in the beginning, was in transition, and not to be considered in final and complete form:

Martin Luther wrote:

“Above all, I beg the reader, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to read these works with discernment, or perhaps, I should say with compassion” (b)

The doors of theological thought and intellectual opinion, once freed from the strangulation of Rome, were thrown open to speculation and supposition, sometimes to the detriment of carefully considered opinion and sound principles of governance. Compromises were made that have had long-term disastrous consequences.

27. **Erasmus**

In Church history, evil compromise came in the form of a most unlikely person: “Desiderius Erasmus,” a brilliant humanist, and one of the greatest theological writers of the reformation period. It is believed that he staked great hopes, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, in being invited into the theological realm of Henry the Eight’s England, and apparently went to considerable lengths and efforts to secure his tenure in that country. In any case, he seemed to modify his theology on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage to suit King Henry’s ambitions.

Erasmus, along with many others, was instrumental in initiating the reformation. He was intoxicated with the heady intellectual and liberating moral freedom it brought, and lacked the moral strength to resist its more obvious temptations. It seems that he was neither convicted by, or convinced in, the hardcore principles of true Christianity. He was equally indecisive in his relationship with Roman Catholicism.

He was neither a reformer nor a traditionalist, not a fish, nor a foul. I believe he was simply a man caught between a rock and a hard place, wanting to be recognized as a man of God, but unwilling to part with the sin that he was entangled in. In the end he was left in no man’s land, reviled by the leaders of the reformation, but at the same time refused a Christian funeral by the Roman Catholic Church.

As a contemporary of Martin Luther, and a most eloquent, if sarcastic, protester of the evils and excesses of Roman Catholicism, he was at first considered in the main stream of the heated religious debates. However, over time, it became increasingly obvious to his contemporaries, who were personally and corporately seeking a closer and purer walk with God, that Erasmus’s stream came from a different source, a different river.

Many of his doctrines however established a toehold early on in the mind of the society harboring the reformation, and to a significant extent, helped set the agenda for the sweeping changes that were initiated then, and which have descended to us today.

28. **License of Grace**

He had developed, promoted and defended what would be described today as humanist philosophy, being quick to compromise the Scripture's core foundational moral teachings in order to mitigate both the errors of the Papacy and the hard but fundamental truths proclaimed by the reformers.

He raised doubts and fostered confusion with those being persuaded to return to pure New Testament Christianity, tightly binding moral and theological license and undisciplined freedom to the sanctifying cause.

Erasmus maintained, it can be said, that the central and overriding message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was an ethical ideal that should be interpreted individually, and rationally, according to an individual's own personal judgments and subjective viewpoints. In short order this deviated to the belief that "what seemed to be true and right for an individual", as long as it is "reasonably" based in Scripture and tradition, is what matters to God, and within His permissible will.

Erasmus taught that theological and moral standards should not be subjected to methodical and "legalistic" evaluation or authority of any kind, including the contrary statements found in Holy Scripture. Simply put, he advocated more "spiritual" interpretations of the Scriptures, especially when applied to those "ideals" that required obedience; heart felt reformation or standards of personal holiness.

29. **Serious Error**

Among Erasmus's teachings was the denial that Paul was the author of the book of Ephesians, Divine inspiration of the book of James and the permanence of the marriage covenant. He popularized the notion that being a follower of Christ does not have any real legitimate connection with practicing good works or living Holy lives. The end result, finally seen by most, on all sides of the theological debates, was his obliteration of the real differences between Christianity and heathen philosophies.

History has mostly consigned him the derogatory role as that of a spoiler, a secular philosopher in religious garb, "a distraction, and corrupter of morals", by both protestant and catholic theologians. In the end he was abandoned by nearly all, but the damage was done, and the church would suffer greatly because of his teachings.

30. Doctrinal Corruption

Erasmus's voice lived on in the protestant Church as a source of confusion, compromise, disagreement and division. Martin Luther, pressed to make definitive doctrinal and theological decisions, based upon then current theological thought, was pulled to the left by Erasmus's strong and pervasive influence. There was a strong desire among reformation leaders to free the common people from the yoke of Roman Catholicism and its control over every aspect of their lives, but yet, at the same time, maintain orderly conduct in society. In some cases it turned into a blood bath.

Due to a great extent to Erasmus's influence in Germany, France and Switzerland, Luther opened the door to the possibility that marriage could be dissolved on adulterous grounds. He then went a step beyond, despite Biblical prohibition, by permitting remarriage of the "innocent party," under certain conditions. He would live to regret some of the negative effects of the mistakes he made, not being more careful to warn against sin and compromised holiness, but most of the real damage caused by his mis-step would not become apparent until long afterwards.

31. The Sowing of Weeds

There was great secular pressure to allow such a thing as the dissolvability of marriage, as the great immorality of the renaissance age advanced alongside, but separate from the great integrity of the protestant reformation. In 1545, in the same preface mentioned earlier, Martin Luther wrote concerning the then prevailing mood and attitude of the population:

"Meanwhile the Germans were getting tired of putting up with the plundering, the buying and selling, and the endless frauds of the Roman rascals... The mood of the populace encouraged me, because those crafty 'Romanations' with which they had filled and fatigued the whole world were now hateful to everyone" (b)

The confusion between personal liberty and freedom of action was a product of the times, the spirit of the age, and in it Satan was able to sow weeds among the wheat. The weeds began to overtake the crop of righteousness in the last generation or so.

Notwithstanding Luther's compromise, the sanctity of marriage, the undesirability of divorce and the impossibility of remarriage while a spouse lived was upheld and enforced over the centuries by the vast majority of the denominations, sects and divisions of the protestant persuasion.

Roman Catholicism continued to hold the line on the Biblical teaching concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage, bleeding off the pressure of attack on the subject from the world by foolishly allowing marriage annulments if an excuse could be found. But generally, there was a common voice against the evil of divorce and remarriage up until the middle of the twentieth century.

32. The Diseased Crop

Approximately 50 years ago liberal church leaders began disregarding clear Biblical prohibitions against remarriage, a drifting process that has since expanded to include most conservatives, thereby replacing the historic position with the modern one. After barely more than a single generation, little trace or memory remains of the protective walls that once stood upon the sound original teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Church. This has enabled, and indeed authorized, the divorce and remarriage culture to rapidly invade and infect the people of God with devastating results.

This contagion is not limited to any particular Church tradition or division. It is spreading from Christian family to Christian family like a plague, transmitted by the unrepentant hearts and unwashed hands of those already infected. It is running out of control in essentially every protestant group in the western world. To compete, Roman Catholics have inflated their concept of annulment leading to remarriage into a modern day indulgence to sin, just like the Protestants.

No longer can any one group point at the other as the source of the problem. The root of the deadly disease is the commonly shared theology that undercuts marriage, tolerates divorce, and initiates and supports remarriage, contrary to the specific commands of Jesus Christ. Fortified by a doctrine of confession without repentance, the epidemic is becoming uncontainable as it gains equality, respectability and a cloak of spirituality within God's house.

As a direct result, efforts to reach the watching world for Christ are returning unto us void, as our demonstratively lack of integrity empties us of the power of God's Word.

33. Unequally Yoked

Essentially the Church and the world are now becoming yoked together in common beliefs and practices. Subsequently, evil is rampant and escalating both inside and outside the Church. In the next decade or so, if the present rate of moral decay continues, little if any of the basic precepts of God's law will be known, let alone adhered to in society. When the blind lead the blind they both fall in the ditch. Faced with the same type of apostasy Jeremiah wrote:

"From the least to the greatest, they trick others to get what does not belong to them. Yes, even my prophets and priests are like that! They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when all is war." (Jeremiah 6:13-14 NLT)

34. Compromised Christianity

Sadly, It has been increasingly difficult for concerned Christians to stand up and call attention to immoral practices and beliefs within the Church. Because of the strong support for the re-emerging "license of grace movement" holiness standards are falsely considered by many as being an attempt to gain salvation by works, instead of by faith alone. The wisdom of the age brands anyone that holds obediently to the original teachings of marriage, divorce and remarriage as legalists, and ostracizes them within their own church and families, especially if they have the courage to model and voice their convictions. This method of intimidation has enabled the evil one to maintain his stranglehold on the cynical among us, that is separating the modern Church from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One thing it is not is a higher understanding of a special appropriation of God's grace for this generation. It instead points to a fundamental lack of comprehension of the Holy nature of God and His view of sin. The denial of the scriptures as the only basis for doctrine and practice underlines an absence of a healthy fear of God. As Jesus explained:

"To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they have an abundance of knowledge. But to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them." (Matthew 13:12 NLT)

35. Be Discerning of the Times

Near the turn of the first century Ignatius wrote Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John a letter of encouragement. In it He exhorted Polycarp to recognize the evils of a new age and to fight the good fight.

Ignatius wrote:

“Let not those who...teach strange doctrines, strike you with apprehension; but stand you in the truth, as an athlete who is struck, for it is the duty of a great athlete to be struck, and yet conquer. More especially is it fitting that we should bear everything for the sake of God, that He also may bear us.”

“Be even more diligent than you have been. Be discerning of the times. Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible, Him who for our sakes became visible, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes.”
(Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp) (a)

Sincere friends, there is a lot of uninformed opinion as to what God teaches us in regards to marriage and divorce. The Bible clearly spells out exactly what our Lord expects us to do, and lays out how to do it. I purpose that we abide by God’s Word in discovering and defining what His will is concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. We must go to the Bible, the Word of God, and search prayerfully for the truth.

What Does the Bible Really Say?

36. God’s Final Word in the Old Testament on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Malachi 2:13 - 17

“...You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

“Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He is seeking Godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel, “and I hate a man covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the Lord Almighty. “So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith.” (NIV)

Malachi's teaching:

- 1. Breaking faith with a covenant marriage partner is breaking faith with God.**
- 2. The breaking of the covenant by a wayward spouse results in a severing of their relationship with God as He refuses to hear or pay attention to offerings or prayers, no matter how sincere. Obviously repentance must be sincere and restorative covenantly.**
- 3. God was party to the marriage covenant as witness and an active participant by making the man and woman His own personal possession.**
- 4. Faithfulness to the marriage covenant is necessary to produce Godly offspring. Without it the future of God's people is threatened.**
- 5. The covenant relationship belongs to the wife or husband of the youth, the first one. This is the union that God is a witness to and the enforcer of.**
- 6. Even though one of the parties may be unfaithful, as described here, to the original covenant, it remains in force for God says that the betrayed one remains the partner. This dispels the notion entirely that adultery dissolves the marriage covenant.**
- 7. God twice warns specifically not to break faith with the spouse of your youth, the original union. These are direct warnings against divorce and remarriage.**
- 8. Divorce is a spiritual attack with spiritual results and lasting spiritual consequences.**
- 9. Divorce is a violent ripping away of the cloak covering the husband provides for his wife, and the wife for the husband.**
- 10. God Hates Divorce! He truly does. That's why He never severs the covenant bonds and punishes those who violate them.**

This is God's final word on marriage and divorce in the Old Testament. Those hoping to apply some earlier Old Testament provision allowing divorce and remarriage should be careful. God was increasingly leading people closer to the New Testament age in which we live. This is the immediate Biblical backdrop to the arrival of the Messiah. Jesus' own teachings closely follow the same principles given here. He then takes it several steps farther.

The New Testament Teachings on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

37.

Matthew 5:31, 32

"It has been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a letter of divorcement: But I say unto you, that Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (KJV)

Jesus' Teaching:

1. A man must not divorce his wife, if she is not guilty of "fornication". If she marries again, he will have helped cause her to become an adulteress.
2. Any divorced woman not put away for "fornication" can not remarry without becoming an adulteress.
3. Any man that marries a divorced woman who was not put away for "fornication" becomes an adulterer.
4. Jesus abrogated Moses' Deuteronomy 24:1-4 allowance for remarriage of a woman not put away for "fornication."

In this passage on marriage and divorce, the first book in the New Testament, which was written primarily to the Jews, Jesus sets the standard for His Church to follow. Whatever the exception clause means, "saving for the cause of fornication," it has little active, or direct bearing on either the husband, or the wife or the third party so narrowly described here. It is as important to understand what is not taught here, as well as what is. Otherwise, it would only be too easy to take untaught lessons and try to apply them elsewhere.

Jesus referred directly to a man who divorced an innocent wife. Jesus did not refer to a man who divorced his wife for fornication. Jesus referred directly to an innocent woman who remarried. Jesus did not refer to a guilty woman that remarried. As this passage is gender specific, it also does not deal with reverse sexual roles, where the woman divorces her husband, and he remarries, therefore committing adultery by doing so.

Jesus, in Matthew 5:31-32, prohibits an innocent woman, who has been divorced by her husband, from remarriage. If she does remarry, according to Jesus, she is guilty of adultery. Jesus did not put any kind of qualifier on His statement, nor is any implied. He did not say

that she would not be an adulteress if her husband sinned, or remarried, or for any other reason. He said that if she marries after being divorced she would become an adulteress. This innocent woman, legally divorced from her husband, can not remarry. Jesus went on to say that any man that marries this woman is guilty of the sin of adultery as well. He has in this passage of Scripture, abrogated the Moses allowance for divorce and remarriage, which allowed the woman to remarry after divorce if she wished to do so (Deut. 24:1-4).

By this teaching our Lord shows that God's original standard is now being enforced. He indicates that marriage is a binding covenant relationship as described by God Himself in Malachi 2:14, and not just a human contract that can be broken. Here the validity of the marriage covenant is considered by Jesus to survive any act of divorce, thereby precluding any remarriage.

Jesus' use of the exception clause indicates that there is a difference in circumstances involving **"porneia"**, or fornication than those that do not. The Greek root word **"porneia"** is different here than adultery, which is always translated from the Greek root word **"moiceia"**. In this passage, and the one to follow, Jesus was referring to the Jewish betrothal process. After all, He was speaking to Jewish lawmakers on legal matters.

This tradition, based upon Jewish law and custom provided a way for the husband to back out of a marriage if it was proved that the woman being married was not a virgin upon sexual consummation. Joseph considered putting away Mary, the mother of Jesus, when he found out she was with child, thinking she had been guilty of **"porneia"**, but an angel revealed to him that The Holy Spirit was the father, not another man.

A translation of verse 32 could be written as follows:

"But I tell you, anyone who puts away his wife, except for fornication (porneia), causes her to become an adulteress (moiceia), and anyone who then marries the woman put away in such a way, commits adultery (moiceia)."

In other words, unless she is dismissed on grounds of **"porneia"** (fornication), which means having sexual relations while unmarried, she cannot rightfully and morally be put away. If she is put away, or divorced, and subsequently remarries, then she now becomes an adulteress herself, guilty of **"moiceia"** (adultery), having sexual relations with someone other than her spouse. In addition the man who marries her also enters into **"moiceia"**(adultery), since he has not really married her at all, but instead, having sexual relations with another man's wife.

John Gill, in his historic commentary stated:

”that is, as much as in him lies: should she commit it, he is the cause of it, by exposing her, through a rejection of her, to the sinful embraces of others; and, indeed, should she marry another man, whilst he is alive, which her divorce allows her to do, she must be guilty of adultery (moiceia**); since she is his proper wife, the bond of marriage not being dissolved by such a divorce.”**

In the New Testament, fornication (root Greek word “porneia**”) refers generally to illicit sex of unmarried persons outside of a marriage covenant or its spiritual counterpart. Fornication (**porneia**) may also be used to describe sexual sin in an overall sense that includes any and every form of sexual vice including adultery (**moiceia**), but if so, that occurs specifically only in 1 Cor. 5:1. That case involved a form of incest, which is not considered adultery (**moiceia**), but rather fornication (**porneia**). That is not the case in Matthew's two accounts involving marriage, divorce and remarriage. The occurrences of “fornication” (**porneia**), or forms of the root word in The New Testament are as follows:**

Matthew 5:32

“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except ‘porneia**’ causes her to commit adultery (**moiceia**); and whoever marries a woman who has been divorced commits adultery (**moiceia**).” (NKJV)**

Matthew 15:19

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries (moiceia**), ‘**porneia**’, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (NKJV)**

Matthew 19:9

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for ‘porneia**’, and marries another, commits adultery (**moiceia**); and whoever marries her that is divorced commits adultery (**moiceia**).” (NKJV)**

John 8:41

“You do the deeds of your father”. Then they said to Him, “We were not born of ‘porneia**’; we have one Father – God.” (NKJV)**

Acts 15:20

“but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from ‘porneia**’, from things strangled, and from blood.” (NKJV)**

Acts 15:29

“that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from ‘porneia**’.” (NKJV)**

Acts 21:25

“...they should from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from **‘porneia’**.” (NKJV)

1 Cor. 5:1

“It is actually reported that there is **‘porneia’** among you, and such **‘porneia’** as is not named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father’s wife!” (NKJV)

1 Cor. 6:13

“...Now the body is not for **‘porneia’** but for the Lord, this is to shame you...” (NKJV)

1 Cor. 6:18

“Flee **‘porneia’**. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but He that commits **‘porneia’** sins against his own body.” (NKJV)

2 Cor. 12:21

“Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many whom have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, **‘porneia’**, and lewdness which they have practiced.” (NKJV)

Galatians 5:19

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery (**moiceia**), **‘porneia’**, uncleanness, lewdness” (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:3

“But **‘porneia’** and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be named among you, as is fitting for saints.” (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:5

“For this you know, that no **‘porneia’**, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.” (NKJV)

Colossians 3:5

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: **‘porneia’**, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (NKJV)

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from **‘porneia’**.” (NKJV)

Revelation 2:21

“ And I gave her time to repent of her **‘porneia’**, and she did not repent.” (NKJV)

Revelation 9:21

“And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries, or their **‘porneia’** or their thefts.” (NKJV)

Jesus was teaching that the man in question who divorced his wife would cause his wife to commit adultery when she is forced to remarry in order to survive, and that any man that subsequently marries her is also in sin. The point Jesus was making is that it is a sin for a man to put his wife into that position. Jesus is condemning divorce and remarriage for all the parties involved, not defining an exit clause.

38.

Matthew 19:3-12

“The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce 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 marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But He said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men, and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." (KJV)

Jesus' teaching:

- 1. A husband and wife are to leave their parents and cleave to each other.**
- 2. When a man and a woman marry God makes them one flesh. No one may separate them. Anyone attempting to do so will fail, as well as pick a fight with God.**
- 3. By Divine Decree God declares that no man has the authority to alter a supernatural unifying act of God, and consequently God**

- neither recognizes any human decision to the contrary nor obligingly cuts the one flesh body in half.
4. A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, by sinning against her, in contravention of the covenant union.
 5. Some will choose not to marry, for some good physical reasons, or for spiritual choices, or for other reasons. But for those who do marry, Jesus tells them to receive these teachings.

In Matthew's account of this confrontation, also recorded in Mark, Jesus restores the standard concerning marriage. He also gave an insider's view of what God's standards are, and affirms that they are unchanged since the beginning. Since Matthew's Gospel was written as a witness to the Jews he emphasized certain points not found in Mark's account, since Mark was writing primarily to the Romans.

As in Jesus' earlier recorded teaching, the exception clause 'except it be for fornication,' uses the Greek word "**porneia**", or rendered properly in English as "fornication". It refers only to the Jewish betrothal custom of the time, backed by the law. That was when a bride was found upon marriage consummation not to be a virgin; the bridegroom could divorce her for "**porneia**" and then marry another.

A literal original Greek translation of verse 9 is as follows:

"And I say to you, whoever puts away his wife, except for fornication (porneia), and marries another, commits adultery (moiceia); and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery (moiceia)."

Matthew Henry quoted Dr. Whitby as follows:

"Dr. Whitby understands this, not of adultery (moiceia), but (because our Saviour uses the word *porneia* (porneia)- fornication) of uncleanness committed before marriage, but discovered afterward; because, if it were committed after, it was a capital crime, and there needed no divorce. He disallows it in all other cases: 'Whosoever puts away his wife, except for fornication (porneia), and marries another, commits adultery (moiceia).' This is a direct answer to their query, - 'that it is not lawful'."

All those listening to the debate expected Jesus to side with either the "Hillel" school of thought that believed that divorce was legal for any and every reason, or the "Shammai" group, that taught adultery was the only legitimate reason for divorce. He surprised His hearers with a new, uncompromising position, disallowing divorce and remarriage at all.

39.

Mark 10: 2 –12

“Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with a question: ‘Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?’ ‘What did Moses say about divorce?’ Jesus asked them. ‘Well, he permitted it,” they replied. He said a man merely has to write his wife an official letter of divorce and send her away.’”

“But Jesus responded, ‘he wrote those instructions only as a concession to your hard-hearted wickedness. But God's plan was seen from the beginning of creation, for; “He made them male and female.” This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” Since they are no longer two, but one, let no man separate them, for God has joined them together.’”

“Later, when he was alone with his disciples in the house, they brought up the subject again. He told them, ‘whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and remarries, she commits adultery.’” (NLT)

Jesus' teaching:

1. The old covenant allowed divorce only as a concession to hard - hearted wickedness.
2. God changes a man and woman's status upon marriage and unites them into one.
3. Jesus declares that no one must separate a husband and wife.
4. If a man divorces his wife and marries another, he is committing adultery.
5. A woman who divorces her husband and remarries commits adultery.
6. Jesus treats both males and females the same insofar as marriage and divorce.

This is Marks' account of the same conversation recorded in Matthew 19. Being written to Roman gentile Christians, he provides us further understanding of Jesus' teaching and the interpretation intended for us to take. As we know from both accounts, the disciples were shocked and disturbed by Jesus' answer to the Pharisees.

They waited until they could get Him alone to ask Him for verification and clarification. He confirmed what He meant by firmly slamming

the door on divorce and remarriage forever. Giving them the bottom line, He declared:

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery (moiceia) against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and remarries, she commits adultery (moiceia)." (Mark 10: 11 – 12 NLT)

As with the disciples, there is great dismay and shock when the words of Jesus, recorded here, are spoken to the Church today. It was difficult to accept and obey back then, just as it is now. In having this private meeting recorded for us, the Holy Spirit has clearly detailed God's stand on marriage and divorce and remarriage.

40.

Luke 16: 15 - 18

"Then He said to them, "You like to look good in public, but God knows your evil hearts. What the world honors is an abomination in the sight of God. Until John the Baptist began to preach, the Law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, and eager multitudes are forcing their way in."

"But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force in even the smallest point. It is stronger and more permanent than heaven and earth. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery and anyone whom marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (NLT)

Jesus' teaching:

1. It is irrelevant what the world thinks or does or what its opinions are. God does not agree with the world and what the world honors is an abomination to God.
2. The words of Jesus Christ are to be our instructions from that time to this.
3. The moral law is still in force and being enforced. It is more permanent than heaven and earth; not even the smallest part is changed. It will be in effect forever. Obedience to the law does not produce salvation, but disobedience is sin, and punishable by God.
4. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery.
5. Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

This passage of scripture makes the teachings of Jesus rather clear-cut. He states that whatever the worlds standards are, they are not to be adopted by his followers.

He declares that the law of God is permanent, and righteous. He then gives an example of what He meant by declaring the permanence of marriage. Anything to the contrary is a violation of His law, and therefore is forbidden as adultery.

There is a comprehensive unity throughout the Gospels in regard to marriage that dovetails perfectly into his commands on forgiveness and faithfulness. This may be best expressed in the Lord's Prayer that removes all possible reasons for divorce:

"Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us." (Matthew 6: 12 NLT)

41.

(Matthew 14: 3-4 NIV, Mark 6: 17-20, Luke 3: 18-20)

"Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Phillips wife, for John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" (Matthew 14: 3-4 NIV)

"For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Phillip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'

"So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man..." (Mark 6: 17-20 NIV)

"And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison." (Luke 3: 18-20 NIV)

John the Baptist's teaching:

- 1. The moral laws of God apply to all, the Godly and the ungodly equally.**

2. The divorce of Herodias from Phillip was unrecognized by God, as John declares that she was still Phillip's wife.
3. The sexual relationship of Herod with Herodias was adultery in God's eyes, as She belonged still, to Phillip.

John the Baptist, contrary to the teachings of corrupted religious leaders and the prevailing culture of the day, was compelled to properly apply the word of God. He confronted Herod for marrying his brother's wife while his brother still lived. Herod and Herodias were breaking the commands of God, and John, not being a respecter of persons, confronted him accordingly. It was not improper or considered incest for Herod to marry Phillip's wife, if Phillip had died. In Mark we find the Sadducees quoting Moses:

"...Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother." (Mark 12: 19 NIV)

The problem was that Phillip was very much alive and ruling the adjacent territories of Iturea and Traconitis. (Luke 3:1) Paul explained the difference between divorcing and remarrying instead of having your husband or wife die, and then remarrying. He wrote in Corinthians:

"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes..." (1 Corinthians 7:39 NIV)

and in Romans:

"... so then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is released from that law, and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man." (Romans 7:3 NIV)

The serious nature of the transgression of Herod and Herodias is underscored by the high cost of John the Baptist's stand against it. Herodias had John beheaded by taking advantage of and manipulating Herod's lust for her daughter. Most people, when confronted with their sin and convicted by the Holy Spirit lash out in denial and rage.

The standards of God are high, and the people of God are commanded to obey them, regardless of personal cost. John's obedience to God cost him his life. Herod and Herodias' disobedience has probably cost them much more.

42.
Romans 7: 1 - 3

“... You who are familiar with the law - don't you know that the law applies only to a person who is still living? Let me illustrate. When a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her.”

“So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries” (NLT)

Paul's' teaching:

- 1. Marriage survives remarriage and precludes it.**
- 2. Marriage is binding as long as both husband and wife are still living.**
- 3. Remarriage while the spouse lives is the sin of adultery.**
- 4. The marriage covenant ceases upon the death of the spouse.**
- 5. When death breaks a marriage, the living spouse may remarry.**

This reference by Paul is extremely important in a number of ways that are different from other scriptures on marriage, divorce and remarriage. What we have here is a description of what the first century Christians believed in regard to these subjects.

It is not being taught as doctrine, but referred to as a commonly held principle of morals and law. It is a key to understanding what the apostle and the Church understood as right and wrong.

What is even more remarkable is that Paul hinges on this principle, as an illustration, the doctrine of grace, the forgiveness of sins and the empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The apostle, using this statement of belief to illustrate the core covenants of the blood of Christ underscores both its common knowledge and its importance.

Here in the first letter after the Gospels in the New Testament is a summary of what Jesus taught, the disciples understood, and the early Christians believed. Here is no less than a written witness of what was and remains the foundational understanding of Christianity insofar as morality is concerned.

43.

1 Corinthians 7: 10 - 11

"Now for those who are married I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife." (NLT)

Paul's teaching:

1. This command has the full authority of the Creator and is the fundamental principle and interpretive device to understanding all that God has instructed us on Marriage, divorce and remarriage. It binds Paul, the early Church and we today to its overriding command, and it is not negotiable, conditional or non applicable in all matters pertaining to it. This is not simply a statement of what God considers to be an ideal, but a direct command.
2. A wife must not leave her husband.
3. A provision is made for those who have had to be separated from their spouse for any reason whatsoever - Singleness.
4. Remarriage for divorced or separated spouses is strictly forbidden.
5. Upon separation or divorce the spouses can (and should) be reconciled.

It is difficult to imagine how Paul could state any clearer what the Christian doctrine, as defined by the Lord Jesus himself, is and forever will be. He goes into greater detail in the rest of the chapter to illustrate how it is put into practice and how to apply the principle in the situations faced by real people in the real world who are called by His name.

In every single application described in the rest of this chapter, Paul uses this command of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only plumb line of truth. We can do no less.

44.

1 Corinthians 7:12 - 17

"Now I speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command of the Lord. If a Christian man has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. And if a Christian Woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him."

“For the Christian wife brings Holiness to her marriage, and the Christian husband brings Holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not have a Godly influence, but now they are set apart for him. (But if the husband or wife who isn't a Christian insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the Christian husband or wife is not required to stay with them, for God wants his children to live in peace.)”

“You wives must remember that your husband might be converted because of you. And you husbands must remember that your wives might be converted because of you. You must accept whatever situation the Lord has put you in and continue on, as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the Churches. ” (NLT)

Paul's Teaching:

- 1. This doctrine and practice is given not only to the Corinthian Church, but to us as well.**
- 2. A Christian husband is to treat his unchristian wife the same way he would if she was a Christian. A Christian wife is to treat her unbelieving husband the same way she would if he was a Christian.**
- 3. God compensates for the ungodly influence of the unbelieving spouse by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit through the Christian spouse, setting apart the children for himself.**
- 4. As long as the unbelieving spouse wants to live together, the Christian must not leave.**
- 5. If the unchristian spouse wants to leave or divorce, let them go in peace, don't try to force them to stay.**
- 6. The Christian husband or wife must bear in mind that they may be able to lead their unchristian spouse to the Lord because of the way they handle these matters.**
- 7. Christians in unfavorable marital circumstances are commanded to accept the situation they are in and specifically instructed not to try to change it by separation or divorce.**

Paul's instructions are in conformity and obedience to the direct command of the Lord expressed in verses 10 and 11. He instructs the Christians to act like Christians regardless of the actions of their spouses. We must bear in mind everything we do is a testimony to our children and our unbelieving or wayward spouses. Nowhere in this passage is there the slightest allowance for divorce and remarriage.

The message, not a word for word translation, but a *paraphrase* designed to say things the way we would say them today, renders verses 15 to 17 as follows:

"On the other hand if the unbelieving spouse walks out, you've got to let him or her go. You don't have to hold on desperately. God has called us to make the best of it, as peacefully as we can."

"You never know wife; the way you handle this might bring your husband not only back to you, but also to God. You never know husband: The way you handle this might bring your wife not only back to you, but also to God" (THE MESSAGE)

45.

1 Corinthians 7: 25 - 30

"Now about the young women who are not yet married. I do not have a command from the Lord about them. But the Lord in his kindness has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is best to remain just as you are."

"If you have a wife, do not end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not get married. But if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married it is not a sin. However I am trying to spare you the extra problems that come with marriage."

"Now let me say this, the time that remains is very short, so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work." (NLT)

Paul's teaching:

- 1. Paul is giving his best advice on how to handle particular applications of the previously stated principles.**
- 2. During a time of trouble it is easier not to be married.**
- 3. If a man has a wife, do not end the marriage. If a man does not have a wife, don't get married.**
- 4. If an unmarried woman wants to get married, let her.**
- 5. If a man does not have a wife it is not a sin to marry.**
- 6. Don't let marriage be your major concern, it's not first in importance, God is.**
- 7. Christians must do God's work and obey him, no matter what the marital circumstances. Personal happiness or sadness must not alter our obedience in decisions and activities.**

Paul does not have a direct command from the Lord regarding the unmarried, so again he applies the Lord's command given in verse 10. Although he advises that being single is easier, as stated throughout the letter, he declares that if there is an unmarried man or woman, it is not a sin if they get married.

The word for young woman implies a maiden or virgin, and applies to the masculine gender equally. If a man or woman is virginally unmarried, they may marry. If on the other hand, anyone is already married, stay married as per the Lord's command.

The modern incorrect misunderstanding of the word **"loosed"** in verse 27 (Greek **luisis**) or **"unmarried"** in English has provided considerable false comfort for those seeking loopholes to run divorce and remarriage camels through. However, in order to do so, they ignore the reference to the virginal unmarried precondition by changing the meaning of **"loosed"** to refer not to those who are virginally unmarried, but to those that had previously been married, but subsequently divorced.

With a blind eye to the Lord's command that if separated or divorced they are to remain single, many rationalize away the rest of the restraining teachings and proceed to do what seems right in their own eyes. Even a cursory look at the subject matter disallows such liberties. But in case any misunderstood him, Paul again explains what he meant in the verses to follow.

46.

1 Corinthians 7:35 - 40

" But if a man thinks he should marry his fiancée because he has trouble controlling his passions, and time is passing, it is all-right, it is not a sin. Let them marry. But if he has decided firmly not to marry, and there is no urgency and he can control his passion, he does well not to marry. So the person who marries does well, and the person who doesn't marry, does even better."

"A wife is married to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry whomever she wishes, but this must be in a marriage acceptable to the Lord. But in my opinion it will be better for her if she doesn't marry again, and I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this." (NLT)

Paul's' teaching:

1. Christians who have never been married are free to marry if they wish.

2. Christians who have never been married are free not to marry if they wish.
3. A Christian is married to their spouse as long as they both live and the covenant bond is unbreakable while both live.
4. A Christian is released upon death of a spouse to remarry.
5. The marriage has to be acceptable to the Lord.
6. Some second marriages after the death of a spouse are not acceptable to the Lord.

As Paul prepares to turn to other matters he ties up loose ends by summing up his instructions on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Again all his advice conforms to the command of Christ given in verses 10 and 11:

"Now for those who are married I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single, or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave his wife." (NLT)

With this teaching Paul closes off the subject, no doubt satisfied that his teaching is plain enough to settle all the questions the Church may have on the subject. He addressed every question he considered important enough to deal with, and he was right, He did. The problem is that many disagree with his statements and have tried to subvert them or redirect their obvious applications.

Over and over again Paul states and restates the same themes, without variation, in obedience to the Lord's instructions given him. It matches up perfectly with what Jesus commanded us in the Gospels:

"Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together." (Matthew 19: 6 NLT)

47.

Ephesians 5: 21-33

"And further, you will submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of His body, the Church; he gave His life to be her savior. As the Church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything."

"And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the Church. He gave up His life for her to make her Holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. He did this to present her to Himself as a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead she will be Holy and without fault."

“In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man actually loves himself when he loves his wife. No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for His body, which is the Church. And we are His body.”

“As the scriptures say, 'a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the Church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (NLT)

Paul's teaching:

- 1. Mutual submission of both husband and wife to each other is an act of worship and obedience to Christ.**
- 2. Wives are to submit themselves to their husbands and respect them in the same way they are to submit themselves to the Lord.**
- 3. The Church is to submit to Christ in the same way that wives are to submit to their husbands. He laid down His life for those who are in His Body, the Church.**
- 4. The husband is the head of the home in the same way as Christ is the head of the Church. He is to lay down his life for his wife in the same way Christ lived and died for the Church.**
- 5. The husband is required to love and forgive his wife in the same way as Christ loves and forgives the Church. Regardless of her faults he is to see her through Christ as spotless and pure.**
- 6. A husband and wife are actually one flesh, not in some sort of flexible symbolic way, but in another, more substantial but mysterious way, as a divine act of God, just as Christ is united into one with those who are part of His Body.**

Paul again repeats his other teachings on marriage, further giving us insight on just how central it is to the message of Jesus Christ and the law of love in the New Testament. It is clear here that marriage is not just another ideal given by God, but a mystery that symbolizes and models the very nature of the relationship He has chosen to have with us. He binds both husband and wife together in the same way as He binds himself to us.

The very nature of this entire scripture and its context underscores the permanence of marriage and the one flesh relationship of husband and wife. Each is to extend the same kind of commitment, forgiveness and longsuffering to the other that Christ extends to us.

48.

Hebrews 13: 3 - 8

"Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery. Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you." That is why we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

"Remember your leaders who first taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives and trust the Lord as they do. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. So do not be attracted by strange new ideas." (NLT)

Hebrew's teaching:

1. Marriage must be upheld with honor and safeguarded.
2. Husbands and wives are to remain faithful to each other.
3. God will judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery by violating the sanctity and Christian understanding of marriage.
4. We are to live our lives as the first Church leaders lived theirs, being faithful and trusting God to be our helper in times of need and trial, regardless of opposition or resistance from others.
5. Do not be attracted to mutations or alterations to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but follow the original leaders because the Gospel, like its head, Jesus Christ, does not change with time. Refute and resist doctrines that are either departures from or additions to the message already received.

The author of Hebrews adds his voice to the chorus of witnesses to Christ's plan for marriage within Christianity. As in Jesus and Paul's commands before him, he enforces the strict obedience to the covenant of marriage by repeating the command for absolute fidelity to the marriage partner.

He goes even further by teaching that failure to do so by husband or wife is the sin of adultery that will be judged and punished by God. We are reminded that God will meet all our needs and will never abandon us or forsake us.

49.
1 Peter 3:1 – 7

"In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands, even those who refuse to accept the good news. Your Godly lives will speak to them better than any words. They will be won over by watching your pure godly behavior."

"Don't be concerned about the outward beauty that depends on fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should be known for the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God."

"That is the way the Holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, when she called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do."

"In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard." (NLT)

Peter's teaching:

- 1. Wives must accept the husband as the head of the home and recognize his authority. They are to treat their unbelieving husbands in the same way they would if they are fellow believers, becoming living epistles of Godliness by allowing their lives to witness to the power of God.**
- 2. There is a promise here that when a woman remains faithful to God and to her unbelieving husband, he will be won over by the Holy Spirit working through the example of her life and the intercession of her prayers.**
- 3. Women that let God give them a quiet, gentle spirit need not adorn themselves with all the latest worldly clothes, makeup and jewelry. The Spirit of God within them will be pleasing to God and through him wives will be made beautiful to their husbands too.**
- 4. Wives are to obey God without fear of what their husbands may or may not do. They have a covenant with God who will protect them and bless them as God protected and blessed the women of old. If the husband is dangerous to the safety or welfare of his family a separation is in order so that the decks are cleared for God to work a miracle.**

5. Husbands must honor their wives in the same way that wives are instructed to honor their husbands. They are also to understand their wives and the differences between them. Wives are equal partners with the husband in family and in life. God does not deem one to be superior to the other.
6. Husbands that do not treat their wives as they should, will have their relationship with God severed. God will not answer the prayers of a man who betrays his wife. Such an evil attitude also leaves him naked and exposed to the disciplining arm of God – a fearful thing indeed!

Peter closes off the New Testament revelation on the subject by independently commanding the same adherence to the law of Christ that Paul did. Marriage is sacred and to be held in the strictest regard. Failure to do so will result in the active displeasure and judgment of God.

Abuse of one's covenant partner is considered as serious a breach of God's laws as adulterous unfaithfulness.

As in all the other teachings given in the New Testament by our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, marriage is upheld and divorce is disallowed. Expressly stated here is a direct connection between dishonoring marriage and spiritual apostasy.

50.

The Moral Law of God

The moral laws of God are still in effect and the standard of all those who follow Christ. They prohibit sex with animals, homosexuality, incest and adultery. They also speak against stealing, cheating, lying, swearing falsely, slander, witchcraft, divination, seeking revenge, and bearing a grudge. It starts out saying:

“If you obey my laws and regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 18: 5 NLT)

and includes:

“Do not defile yourself by having sexual intercourse with your neighbor's wife,” (Leviticus 18: 20 NLT) ***“Do not have intercourse with your brother's wife, this would violate your brother.”*** (Leviticus 18:16 NLT) ***“Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”*** (Leviticus 19:18 NLT)

51. John the Baptist

The New Testament gives an account of how John the Baptist applied the message of moral law God had given him. The ruler Herod Antipas had married Herodias, the divorced wife of his brother Phillip. The Gospel of Mark gives an account as follows:

“For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Phillip’s wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is unlawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’”
(Mark 6: 17-18 NIV)

John the Baptist was preaching the moral Law of God as laid down in the book of Leviticus for mankind.

52. Jesus Christ

In reference to both John’s and His own ministry, Jesus referred to the same commandments when He said:

“But that doesn’t mean that the law has lost its force in even the smallest point. It is stronger and more permanent than Heaven and earth. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Luke 16: 17-18 NLT)

53. Paul

The Apostle Paul refers to the same moral law of God when He writes:

“you who are familiar with the law ...When a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery if she remarries.” (Romans 7: 1-3 NLT)

Paul brought the application of the same commandments into the governance of the Church when members did not enforce them. He referred to the same moral law as follows:

“Do not have sexual intercourse with any of your father’s wives, for this would violate your father.” (Leviticus 18: 8 NLT)

Here are his words:

“I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you...I am told you have a man in your Church who is living in sin with his father’s wife. And you are so proud of yourselves! Why aren’t you in mourning and shame? And why haven’t you removed this man from your fellowship?” (1 Corinthians 5: 1-2)

He goes on to say that this person must be cast out of the Church into Satan’s hands.

54. John the Apostle

The Apostle John, known as the Apostle of God’s Love, clarified the relationship between the Love of God, Salvation, and the moral Law of God as follows:

“And how can we be sure that we belong to Him? By obeying His commandments. If someone says, ‘I belong to God,’ but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth. But those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did.” (1John 2: 3-6)

55. Saved by Grace

What this all means is that if we try to keep any law in order to be justified before God, it is not good enough. In order to be saved by keeping the law, we must then keep all the laws perfectly from the moment we were conceived until the moment we die. That is impossible! No one who ever lived would qualify except Jesus Christ. That is the point.

Salvation is only from the Grace of God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ our Lord. But as Jesus said, the moral law of God as expressed in the Scriptures is still in effect. It is the plumb line that applies to the behavior of His children, and God is serious about it.

Breaking these moral laws is as much a sin now as it was anytime since when they were written. The continued application of them is foundational to holy living in the New Testament, as attested by Jesus and His apostles. Willful and continued disobedience of God’s moral law is sin and warned about most urgently.

56.
Hebrews

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only the fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

“How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that has sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace. For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.” (Hebrews 10: 26-31 NIV)

57.
The Church’s Responsibility Specified

Those who have not understood His intentions often misapply the warnings issued by Jesus about not judging hypocritically. We are specifically instructed to judge in matters of faith and doctrine. If we fail to act decisively against sin in the Church, the whole Church becomes corrupted. He wrote to the Corinthians regarding sexual sin:

"How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality, and yet you let this sort of thing go on. Don't you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning, soon all will be affected? It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your job to judge those inside the Church who are sinning in these ways."

“God will judge those on the outside; but as the scriptures say, You must remove the evil person from among you...Don’t you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves.”

“Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers - none of these will have a share in the kingdom of God. ” (1 Corinthians 5: 6 - 7, 12 - 13 & 1 Corinthians 6: 9 – 11 NLT)

58. Cultural Contamination

"You should also know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control; they will be cruel and have no interest in what is good."

"They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that makes them Godly. You must stay away from people like that." (2 Timothy 3:1 – 5 NLT)

Brothers and Sisters, today's Church culture is a close variation of the prevalent culture of the world in which we live. This is not what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Roman Christians:

"I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and Holy sacrifice – the kind He will accept. When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask?"

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world. But let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect His will really is." (Romans 12: 1 – 2 NLT)

Paul's exhortation stands out in sharp contrast to the fundamental overriding principles governing the very thought processes of modern society: - "There is an absence of absolute truths or standards; there are no eternal moral laws and a denial of the existence of a lawgiver to be held individually accountable to."

This world's unbelief denies the very concept of a court, a judge or a personally appointed court date. Consequently, the written indictment, the Word of God, is disregarded. This same notion has contaminated the way many Christians conduct their lives. They can be every bit as good, maybe better, at avoiding personal responsibility for their moral choices. The difference between the world's view and the modern Church's view is too often just a matter of degree.

59. Let's be Reasonable

When Paul makes the above statements, they might argue with him, quoting his own teachings on grace and law. Paul did not forget what he taught on grace and freedom in Christ. We can be certain he did not expect the readers of this letter to disobey him by misapplying what he himself wrote elsewhere about grace and the "Spirit of the Law."

He expected to be obeyed, in fact, insisted upon it. Paul had taken all that the Holy Spirit had taught him about grace, freedom and the atonement of Jesus Christ and applied them already.

If anyone seriously believes that Paul contradicted himself or didn't mean for us to take him literally on the subject of purifying the Body of Christ, they are greatly mistaken. Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ and wrote with the authority Jesus Christ. Does that mean that Paul is heartless and cold and uncaring? No, far from it! He knew through the Holy Spirit what could destroy the Church and just what actions were required to keep it pure.

60. Warning

The Apostle Peter warned us about twisting the words of Paul in order to abort the intended meaning of his writings:

"...make every attempt to live a pure and blameless life. And be at peace with God. And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people will have time to be saved. This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him - speaking of all these things in his letters."

"Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do other parts of Scripture - and the result is disaster for them."

"I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people. I don't want you to lose your own secure footing. But grow in the special favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3: 14 - 16 NLT)

61. **Pop Theology**

In our efforts to rightfully leave eternal judgment and condemnation to God and God alone, we have effectively abandoned teaching and enforcing our Lord's standards and obeying the apostle Paul's instructions. Our failure to uphold His commands has resulted in an irresponsible pop theology that is destroying the Church, ruining lives and losing souls.

Jesus gave us two measuring sticks to evaluate others and ourselves; our love for each other, and the nature of the fruit we produce. Since the divorce rates are reportedly lower amongst atheists and agnostics than those who call themselves "born again" Christians, it would seem that many of them may have an equal or better understanding of certain basic rights and wrongs than many in the Church.

There is serious alarm among the watchman "on the walls" who see the trends and pay strict attention to where the Church is heading! The question is: How did we even get to such a state of apostasy? God's tough love has been replaced with popular sentiment. As Paul wrote:

"If I had the gift of Prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future, and knew everything, but didn't love others, what good would I do. If I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor, and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it, but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever." (1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 3 NLT)

Brothers and Sisters, the tragedy of the fall of holiness in the Church is not that God is any worse off or that we are just in violation of His Blood Covenant, but rather the pain and suffering we have caused ourselves. Society is coming apart at the seams as the primary building block of monogamous marriage disintegrates. We now have a wide swath of broken homes with all the horror and sin that accompany that.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is the damaged and deranged children caused by the divorce of their parents. Every objective study has confirmed the permanent injury done to children of all ages. It often results in a predisposition toward Theft, violence, deceit and unfaithfulness.

62.

The Momentum of Mutation

As the deterioration of standards in marriage and divorce works itself through the Church it is steadily gaining momentum. Christian divorce, once a rare and curious dichotomy, now defines normality in the Church. A large metropolitan Church is not considered well rounded if it does not have a ministry to provide divorce care and recovery programs. As more professing Christians walk from their marriages, there is less moral support holding together the remaining unions.

As pastors and leaders in the Church who succumb to the same tide, freely divorce and subsequently remarry, it becomes conditionally acceptable by nearly all. These same leaders often stay in or return to ministry with their new mates.

The denomination, colleagues and Church members are quick to defend their leader's decisions and speedy rehabilitation, redefining doctrine as necessary to comfortably accommodate the circumstances. Biblical teaching that cannot be twisted away is explained away as falling within God's permissive will, or unconditional grace, providing a slippery slope for those left standing.

The leaders beat a wide path through the wilderness for whosoever will to follow in their footsteps. Consequently, The walls carefully erected and maintained by the Church for nearly 2000 years are being professionally pushed down from the inside.

63.

Swap Shops

Meanwhile temptation increases dramatically as new mating opportunities arise with the collapse of marriages, throwing millions of Christian Moms and Dads onto the "meet" market. "Christian" radio stations and Internet sites abound with advertised dating services aimed at the Christian divorced, desensitizing, encouraging and facilitating the sin of remarriage.

Testimonials of meeting the right new "Christian" spouse are aired as an encouragement for others. These "swap shops" not only tempt the remaining faithful but also destroys the credibility of the Gospel of Christ to the world.

Unbelievers are becoming less aware of the salvation and restoration message of Jesus Christ that the Church is commissioned to deliver. They do, however hear loud and clear that Christians and the Church have absolutely nothing worthwhile to offer them with their own relationship problems, or any of life's other problems either. Even they can see that the walk and the talk are in opposite directions.

Sin, now dressed in stolen clothes of righteousness, begins to entice afresh as old temptations are magically transformed into new, potential opportunities. The nature of the "opportunities" is as varied as the weaknesses of the victims themselves.

The treacherous slide from believing in and looking for "God's permissible will" instead of God's written will, all the way down to "God just wants me to be happy" is fast, furious and fatal. Unchecked, the lowest common denominator becomes the demarcation line between right and wrong.

There are many crowded roads leading to the same destination, divorce. For some it's an affair, with others it begins as an occasional interest in pornography, but with many it's simply unrepented selfishness and unforgiveness disguised as Christian liberty and freedom. It is all sin. Any ticket out of town becomes a good one.

Sufficient reason that is saleable to the spiritually gullible can always be found to leave the marriage behind. Acceptance by the Church is no big deal. Problems with spouses that could and would have been resolved before now become prime justification for a divorce. Another one bites the dust.

64. The Wages of Sin

It is said that the emotional pain of divorce greatly exceeds that caused by the sudden death of a victim's entire family. Because God has knitted a husband and wife into one flesh the triple-header of hurt, rejection and loneliness does not have its match in this life. It usually destroys the emotional, spiritual and physical health of one or both of the parties involved.

Divorce alters personalities, destroys businesses, wrecks careers, ruins ministries and leaves open emotional wounds that never totally heal no matter how much time goes by. We are not even scratching the surface here.

There is no good side to divorce. The extent of the damage caused by divorce cannot even be assessed yet, as the smallest victims; children

and grandchildren inherit a legacy of infidelity and betrayal. It affects them profoundly, altering their very perception of the world around them. Broken homes make for a broken world.

Divorce is itself the very definition of failure. The Greek word used in The New Testament for divorce is “apostasy”. The Church can do no greater harm that will have a lasting destructive effect in the world and the expansion of the Kingdom of God than compromising on morality. Our Lord's words echo this truth when He asked:

"What good does it profit a man if He gains the whole world, but loses His own soul?"

65.

The Yeast of the Pharisees

Mirroring the apostasy of Israel's practice in Jesus' day, conditions for divorce within the Church, properly presented, packaged and delayed, have broadened to include any and every reason. If one Church, resisting the trend, the one that knows the truth of a couple's history, won't accept those who have swapped mates, the other Church down the street will, and vice versa.

The whole scenario we see unfolding is a time bomb that will go off in nearly every home sooner or later. It is only by the Grace of God that many families will withstand the assault.

Incredibly, the unavoidable truth is that we, as the Church of Jesus Christ no longer believes in a strictly monogamous marriage relationship as the only Christian standard, but rather practices a type of staggered, progressive polygamy. We allow Christians to have multiple husbands and wives, just not at the same time. What is the real difference? Its adultery, plain and simple. All the “ecclesiastical” trappings to the contrary, its still a slow game of musical beds.

66.

A Different Gospel is Being Preached

Every ill in society is produced from or enhanced by the immorality and sin accepted by the Church. The world is only following the Church's lead, and walking beside it. Both are on the same road, going in the same direction, and if the Church will not be persuaded to turn back, both will arrive at the same destination.

We are not to worry about the world; God will judge the world. We are to judge amongst ourselves, those of us who claim to be the “Bride of Christ”. We are instructed to turn back to the old ways and seek His presence. God promises that if the Church will truly seek after him with all its heart, He will be found.

Jesus affirms that divorce and remarriage is sin, and the Church is to have no part of it. Jesus says that not forgiving others will result in eternal destruction. Bitterness has grown up in the Church and has defiled many. Paul states that if we don't apply the Divine force of Love, and all that it means in our relationships, the rest is pointless and unfruitful.

The Church has allowed this same bitterness, selfishness, resentment and unforgiveness to terminate Christian Marriages. In the face of determined defiance from wayward spouses to submit to God and reconcile, we add the sanctioned sin of adultery in remarriage.

“Oh what a tangled web we weave when we set out to trick and deceive”. We have misapplied the word of God by ignoring the requirements of the law of love. We sowed to the wind and are now reaping the whirlwind.

67.

The True Gospel of Love - Forgiveness

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices when the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” (1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 7 NLT)

The Love of God is best expressed in forgiveness of others. Scripture repeatedly states that God considers the absence of forgiveness on our part an unforgivable sin. Jesus said:

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your Heavenly Father will forgive you. But, if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6: 14 – 15 NLT)

Showing Christian forgiveness of others is a basic requirement for forgiveness of our own sins by God. Anyone who holds malice, bitterness and unforgiveness against any others simply cannot enter Heaven forgiven by God.

Jesus gave us a parable, an example, case law as it were, for us to fully understand what is required of us by God. He entered into Holy Testimony the following precedent:

“For this reason the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a King who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had

borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so the King ordered that he, his wife, his children and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. But the man fell down before the King, and begged him, 'Oh Sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then the King was filled pity for him, and he released him, and forgave his debt.

But when the man left the King, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until he could pay the debt in full.

When some of the other servants heard this, they were very upset. They went to the King and told him what happened. Then the King called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy with your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry King sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny.

That's what my Heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart." (Matthew 18: 23 – 35 NLT)

Insofar as who should be forgiven, Jesus illustrated innumerable descriptions of enemies. In an instruction to those who would bear his name He said:

"You have heard that the Law of Moses says, 'If an eye is injured, injure the eye of the person who did it. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the person who did it.' But I say, don't resist an evil person! If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too. If you are ordered to court, and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles..." (Matthew 5:38 – 41 NLT)

In fact, Jesus included all possible enemies and acquaintances, as illustrated by His forgiveness on the cross for all of mankind.

About what kinds of hateful actions that should be forgiven, He specified everything from stealing, beating, lying, adultery, to enslavement and everything in between. He stated the way we were to now conduct ourselves differently that which is common in polite society:

“You have heard that the Law of Moses says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true children of your Father in Heaven. For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust, too.

If you love those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different than anyone else? Even Pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as you Father in Heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43 – 48 NLT)

In regards to the number of times one must forgive others, he indicated that the obligation to unconditionally forgive has no end – 7 times 70 - infinity. As to what criteria are required to enable forgiveness, He gave none, except the one single condition, that there be an offence, whether repented of or not.

So how far are we, as Christians, required to go in order to set a standard of forgiveness of betrayal by a husband or wife? The answer is simple: as far as is needed to not hold them accountable for the hurt and the pain and the rejection and the disappointment and the wasted years. That's how far... and this is what we are to teach those who are mistreated by others. No exceptions!

Jesus warned:

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the Prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, until Heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God’s law will remain until its purpose is achieved. So if you break the smallest commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws, and teaches them, will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“But I warn you – unless you obey God greater than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all!” (Matthew 5:17 – 20 NLT)

How practical is this? Completely, for in our forgiveness we let the power of the Holy Spirit flow through us to the ones who need it the most, the fallen. What's the alternative? Hardhearted wickedness, and entering eternity unforgiven, just as we have been unforgiving. That's what.

68. **Good Intentions**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as the Church, we did not intend to fall into Satan's trap. We stepped off the narrow path into a deep ditch once we tried to be all things to all people. We believed that we could mix God's solutions with the worlds. We were wrong. We dare not say that God encouraged us in the direction we have gone, for God does not tempt to sin. The Church was led away and enticed by the evil of unconfessed sin and the lure of adultery.

By discounting the direct teachings and instructions of our Lord and His Apostles and thereby producing bad fruit, the modern Church has done great evil in the eyes of the Lord. We have led many astray. Predictably, we are now faced with the terrible consequences of our sin.

69. **Restoration**

All sin is eradicated and atoned for by the Blood of Jesus Christ by sincere, genuine confession and repentance. As the Church has sinned publicly then so must the confession be equally public. Confession means that the truth of God's instructions must be proclaimed as well as our own disobedience to them. *As we know:*

“But we confess our sins to him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong.” (1 John 1: 9 NLT)

Repentance means that we must turn away from sin and follow God's plan from that point on. This means that the Church must refuse to recognize and facilitate any further divorce and remarriage.

70. **God's Grace**

“It is God who saved us and chose us to live a Holy Life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan long before the world began – to show His love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:9 NLT)

Provision must be made to undertake the careful application of God's love and commands. Allowance must be made for an enormous number of differing circumstances without violating God's commands. It won't be easy, but we will have the blessings of God and the active assistance and leadership of the Holy Spirit. We do have an example in scripture to go by when many in Israel violated God's commands and married outside of his will. In that case Ezra under the command of God required all those unions to be abandoned.

We are in the age of grace, and grace applies when it conforms to the will of God and His specific instructions as laid down in the Scriptures. Subjective evaluations of individual divorce and remarriage situations contrary to the Word of God are of course contrary to the will of God. As circular as this reasoning is, I feel it is the whole Counsel of God on the nature of covenant marriage. The Church will have to fall on its face before a Holy God and seek supernatural wisdom as to how to unscramble the complete mess we have made in the lives of families.

God will forgive past sin upon contrite confession and true forsaking repentance and but will never tolerate continued disobedience. Our authority as the Church does not extend to permitting disobedience or granting indulgences for sin.

As Paul told Titus:

“For the Grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from Godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self – control, right conduct, and devotion to God....He gave His life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing what is right. You must teach these things and encourage your people to do them, correcting them when necessary. You have the authority to do this, so don’t let anyone ignore you or disregard what you say.” (Titus 2:11 – 15 NLT)

Our assemblies are filled with those who knowingly or unknowingly violated the direct command of God by divorcing and remarrying. There are many thoughtful Christians who have different views on just how the Church can be reformed and move forward with clarity and holiness. None are being listened to.

God is merciful and forgiving and only right and just in all He says and does. He corrects and disciplines those He loves and straightens their paths. Because He loves us He is correcting us. He is willing to forgive us and cleanse us and pour out His grace upon us. All we have to do is confess our sins, repent, and go and sin no more.

We are not free to live in sin and disobedience but are given the grace freely to be conformed to the Image of His Son. It is necessary therefore to warn those who have remarried while a former spouse lives that they are in a continuing state of adultery according to the scriptures, and must repent of it by confessing that sin and vacating that relationship. It is impossible to affirm that it is a sin to remarry under those same conditions while maintaining it does not remain a sin after a ceremony is performed. A doctrine of grace that accommodates or justifies continued sinning is not of God at all, but the doctrine of demons.

The forefathers of all the modern Protestant Churches would have been horrified to see the mutation and misuse of the Grace of God being taught and practiced in many of the evangelical Churches today. In most cases, the moral standards commonly practiced by those claiming to be Christians today are much lower than those that were claiming not to be Christians just a few shorts decades ago.

71. Conflict of Interest

Some sincere Christians studying this doctrine may be personally insulted or feel wrongly judged and condemned because they themselves are either divorced and remarried, or members of their immediate families are. Most Pastors reading this will have participated wrongfully in the remarriage of the divorced. That is the whole point.

It is not the intention of this "*Call to Reformation*" to point fingers at any particular individuals or to pass judgment on them personally, but we surely can not produce different results from what we now have unless we are open to change what we now do. We are all in this thing up to our necks! But this is not about us...

72. ...It's About Them

Please look at the remaining married couples in your own Church. Mentally line them up and begin picking out which ones will be divorced one year from now, or 10 years, or 15 and 20? Who will become whose new husband and wife?

Don't forget the little ones in Children's Church. Go take a look at them. Pull out every second child, no, maybe two out of ever three by that time, or worse, and consign them to broken homes and failed marriages with warped children of their own.

Remember what Christ said about our responsibility for the care of children in Matthew:

"He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven...."

"But if anyone causes any of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the ocean." (Matthew 18, 2 - 7: NIV)

73.

An Ungrounded Trust

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), Vicar of Kidderminster, Pastor, Evangelist and writer is recognized as one of the Church's great reformers. When describing the state of the Church in 1656, he made a sorrowful observation about the mindset of many of the Christians that he encountered.

He mourned how they could attend Church faithfully for every service; hear the Gospel over and over again without really understanding and applying its principles. In "**THE REFORMED PASTOR**" he wrote:

"But most of them have an ungrounded trust in Christ, hoping that He will pardon, justify and save them, while the world hath their hearts, and they live to the flesh. And this they take for justifying faith." (c)

74.

An Urgent Appeal

"My fellow Christians, I trust God to speak to you out of His Word. I do not have all the answers on exactly what to do or how to do it. The answers are not remotely relevant however, if the Church won't even ask the right questions! Therefore I urgently beseech you to search the Word of God, and go to Him for answers. He has promised to give wisdom to all who ask, providing you believe He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek after Him."

75.

The Bottom Line

Until we hate divorce as God hates it in Malachi, the Church is on an opposing side, fighting God! God does not allow divorce and remarriage for anyone! It is not within His revealed, permissible will. All the wishful thinking to the contrary, no matter how much it disagrees with what is commonly taught and practiced, regardless of how it may limit our own choices, it is strictly forbidden by the Word of God under any circumstances. Jesus said:

"Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! No, I came to bring a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household! If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine."

If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it.” (Matthew 10:34 – 39 NLT)

As has always been the case, right from the beginning, it comes down to each person’s personal decision whether to believe what God says, and obey, or to join the line of those denying and protesting against God’s instructions. As with the first time God was put to the test, the question is still asked:

“Really...Did God really say...?” (Genesis 3:1 NLT)

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to read and reflect upon this call for reformation. If I have offended anyone, I humbly submit that they need to take their offence to God. I hope those who may disagree with me will appreciate the urgency of the problem in the Church and will point out where they believe my Biblical understanding is weak or mistaken. I hope all will seek the Lord's will, so He can use them as an instrument of His righteousness. I only wish to honor Jesus.

I do not suggest that God has given me any more light on this subject than He has provided my fellow serving Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, only a deep desire to be found faithful, and to help claw back the territory stolen from us.

Please email me with any observations, corrections or questions you may have. I ask God's blessing and mercy on us as we all go to Him with an open heart and a contrite spirit. May the Grace of our God be with you.



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