

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE & RE-MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE

A discussion in the context of the historical, social
and cultural background in the time of the Bible.
(Matt. 5:32,33, 19:1-12, 1.Cor. 7:1-16)

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Chapter 1 - Introduction.

The purpose of this article is to understand the meaning about divorce and remarriage in the social and cultural context of what is written about it in the NT, as it would have been understood by the hearers and readers in the time of Jesus Christ and Paul.

We are going to answer the following questions:

- What did Jesus Christ and Paul mean when they talked about marriage, divorce and remarriage?

Before answering this question, it is important to look at the social, cultural and biblical context first to answer the following questions:

- What was the historical view on divorce and remarriage of the Jews and surrounding peoples in the Near East, and what view did the Jews hold at the time of Jesus' preaching?
- What is the reason and/or occasion that Jesus says in Matt. 5:32,33 and 19:9 "*except on the ground of immorality (Gr. porneia)*"?
- What cultural, social and biblical information is not given in the passages in the NT, and for what reason is nothing said about them?

We also look at what the early Christians write about this subject, and why and how they arrived at their interpretations.

For those who do not wish to read the entire article, which we do encourage to consider the evidence presented, here in four points the final conclusion:

1. Both Jesus Christ and Paul condemned divorce on **NOT** legitimate grounds, and discouraged divorce even when there were legitimate grounds for it.
2. Both Jesus and Paul affirmed the grounds for legitimate divorce as mentioned in the OT in Exodus 21 and Deut. 24.
3. The grounds accepted by Jesus and Paul for legitimate divorce in the OT were; adultery (Gr. *Porneia*), material and emotional neglect, and physical or spiritual abuse.
4. Both Jesus and Paul condemned remarriage after an **unlawful** divorce, but not after a divorce on lawful grounds (as mentioned in the OT and NT).

We realize that these conclusions are quite different from the traditional Christian / Anabaptist view of these passages concerning divorce and remarriage in the NT. The reason for this different interpretation is that soon in the first century (and certainly after 70 AD) the historical context in which Jesus made these statements disappeared and logically different conclusions were drawn and/or interpretations were made. (More on this in chapter 10 and 11.)

However, it is clear that, both the Jews and Christians of the first century accepted the OT as God's Word, whereby for the Jews it was the basis for their ethical issues. Therefore, it is essential to know what the OT writes about this, (which the hearers of Jesus, the Jews, were aware of) and what the legitimate grounds based on the OT for divorce and remarriage were.

Chapter 2 - Marriage is a contract.

This will come as a '*surprise*' to many in our time, but marriage is simply called a '*covenant*' (Heb. '*berith*') throughout the Pentateuch and the rest of the OT. Unfortunately, this takes something away from the '*romantic*' nature of marriage in our day, but in the OT and Near East that was often *not* the reason for entering into marriage. The same word "*berith*" is also rendered with contract or covenant, in the context of a contract of sale or purchase agreement of land, house or other things. Its purpose is to set forth the agreements to which both participants in the contract must adhere. And that one of the parties involved, can have the contract dissolved, or put on penalties, if the other party had not adhered to the pre-determined written terms.¹

Marriage was another such "*ordinary*" contract, often drawn up by the families of the couple-to-be. In it, beyond the normal matters such as housing, clothing, food and the right to produce offspring, financial matters were also arranged and/or established in case one of the parties did not comply with the written terms.

The '*penalty*' for the husband breaking the marriage contract, on non-legal grounds, was the repayment of the dowry to the wife, and this could often be a high price. The "*penalty*" for the woman if she broke the marriage contract was the loss of her dowry and thus financial security, and for her it usually meant poverty and begging. Often, if possible, the woman returned to her family. By including these financial conditions into the marriage contract, a "*barrier*" was created to adhere to the conditions laid down, and not be so quick to file for a divorce. Indeed, the consequences were great, and rabbinical courts were the ones who decided, after hearing the "*facts*," whether there were lawful or unlawful grounds for divorce.

Many such and similar contracts have been found in the Near East, and the words and phrases used correspond to the wording used in the OT when it comes to marriage contracts.

Mosaic law did differ in this from the rest of the Near East, especially regarding the rights of women *in* marriage and *after* divorce. They had more rights in marriage, and more opportunities to remarry after a divorce on legitimate grounds as recorded in the marriage contract.

The "*divorce certificate*," which provided women with the right to remarry, was unique to Judaism.² It is worth making it clear in advance that the divorce certificate was therefore specifically intended as a '*free letter*' for the woman to be allowed to remarry, and as such not be guilty of the sin of '*adultery*' (and in ancient times even be stoned to death). That was the main function of this document for a divorced woman at the time the Son of God appeared on earth!

¹ See Chapter 1 from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information with source references.

² See Chapter 2 - "The Pentateuch," from the above source.

Chapter 3 - **Conditions for lawful divorce.**

In Exodus 21:10,11 we read the following about a slave woman:

"If he takes another wife in addition to her, he may not give the slave woman less food or clothing or have intercourse with her less frequently; if he fails her in any of these three points, she may go away without paying anything at all."

This probably freed the slave from paying a sum of money to obtain her freedom. If these three "conditions" applied for a slave to be able to "get free," then we may also assume that these were certainly also the "rights" women had in marriage.

Any woman with whom the husband had entered into a marriage contract, and in which he violated any of the above conditions, had to repay her the dowry and she received a divorce certificate from her (ex)husband, according to Deuteronomy. In Deut. 24:1-4 we read:

"When a man has taken a wife and married her, and it happens that she no longer finds grace in his eyes, because he has found something disgraceful about her, and he writes her a letter of divorce, gives it in her hand and sends her away from his house, and if she then leaves his house, goes away and becomes another man's wife, and that last man also becomes disliked by her, writes her a letter of divorce, gives it into her hand and sends her away from his house, or if that last man, who took her for himself to be his wife, dies, then her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her back to be his wife, now that she has become unclean; For that is an abomination before the LORD. You must not bring sin upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inherited possession."

It is worth noting that the first man who sent her away with a divorce certificate is not allowed to marry her again later, when the woman is "free" again. In fact, we also encounter this in the next chapter about the precedent God Himself gave.

Another ground for a lawful divorce, beyond the three in Ex. 21:10,11, is given in Deut. 24:1-4, namely, *"something shameful in her*. The giving of a divorce certificate, as described in the previous chapter, was specifically something from the OT, and so we do not find it in other Near Eastern documents.

That divorce, by the way, is not a matter to be taken "lightly," we read in Deut. 22:13-21. This also shows that the phrase "shameful to her" refers to sexual purity of the woman. Here it reads:

"When a man takes a woman, comes to her, and then takes a dislike to her, and if he then accuses her of all kinds of things, gives her a bad name, and says, This woman I have taken to wife, but when I approached her, I discovered that she was no longer a virgin, then the father of this girl and her mother must take the proof of the girl's virginity and bring it to the elders of the city, to the gate. The girl's father must then say to the elders, I have given my daughter to this man to wife, but he has taken a dislike to her. And behold, he has accused her of all kinds of things by saying, I have discovered that your daughter was no longer a virgin. But this is the proof of my daughter's virginity. Then they must spread the garment before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city must take that man and punish him. They must fine him a hundred pieces of silver and give it to the girl's father, because he has given a virgin from Israel a bad name. Furthermore, she shall remain his wife; he must not send her away all his days. But if this word is true, if it is discovered that the girl was no longer a virgin, then they must bring the girl out, to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city must stone her with stones, so that she dies, for she has committed a shameful act in Israel by committing whoredom in her father's house."

Unfortunately, we do not find the exact wording of a divorce certificate in the OT, but we do have rabbinic sources of divorce certificates³. In them we find almost everywhere this important phrase; "you are permitted to marry any man you wish." This clearly indicates the function of the divorce certificate; the ability for a woman to legally remarry.

But what about the man?

So was he allowed to "*remarry*" without a divorce certificate? It may sound strange to us, but even in Jesus' time, polygamy, being married to more than one wife, was still allowed in Jewish society. However, it must be said that this was limited to the wealthy Jews, because each wife also had to be maintained, which cost a lot of money and was only for the wealthy within the Jewish people. There were also debates going on in the rabbinical schools to abolish and prohibit polygamy.

Just to emphasize: The divorce certificate was specifically for the woman, to be '*free*', and to be able to remarry again, without being accused of fornication or adultery, which in ancient times was even punishable by death.⁴ The man had no '*restriction*' to having only one wife (and thus being accused of '*adultery*'), and thus could be married to several women at the same time. The woman however, could be married to only one man.

³ See Chapter 5 "Rabbinic Teaching" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information and source references.

⁴ Capital punishment by stoning was not '*officially*' practiced well before the first century. Especially after the Jews came under '*supervision*' of the Romans, they were no longer allowed to practice this form of execution and had to hand over what they considered '*criminals*' to the Roman authorities. However, it did happen that crowds stoned both men and women out of anger. As an example, the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:54-60, as well as Paul claiming to be a Roman citizen, among others.

Chapter 4 - Precedent given by God Himself.

Precedent = exception applicable to other similar situations/cases.

That which we described in the previous chapters is also found in God's dealings with the OT people Israel.

God viewed and described His relationship with Israel as a marriage.
We find this wording in Isaiah 54:5:

"For your Maker is your Man, LORD of the army powers is His Name, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth He shall be called."

The Hebrew word here rendered "Man" is "bâ'al"⁵, which means husband. So God regarded Israel as His spouse. It becomes clear to you, if you read the OT, that Israel is 'adulterous' time and again, and enters into 'relationships' with other 'gods'. Thereupon God decides to send her away with a certificate of divorce, which we read in Jeremiah 3:6-11 and verse 20:

"During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, 'Have you seen how unfaithful Israel has become to me? She committed adultery on every high mountain and under every leafy tree. I thought, When she has had enough of all that, she will come back to me. But she did not come back. Her apostate sister Judah saw that I had disowned unfaithful Israel and given her a letter of divorce precisely because she had committed adultery. Yet apostate Judah did not let that deter her; she committed adultery herself. And by her frivolous adultery with gods of stone and wood she cast a stain on this land. Then Israel's apostate sister Judah did come back to me, but she was not sincere, she came with empty words - speaks the LORD. The LORD continued, "Infidel Israel is still righteous compared to apostate Judah. ..."

*But no, like a woman who cheats on her husband, so you have cheated on me, people of Israel!
- speaks the LORD."*

We encounter the same theme in the book of Hosea. There, however, it seems that Hosea takes his adulterous wife Gomer, back as a wife at the end. But that would contradict Deut. 24:1-4, where the husband, is not allowed to take back his divorced wife. The solution to this apparent problem is simpler than thought. Indeed, we read that Christ makes a new covenant with, initially the 12 apostles, but by extension with anyone who wants to follow in His footsteps, the Church of God or members of the Body of Christ (Luke 22:20). Jesus also told the leaders of Israel that the earthly kingdom, which was the marriage covenant between God and Israel, will be taken away from them, and given to a people who do bring forth its fruit (Matt. 41:43). Paul also clarifies this both in Rom. 9:6-26 and Gal. 6:15,16 where he speaks of the "*Israel of God*," where this consists of both Jews and Gentiles who are converted to Jesus Christ.

This makes it clear that, on one of the lawful grounds for divorce, namely repeated adultery (*Gr. Porneia*), it is permissible to remarry again.⁶

⁵ h1166. בַּא'ל bâ'al; a primitive root; to be master; hence, (as denominative from 1167) to marry: - have dominion (over), be husband, marry(-ried, x wife).

⁶ For a comprehensive explanation of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezechiel, see "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" by David Instone-Brewer - Chapter 3 - "The Later Prophets."

Chapter 5 - The period between the OT and early NT (Inter-testamentary period).

What do we mean by the Inter-testamentary period? The last book in the OT of the Protestant canon ends with the book of Malachi. From there to the events described in the four Gospels, we find a "gap" of about 300 years. During this period, quite a few things took place concerning Judaism. The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the OT, for example still has the books of the Maccabees here, which tells a lot about that intervening period and what the situation of Israel was just before the coming of the Messiah.

During this period between the OT and NT, several changes took place regarding marriage and divorce in Jewish society.

Women's rights, and security within marriage were increased. Women who divorced their husbands on well-founded grounds (see *Chapter 3*) had the security of having their dowry returned to them, giving them a measure of financial independence after the divorce. If the husband refused to give the wife a divorce certificate (or pay back the dowry), the rabbinic courts had extensive opportunities to "enforce" this, through both financial and physical measures.

Polygamy and divorce were increasingly questioned. Outside of Jewish society, in the Roman-Greek world in which the Jews lived, it became increasingly easier to divorce, both for the husband and the wife, and this also had a great impact on Jewish society.

The many changes in divorce laws during this period, therefore, resulted in more rights for women, but also in greater instability of the marriage union.

Divorces were happening more and more and were considered "normal". More and more Jewish men and women were getting divorced. As women's financial security had increased, divorce was also no longer viewed as something "cruel" or "undesirable" for women.

All these developments are the interplay of a debate which was going on among the rabbis at the time of the beginning of the NT, about we explain more in the next chapter.⁷

⁷ See Chapter 4 - "Inter-testamental Period" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information and source references.

Chapter 6 - Infinitely more reasons to divorce.

Arriving in the first century, there was general agreement among the teachers of the Jewish schools (rabbis) on most aspects of divorce and remarriage. They agreed that the legitimate grounds for divorce were; deliberate childlessness, material neglect, emotional neglect and infidelity.

Divorce was viewed as something undesirable, but sometimes unavoidable. Divorces were initiated by the husband, but a Jewish court (of rabbis) could force a husband to give his wife a certificate of divorce (and dowry) if the wife could show that she had sufficient evidence for a legal divorce.

Remarriage was generally accepted, but if it was after a divorce on illegitimate grounds, then it was viewed as adultery. The rabbis also agreed on financial compensation in divorces if the marriage promises (contract) had been violated.

The main point of contention within the two "main groups" of rabbis that the debate centered on was the interpretation of Deut. 24:1. At issue here was how to interpret it namely, as "*something shameful*" or "*a shameful thing*."

Before we discuss this further, we need to know what two rabbinic "*schools*" there were at the time of Jesus. These were followers of the school of Hillel⁸ and the followers of the school of Shammai.⁹

The dispute was about the interpretation of the ground(s) for divorce in Deut. 24:1.

The school of Shammai interpreted this as follows: "*A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity¹⁰ in her, for it is written: Because he finds something shameful in her*".

The School of Hillel interpreted it this way, "*He may divorce her even if she spoils a dish for him, for it is written, 'Because he finds something shameful in her.'*"

Jesus rejected Hillel's interpretation that allowed "*any reason*" for divorce (Matt. 19:3) by opting for Shammai's interpretation that indicates only, "*one reason*" - namely, sexual immorality.

Jesus replied, "*Whoever disowns his wife other than for whoredom (Gr. *porneia*) and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries the disowned one also commits adultery.*" (Matt. 5:32 & 19: 9).

The Hillel school taught "*any reason*" because its emphasized in Deuteronomy 24:1 the word "*shameful in anything*." The Shammai, however, taught "*porneia*" because its emphasized in Deuteronomy 24:1 "*shameful in anything*."

Each school emphasized a different word in this verse. This was one of the main arguments of the school of Hillel in advocating the "*for any reason*" separation in the time of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ sided with the school of Shammai, this upsets even His disciples. They were accustomed to siding with Hillel in many matters like the majority of Jews at that time period, for

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shammai>

¹⁰ The Hebrew phrase עֲרוֹת דָּבָר (‘ervat davar) involves a genitive of specification, something characterized by עֲרוּהָ (‘ervah). עֲרוּהָ means "nakedness," and by extension means "shame, sexual impropriety, sexual organs, indecency" (NIDOTTE III 528, Jastrow 1114-15).

they responded with: "*If the man's business with the woman is like this, it is better not to marry.*" (Matt. 19:10).¹¹

It is not difficult to understand why the school of Hillel prevailed at the time of Jesus. They advocated the reasons for divorce that made it simpler, something that was also "*common*" in the Greco-Roman society of their time, what eliminated a lot of "*fuss*" and "*hassle*" about getting a divorce.

To properly interpret Jesus' response, and what He also did not say¹², we must understand why Jesus gave this response and in what setting/situation this took place¹³. Therefore, let's take a closer look at Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question in the next chapter.

¹¹ See Chapter 5 "Rabbinic Teaching" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information and source references.

¹² Or portions of the conversation with the Pharisees that was not recorded in the Gospel records we have in Bible.

¹³ It is often good to ask yourself when you read a passage, "*Who is saying what to whom, why and in what social and cultural background is this being said?*"

Chapter 7 - Jesus' teaching on divorce.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 portray it in a debate with the Pharisees of the school of Hillel, for their interpretations generally prevailed in Jewish society at that time period.

Jesus' position on the question and / or dispute is found in Matt. 5:32 and Luke 16:18. This very brief "*summary*" of His answer requires more explanation.¹⁴ Especially regarding what was not said and why. After all, what was not said was abundantly clear to Jesus' hearers at that time, and that information was known to all. Besides, rendering something so abbreviated is not strange. We come across it in many works from that time and it was often done for the following reasons, among others;

- a. it saved precious parchments,
- b. it was redundant information because readers knew about this,
- c. one could more easily remember and transfer only that which was "*different*" from normal, and
- d. the first Christians lived under heavy persecution, and if they had to flee, their main concern was to bring to safety the parchment scrolls of the Gospel that had been transcribed with great care and time. So they also wrote down only what was of interest for their fellow Jewish Christians to read, and not what was generally known and accepted by all.

Let's look at the reports, starting with:

The question:

Mark. 10:2 "*Pharisees also came up to Him. They asked Him whether a man may divorce his wife. Thus they wanted to put Him to the test.*"

Matt. 19:3 "*Then Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, 'May a man divorce his wife for any reason?'*"

The main difference between the account in Mark and Matthew is in the "*extra*" information: "*for any reason,*" which we find in Matt. 19:3.

In Jesus' response, He first corrects the custom of polygamy, which was still permitted for the Jews, and He indicates the original monogamous and lifelong state of the marriage covenant. (Matt. 19:4-6).¹⁵ Not content with this response however, the Pharisees ask the question again, "*Why then did Moses prescribe (command) to give her a letter of divorce and thus cast her out?*" Matt. 19:7, harking back to Deut. 24:1, the only passage on the subject.

Most Bible commentators assume that Matthew added the phrase, "*for any reason*" (Matt. 19:3) and "*unless there was an illicit union*" (Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9) later. Given the situation described in the previous chapters, this was indeed the reason for their original question. Namely, the Pharisees wanted to "*put*" Jesus to the "*test*". By their question, knowing that the majority of Jews were for divorce on any ground, according to the school of Hillel, they were trying to trap Jesus.

That Matthew probably added this in the two places (Matt. 5 and 19) has to do with understanding the question Jesus is being asked. Matthew was aware that later on not all of his readers would understand why this question was asked, and that the question would be a "*meaningless one*" if the reader was unaware of the dispute between the Hillel and Shammai

¹⁴ For why, see Chapter 6 - "Jesus' Teaching" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information and source references.

¹⁵ For a more extensive discussion and evidence on Polygamy in the context of Jesus answer can be found in, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible - D. Instone-Brewer pages 136-141

adherents. Indeed, the questioners would then ask a question to which everyone would respond the same, including Jesus.

In His response to this, Jesus first says in verse 8, *"Because you are heartless and stubborn, therefore Moses allowed you to cast out your wife. But it was not so from the beginning."*

Here Jesus first gives the reason namely the heartlessness and stubbornness of the Jews, something we actually read throughout the centuries in the OT. Then Jesus corrects the fact that divorce is not a *"commandment"* or *"precept,"* but that it is *"permitted"* and not an obligation, as it was among the Jews at that time. Indeed, this obligation to divorce to which the Jews clung made it impossible for the innocent party to forgive the guilty party (after repentance) and thus preserve the marriage. Jesus makes it clear here that forgiveness and the maintenance of the marriage covenant is important, and that if the guilty party repents and the innocent wants to forgive, this should be possible and even desirable!¹⁶

Jesus answers the question.

Mark. 10:10-12

"In the house, the disciples asked Him about this again. He said to them, 'Whoever rejects his wife and marries another commits adultery; and if she rejects her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

Matt. 19:3

"I say to you, whoever disowns his wife and marries another commits adultery, unless there was an illicit union."

Luk. 16:18

"Whoever rejects his wife and marries another commits adultery, and also whoever marries a woman who has been rejected by her husband commits adultery."

Matt. 5:31,32

"It was said, 'Whoever divorce his wife must bring her a letter of divorce.' And I say to you, 'Anyone who divorce his wife drives her to adultery - unless there was an illicit union; and also whoever marries a divorced wife commits adultery.'"

Interpretations of these various passages vary quite a bit. Largely, one can attribute this to the *'shortening'* of the information for the reasons already mentioned. Nevertheless, to take a brief look at this *"truncation"* and thus *"omission"* of information that would be automatically added for the audience, two illustrations:

A contemporary example:

You are at a meeting (church or something else) and the speaker says that during intermission there is coffee and tea on the tables at the back of the room that you can pour yourself there.

Now, for example, you drink coffee with milk and sugar, and that's also on the table and you just grab it, right? But it was not explicitly said by the speaker that you can grab that too! And maybe there's also a cookie or a slice of cake on the table. Do you grab those too? Of course you do, because you know that even though it was not explicitly said, it is the most ordinary thing in the world. This information was not given because the speaker assumes that the audience knows that it is also permitted to take it.

Suppose what the speaker says was written down, and we read this say 2000 years later and no longer we have this habit of drinking coffee (or still coffee but never with sugar and/or milk), what do we conclude? Probably it does not even occur to us that milk and sugar (+ cookies and/or

¹⁶ For this, see also, among others, Jesus teaching on forgiveness in Luke 17:3,4 and Matt. 6:12,14,15.

cake) accompanied it, and that it was the most ordinary thing in the world that it could be taken also.

So once we were at a German wedding as Dutch people, and there was a big table with as many as six kinds of home-baked cakes, as only the German sisters can do. And we were invited to make use of that. We went there with our saucer and fork, and chose a piece of one cake. Next to us came a German brother who filled his plate with five different pieces of cake. When we asked after this, he said that this was the custom, to put what you wanted on your plate. So of course we adapted ...

In both illustrations not all the '*information*' is given by the person making the invitation, but we ourselves complete the obvious and logical information. In the second illustration we notice that if we also do not know the cultural and social customs, we come to a different interpretation of the '*missing*' or not given information.

So it is with the abbreviated versions from the various Gospels of the answer Jesus gave. As we saw in the previous chapters, divorce and remarriage was something that had been happening for decades, for that was the explicit function and reason for the divorce certificate.

What was at issue here in the debate/dispute and the question to Jesus, were the terms on what lawful grounds were men allowed to divorce and had the right to remarry, without being guilty of "*an illicit union - (Gr. porneia).*"

Chapter 8 - Jesus brings it back to what was intended.

Just as we discussed in chapter 6 what the various reasons for lawful divorce were, it was also clear to Jesus' hearers what they were. On the first three, the school of Hillel and Shammai were in agreement. This "*redundant*" information was not included in the Gospel account because it was logical information for the hearers that everyone agreed on.

What the debate, or dispute between the school of Hillel and Shammai was about was the interpretation of divorce by the husband from his wife "*on any ground*" (Hillel) or only on the ground of "*porneia*" (Shammai), as given by Moses in Deut. 24:1.

Jesus was aware of the debate between the two schools, and although He sided with the school of Hillel on most issues, here, shockingly for many, He sides with the school of Shammai! ¹⁷

Jesus replies:

"I tell you, whoever rejects his wife and marries another commits adultery, unless there was an illicit union." Matt. 19:9

Since the apostles (like most Jews at that time) were accepting Hillel's "*for any reason*" view regarding divorce, their reaction is also more understandable when they said:

"At this, his disciples said, 'If the relationship between man and woman is like this, you had better not marry.' Matt. 19:10

After considering all this, what can we conclude?

Filling in the missing and not represented information, which was obvious to the audience, we come to the following eight conclusions regarding these passages and what Jesus "*changed*" from what was prevalent and adhered to by everyone at His time:

1. Monogamy; a person can only be married to one other person, however, only a man to a woman. In this way, then, Jesus rejects the custom of polygamy.
2. Marriage is meant to be a lifelong commitment, and it is against God's will to break up a marriage.
3. Marriage is normally not an obligation; so childlessness (whether it is due to the husband or wife) in marriage is not a ground for a legitimate divorce.
4. Divorce is not mandatory, even in cases of adultery. The ability to forgive and thus preserve the marriage is desired, and encouraged.
5. Divorce is permitted; for this, the reasons in Ex. 21:10,11 and Deut. 24:1-4 apply, where Jesus specifically limited the reason in Deut. to only "*porneia*" (adultery). Divorce on lawful grounds is allowed and the woman (if she is the innocent party) is entitled to obtain a certificate of divorce and receives her dowry.
6. Divorce based on "*any reason*" (the Hillel view) is unlawful, and thus "*remarriage*" after such an unlawful divorce is adultery or "*porneia*".
7. Remarriage after a lawful divorce, is possible and allowed for the woman if she has a divorce certificate. It is permissible for a woman, but it is not mandatory.
8. Paul expanded the condition and said that remarriage (or marriage in general) may only take place "*in the Lord*," that is, with a fellow believer. 1 Cor. 7:39

Nowhere do we read anything about what Jesus instructed the audience on what a woman was allowed to do after an unlawful divorce. Which also makes sense, since Jesus was put on the test only concerning Deut. 24:1. But it can be assumed that everyone understood that they would then have to remain alone. For any "*union*" the woman would make would mean for both the husband and wife to fall into the sin of "*adultery*".

¹⁷ Which Pharisees Allow Divorce For "Any Cause"? - <https://www.british-israel.us/11.html>

Nor do we know whether Jesus agreed with the other **legitimate** grounds for divorce. But again, it can be assumed that, precisely because He said nothing about this or corrected this, He agreed with this as did His hearers.

Of course, these are two arguments based on something not said (argument of silence)¹⁸, and we should apply them with caution. But given the overwhelming cultural and social evidence, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus agreed with the other legitimate reasons for divorce. Indeed, had Jesus disagreed with these, and not explicitly stated this or corrected them, His listeners would have naturally assumed that He **did agree**. This could give the wrong impression and thus Jesus would be perpetuating a situation with which He and His Heavenly Father, did not agree.

After all, why correct one and not the other?

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_silence

Chapter 9 - What about the apostle Paul?

Paul was well informed and agreed with Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage, but he also dealt with another problem that he (which Jesus in His day did not) had to deal with in the first Corinthian letter chapter 7.

That Paul agreed with Jesus' teaching is important to emphasize. Paul (formerly Saul) was a promising student of Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) who was a grandson of Hillel. So that Paul **does not** follow the "*interpretation*" of the school of Hillel here indicates that he was aware of, and agreed with the "*interpretation*" of Deut. 24:1 of the school of Shammai that Jesus indicated.

In 1 Cor. 7:8,9 Paul clearly indicates that entering into a (new) marriage by a widow or widower is not a problem, and that the death of either partner dissolves the marriage covenant. He says:

*"As for widows and widowers, I say that it would be good for them to remain alone, like me. But when they cannot afford it, **they should marry**, for it is better to marry than to burn with lust."*

Another verse from his account that is important in the context of this article is 1 Cor. 7:15:

"But if the unbelieving party wants to separate, so be it; in that case the brother or sister is not bound. Remember, however, that you are called by God to live in peace."

After having previously made it abundantly clear that the Christian partner should not be the cause or initiator of divorce, Paul says the above.

The brothers and sisters in Corinth lived under Roman laws, and many of them were of non-Jewish descent. Under Roman law, both men and women could divorce by simply leaving, or sending the partner away from their home. Paul told the Corinthians that Christians were not to act in this way, and were never to be the reason or initiator of a divorce. But, if they were abandoned or sent away by their non-Christian partner (husband or wife), and there was no possibility of forgiveness or reconciliation, they were **no longer** under the "*covenant*" and thus not bound, and were free to remarry.

It is clear by the wording "*should that but happen*" that the Christian partner could do nothing more to preserve the marriage. In Greco-Roman society everyone would also immediately understand that "*not bound*" was equivalent to "*free to remarry*". Where Paul sets the only condition, "*only in the Lord*," i.e., only with a fellow Christian¹⁹, but again, probably in connection with the circumstances²⁰, he encourages remaining single.

The sentence; "*Remember, however, that you are called by God to live in peace*," is a somewhat more difficult statement to understand. Paul could be referring to similar statements that we find more often in rabbinic writings, namely as; "for good peace."²¹

It was more often used at that time as a pragmatic and/or practical solution to issues that could not be resolved or settled within the applicable rules and laws.

Indeed, normally a (Christian) woman could only remarry if she was in possession of a divorce certificate given by the departing non-Christian husband, or with proof that her husband had died.

¹⁹ In Paul's day, a Christian was one who not only proclaimed with his lips to be a Christian, but also lived according to the teaching of Jesus Christ. (Matt. 16:24)

²⁰ It is believed that there was a famine at that time. As a single person, it was hard enough to get enough food, let alone provide food for a family.

²¹ See Chapter 7 - "Paul's Teaching" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer for detailed information and source references.

Often the Christian woman did not had these;

- a. because the (non-Christian) husband did not want to provide it, or
- b. because the (perhaps deceased) man could not be found at all. ²²

Then the Corinthians and other congregations, were not to act dogmatically and legalistically (lawfully), but to "*live at peace with one another*," and view the Christian woman as being divorced on lawful grounds, with the right to remarry.²³

Spending much time at the beginning of the chapter on the responsibilities of both the husband and wife in marriage, Paul emphasized the conditions that those who had entered into marriage had to abide by, especially when they are Christians.

²² This was becoming a big problem for many women at that time. They had been unable to get a divorce certificate because their husbands had "*disappeared*."

²³ In Paul's day, many Christian men (very lovingly) when they went on a distant journey, gave a divorce certificate to their wives in advance so that if they did not return, their wives could use it to "*legally*" remarry again.

Chapter 10 - The interpretation of the early Christians.

The traditional interpretation of Jesus' words is that He rejected all grounds for divorce except on grounds of "*porneia*," and that Jesus completely forbade remarriage. Interpretations of this we see in all sorts of "*variations*" among the early Christians, among the reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Menno Simons ed. as well as in many current Christian movements.

Why do these differ from the explanations we have discussed and established in previous chapters, especially in the areas of divorce and remarriage?

A major reason is that the first Christians, soon made up in large numbers of non-Jews, had lost their social and cultural connection and historical backgrounds to Jewish society.

This began before or just after 70 AD, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Several passages in the NT indicate that probably many Christians were excommunicated and exiled from the Jewish synagogues even before the canon of the NT was established.

Some Christian groups such as the Nazarenes and the Ebionites still followed Jewish customs, culture, and rituals, but these often closed groups, soon disappeared from the world stage.²⁴

The year 70 AD was an important year, especially for Jews, in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and their temple. It was a benchmark with regard of losing much Jewish historical background information. This information was no longer as accessible to the Jews themselves and certainly not to the early Christians who had little to nothing more "*in common*" with the Jews who still knew about the social and traditional situation in Jesus' day.

In Judaism after 70 AD, there were almost no Sadducees and Shammai Rabbis (Pharisees), and their views and interpretations became mere historical curiosities. All the schools there were in Judaism after 70 AD were now founded on the teachings of Hillel, and many of the historical writings were written from Hillel's point of view. Any dispute that described was between Shammai and Hillel was represented as "*won*" by Hillel. This included also the debate over the interpretation about the "*any reason*" divorce from Deut. 24:1-4.

Although this was something that was of historical interest to Jewish students at the rabbinical schools, it was no longer of interest to the ordinary Jew. They could not choose between a Shammai or Hillel court of rabbis when it came to divorce, for there was only one left, and that was Hillel's. And so the knowledge of the origin and reason for the Pharisees' question in the debate in which Jesus was involved also disappeared.

²⁴ See chapter 9 pages 238-239 "History of divorce" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer.

Chapter 11 - What the first Christians wrote.

Most Jewish-Christians, and certainly Christians from other backgrounds, were out of touch with the social and historical background, and why Jesus was asked this question. This also made Jesus' response "*incomprehensible*" from their cultural context, even though Matthew made another attempt by adding the "*exclusion clause*" in his Gospel account, to bring this context to their attention in this way.

Early Christians²⁵ generally approached the Gospels and the rest of the NT in the following way:

- They collected all the texts in the NT that deal with a subject and took them as literally and seriously as possible, insofar as it was clear that they were not talking about an illustration or parable or using a saying, or expression.

That is an excellent approach to what is written in the NT, and with this you arrive at the correct meaning or interpretation in almost all cases as it was most likely intended. Unfortunately, the Pharisees' question and Jesus' response to it about divorce was most likely not intended as a doctrinal question, but his response was in the context of a broader debate with more facets than what is mentioned in the Gospels.

Taking all the passages in on divorce literally, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1 Cor. chapter 7, without knowing and understanding the social, cultural and historical background, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, it is not difficult to see that the early Christians overlooked some facets with their literal approach. Because they had become ignorant of what was **not** written down, but what determined the contextual background, we cannot blame them either. This was "*context determining background information*" that they no longer possessed.

Therefore, with their literal take on Scripture, with the necessary variations, the early Christians came to the following conclusions:

1. Divorce is not permitted except solely on grounds of "porneia," and
2. That it is not permitted to remarry after a divorce.

This interpretation is also strongly evident in the more strict movements within Christianity that emerged later such as Montanism²⁶ which Tertullian²⁷ joined in his later years. But we also find a variety of interpretations outside of this.

Let's look at and discuss some of the early Christians and their explanations.

²⁵ When we speak of the first Christians here we mean those who lived until about 325, the first Council of Nicea.

²⁶ <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montanisme>

²⁷ <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullianus>

Hermas the Shepherd.

One of the earliest writings we possess of early Christians was written in Rome around 100-150 AD, and is that of Hermas the Shepherd.²⁸ In a vision, Hermas asks a guide rendered as the Shepherd what a person should do if a believing woman commits adultery. He replies that the man must divorce her, or else he is partly guilty of her sin. Hermas writes:

"And I said to him, 'Sir, if someone has a wife who trusts in the Lord and he catches her in adultery, does the man sin if he continues to live with her?' And he said to me, 'As long as he is ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no offense in remaining with her. But if the husband knows that his wife has gone astray and the wife does not repent, but persists in her lewd behavior, and yet the husband continues to live with her, then he is also guilty of her crime and partaker in her adultery.'" Hermas (c. 150, W), 2.21²⁹

Hermas then asks if a person should not forgive the sin of adultery when there is repentance. The Shepherd replies that a person should forgive, but not repeatedly, because Christians have only one chance to repent.

"And he said to me, 'He should take back the sinner who repents.' But not repeatedly. For there is repentance for the servants of God only once. If now, the divorced woman repents, the husband should not marry another during the time he sent her away. In this matter, husband and wife should be treated equally."

The shepherd says that the husband should not remarry after the divorce, in case the wife comes to repentance. This might imply that it is normally permissible for a man to remarry, if repentance is no longer an option, because the woman is, for example, living with another man again or is married. For if remarriage were not permitted at all, it would be superfluous to give a reason why remarriage is not permitted in this case.

But it is more likely that remarriage was forbidden altogether except when one of the partners was deceased, and that the "*superfluous reason*" was given here to "*strengthen*" the argument.

The passage about "*being able to repent only once*" goes like this:

"I have heard, sir, that some teachers claim that there is no repentance other than that which takes place when we immerse ourselves in water and receive forgiveness of our past sins." He said to me, "That was a good teaching which you heard; for that is really the case. For he who has received forgiveness of his sins must no longer sin, but must live pure. . . . And therefore I tell you, that if anyone is tempted by the devil, and he sins after the great and holy calling in which the Lord has called His people to eternal life, then he has but one opportunity to show trustworthiness. But if he sins more often after this, and then repents, such repentance will not avail this person."" Hermas (c. 150, W), 2.22.

Hermas, like most early Christians, believed that a person could only repent of a sin once, and that any subsequent sin after water baptism was unforgivable. This teaching they based on the texts in Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31 and was widespread during this period.³⁰

However, most people who use the interpretation of the early Christians, such as Hermas, as an argument for their position in our day, reject the view of no forgiveness possible after water

²⁸ The passages of the early Christians we quote are from the 10-volume Ante-Nicene Fathers set - Philip Schaff, ed. This set can be requested free of charge in PDF and Epub format by emailing: info@plain-living.nl and/or read freely on the Internet at: <http://www.ccel.org>

²⁹ ca. 150 - 150 nChr. / W - written in the west / 2.21 - ANF part 2 p. 21.

³⁰ This teaching was the reason why many Christians were not baptized until their deathbed, in order to avoid the risk of committing sins.

baptism. This way of arguing is not logical. The first Christians would probably have been better informed about the original meaning of the Hebrews letter, which was written to Jews outside Jerusalem in a Roman-Greek society, while the Gospels are full of references to Jewish customs and culture. If anyone were to claim that the early Christians understood the social and cultural conditions concerning divorce better than contemporary scholars, surely this should apply to their explanation of the text in Paul's letter to the Hebrews. But this is not accepted today.

Justin Martyr.

Justin wrote about 160 AD, and had a similar explanation as Hermas. He quoted a series of passages from Jesus, and concluded that it is a sin to remarry.

Regarding honorability, he quoted, among other things, the following: *"anyone who looks at a woman and desires her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* And, *"anyone who rejects his wife drives her to adultery - unless there was an illicit union; and also whoever marries an rejected woman commits adultery."* And concluded from this, *"So everyone, who is married twice by law, are sinners in the eyes of our Lord, and also those who look with lust on another woman."*
Justin Martyr (c. 160, E) 1.167

Justin also described an incident in which the early Christians were divided. It was about whether a converted wife should leave her unbelieving and adulterous husband. Some advised that she should stay, hoping that perhaps he would also repent. While others said that by staying, she shared in his sins. Eventually she sent him a "*repidium*," Latin for a divorce certificate, when he was traveling:

"A certain woman lived with an intemperate husband; she herself had also been intemperate in the past. But when she became acquainted with the teachings of Christ, she became watchful, and tried to persuade her husband to also be temperate, referring to the teachings of Christ, and assured him that there will be punishment by eternal fire given to those who do not live temperate and in accordance with right doctrine. But he, who continued in the same excesses, alienated his wife from him by his actions. For she, who thought it evil to live any longer as a wife with a husband who sought in every possible way means to indulge in pleasure contrary to natural law, and contrary to what is right, wanted to be separated from him. And when she was pressured by her friends, who advised her to continue still with him, thinking that her husband might somehow give her hope of modification, she did violence to her own feelings and stayed with him. But when her husband had gone to Alexandria, and began to behave worse than ever, she, because she might not, by continuing in matrimony with him, and by sharing his table and bed, also become a sharer in his wickednesses and impurities, gave him what you call a certificate of divorce, and was separated from him." Justin Martyr, (c. 160, E), 1.188

What mattered to Justin was not the divorce, but the persecution that broke out on it by the enraged husband.³¹ What matters to us is the uncertainty in this story. When she became a Christian, she was taught that she had to divorce her unbelieving husband, despite the fact that others advised her that she should stay with him in hopes of thus bringing him to repentance. She eventually wrote a divorce certificate, which would give her the right to remarry, but unfortunately we do not read here whether the early Christians would then allow a remarriage.

We quote another of the many first Christians.³²

³¹ See ANF 1.188-189 for his response to this.

³² For more quotes from early Christians, see: See chapter 9 "Interpretations in church history" from "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer pages 243- 253.

Athenagoras.

Athenagoras was a Greek philosopher from Athens who had converted to Christianity. He wrote in c. 177 AD about that Christians should avoid intercourse except for having children, and then claimed many Christians lived celibacy.

"A person must remain as he was born, or be satisfied with one marriage; for a second marriage is only a deceitful adultery. "For whoever puts away his wife," He says, "And marries another, commits adultery;" and so He does not permit a man to put away her whose virginity he has ended, nor to marry again. For the one who deprives himself of his first wife, even though she is dead, is a veiled adulterer, resisting the hand of God. For in the beginning God made one man and one woman, and the dissolution of this union of flesh with flesh, formed for the intercourse and survival of mankind, is not permitted."
Athenagoras, (c.177, E), 2.147i

Here Athenagoras even seems to prohibit remarriage (for one cannot speak of remarriage) after the death of one of the partners. Perhaps this interpretation was based on the concept of the indissoluble "*one flesh*" marriage, but this does not come out clearly here, but clearly he is going "*further*" than Scripture indicates in his commentary.

Summary:

It is generally too easily claimed that the early Christians spoke "*in unison*" in everything concerning NT teaching. They were certainly relatively united in their interpretation of Scripture by consistently taking it literally and seriously. But they also expressed doubts about the problems in their interpretations.

When one reads the passages on divorce in the NT outside the context as it was known in the time of Jesus, it comes across as if the NT teaches that divorce is only allowed after;

- 'porneia',
- when one is left by a non-believing partner, and that
- re-marriage before one of the partners has died is always a sin.

The interpretation or explanation to remain unmarried, which is found among many of the early Christians, resulted in "*fewer*" remarry problems in the congregations due to the literal and strict interpretation of the texts in practice.³³

The first Christians were sadly ignorant of the Jewish background and debate on divorce when the Pharisees asked Jesus this (*put to the test*) question. As a result, the first Christians were almost universal in their teachings, allowing divorce only on the grounds of "*porneia*" and not allowing remarriage after divorce (also if it was on the ground of Porneia). Gradually the idea developed that marriage is indissoluble, and the Roman Catholic Church still teaches this, although they now approach this social problem in a flexible and pragmatic way.

The Reformation³⁴ rejected, unsurprisingly, the explanations of the Roman Catholic Church. They allowed remarriage on grounds of adultery and after leaving the unbelieving partner. They also had a variety of explanations to show that these divorces do not actually break up a marriage.

For example, Luther argued that those who committed adultery, which was punishable by death in ancient times, were thereby already "*dead*" before God, which meant that the marriage had already ended in the eyes of God.

³³ For further information on the interpretations of Luther, Zwingli, the reformers in England ed. among others, see pages 257-266, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" - David Instone-Brewer.

³⁴ <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformatie>

In the centuries following the Reformation, it became increasingly easier and accepted to get divorced for a variety of grounds and reasons. In doing so, the various Christian movements "*reluctantly*" went after the increasingly getting more liberal society around them, adopting more and more worldly views into their doctrines.

Chapter 12 - Anabaptist on marriage, divorce and re-marriage.

In stark and revolutionary contrast to what all state churches had maintained for a thousand years, the first Anabaptist believers in Europe read their Bibles and returned joyfully, thankfully, into focusing once more on wholesome family life. Like Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, the first Anabaptist leaders formally renounced their celibate priesthood and one by one, chose marriage and the begetting of children. This included Michael Sattler, Menno Simons, Jörg Blaurock, Balthasar Hubmaier and many others.

The early Anabaptists, thoroughly disgusted with how things had gone amongst the celibate orders and amongst the priests, not only condoned but openly promoted marriage and the raising of children. Once again, as in Jesus' time, the family became the hub of all life's activities. Early Anabaptist communities actively helped their young members to find partners (there was no "dating" or complicated betrothals) and already in the first generation a rapidly expanding multitude of children and young people pushed the boundaries of the movement from Europe to Poland, to Russia, to the Balkan States, to British North America and eventually to all over the world.

The extensive Christian family, not trammelled by birth control, has become the hallmark and glory of conservative Anabaptist fellowships to this day.

But, what about the "exception clause" within the early Anabaptist movement?

Thanks to the persecution they faced during their turbulent early years, it was not at all uncommon for Anabaptist believers to lose their married companions when they decided to follow Christ. Unbelieving husbands disowned their wives, and unbelieving wives deserted Anabaptist men. After discussing what to do about it, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Leenaerdt Bouwens, Gillis of Aachen, and three other Anabaptist leaders decided in 1554:

If an unbeliever wishes to separate for reasons of the faith, then the believer shall conduct himself honestly. He shall not marry again as long as the unbeliever remains unmarried. But if the unbeliever marries or commits adultery, then the believing mate may also marry, subject to the advice of the elders of the congregation. ...

If a believer and an unbeliever are in the marriage bond together and the unbeliever commits adultery, then the marriage tie is broken. If the unbeliever says it was an accident and desires to mend his ways, then we permit his believing wife to return to him and admonish him—if conscience allows it and in light of the circumstances of the case. But if the man is a bold and headstrong adulterer, then the innocent party is free. She shall, however, consult with the congregation and remarry according to their decisions in the matter.

In other writings Menno Simons reinforced this teaching:

Divorce is not allowed in the Scriptures except for adultery. Therefore we shall not to all eternity consent to it for other reasons. ... We acknowledge no other marriage than that which Christ and the apostles taught in the New Testament: that of one man with one woman (Matt. 19:4). A married man and woman may not be divorced except in case of adultery (Matt. 5:32), for the two are one flesh.

The Swiss Anabaptists in a booklet on marriage stressed the fact that the union of believers with Christ is more precious than the union between husbands and wives. They taught the permanence of marriage, and that it shall not be broken except in case of adultery. But then, with the counsel of the congregation, they did allow the "innocent party" to marry again.

The Anabaptist leader, Rauff Bisch of the Kurpfalz, said at the Frankenthal disputation in 1571:

We believe that nothing may terminate a marriage except adultery. But if the unbeliever wants to divorce because of the faith, we would let him go as Paul says in 1 Cor. 7. We believe that the cause for divorce should never be found in the believer.

The Anabaptists of Hesse, in central Germany, stated in 1578:

We believe and confess that a man and woman who have by divine fore-ordination, destiny, and joining in marriage become one flesh may not be divorced because of excommunication, belief or unbelief, anger, quarreling, hardness of heart, but only in the case of adultery.

The Anabaptists in Moravia included the following among their five articles of faith in 1547:

If the unbelieving one departs let him depart. ... A brother or sister is not under bondage in such a case.³⁵

Most Anabaptists emphasized the fact that; “nothing can break the marriage bond except adultery.” But the presence of divorced and remarried couples among them caused personal hardship and earned them much criticism. On at least one occasion a brother who had remarried, Klaus Frey of Ansbach in southern Germany, was publicly executed for bigamy.

Current Anabaptist interpretation

During the last 125 years, since the rise of Evangelical Fundamentalism and a rapid deterioration of morals and ethics in the world around them, conservative Anabaptists have come to rethink and change the positions they hold regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage.

As a result of their changed position, they have swung from one side to the other and become veritable experts on how to get around the exception clause as Jesus said it in Matthew 5: 31-32 and Matthew 19:9.

All conservative Mennonites, Amish, German Baptists, River Brethren, the Followers of the Way, and similar autonomous groups (so called Fellowships) within the movement have adopted that fundamentalist position of no exception clause. But there are a few exceptions.

The Holdeman Mennonites, a large conservative Anabaptist group, zealous missionaries all around the world, acknowledge the exception clause and those have full access into the membership of their congregations.

The same is true of the Reformed Mennonites, another conservative group established in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the early 1800s. And most Hutterite communities, founded in Austria in the beginning of the Anabaptist movement also accept the exception clause as given.

³⁵ See meaning of “not bound” in previous chapters

Chapter 13 - In Conclusion.

Of course there will be “*all kinds of arguments*”, which makes sense given the contradictions within many current views, both among extremely conservative and liberal Christians.

But what can we conclude after what we have discussed above?

If we accept all the historical, cultural and social aspects as outlined above, we arrive at the following final conclusions:

- It becomes clear that the message in the NT is, that divorce is permissible, but should be avoided by Christians if at all possible.
- Divorce is allowed only on the grounds of violating Gods terms agreed upon in the marriage contract by both partners. And the decision to divorce (but is not mandatory) can only be made by the innocent party.
- The whole Bible affirms the grounds for divorce as stated in the OT, that is, in Ex. 21:10,11 and Deut. 24:1-4. These are:
 - Neglect at the material level, i.e.,
 - (1) food,
 - (2) clothing, (including housing)
 - (3) Neglecting to have intercourse - procreation (love)
 - (4) Committing '*porneia*' (adultery).

And regarding the last point, Jesus corrected the wide spread Jewish Hillel view; "any arbitrary reason" to what was originally meant by God in Deut. 24:1-4.

- A believer would never violate the marriage terms, and would be allowed to forgive the guilty party if he or she repented and turned away from that course of action (which was preferable).
- If there has been a divorce on lawful grounds, remarriage is allowed (but not required) for the innocent party.

All these things would make sense and where logical to a Christian at the time of Jesus' ministry on earth, but they're meaning became unclear early on, due to the loss of context of Jewish background information among Christians (already) before but certainly after 70 AD (the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple).

In conclusion:

Hopefully this article will shed more light on the situation regarding marriage divorce and remarriage. We hope that more contemporary Christians, Christian groups (Anabaptists) and churches will re-examine their interpretation and (Anabaptists) traditions regarding this. In this way, the “*stumbling block*” that has been raised to become a follower of Christ can be removed for those who come out from “*the world*” into Gods Kingdom. Because especially for them the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 are true:

*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. **Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**”*

I Jesus forgives and accept those who have turned their lives to Him, would not be a previous dissolved ‘worldly’ marriage contract also be forgiven, allowing them to be (re)marriage in the Lord, and make them accepted in Anabaptists fellowships?