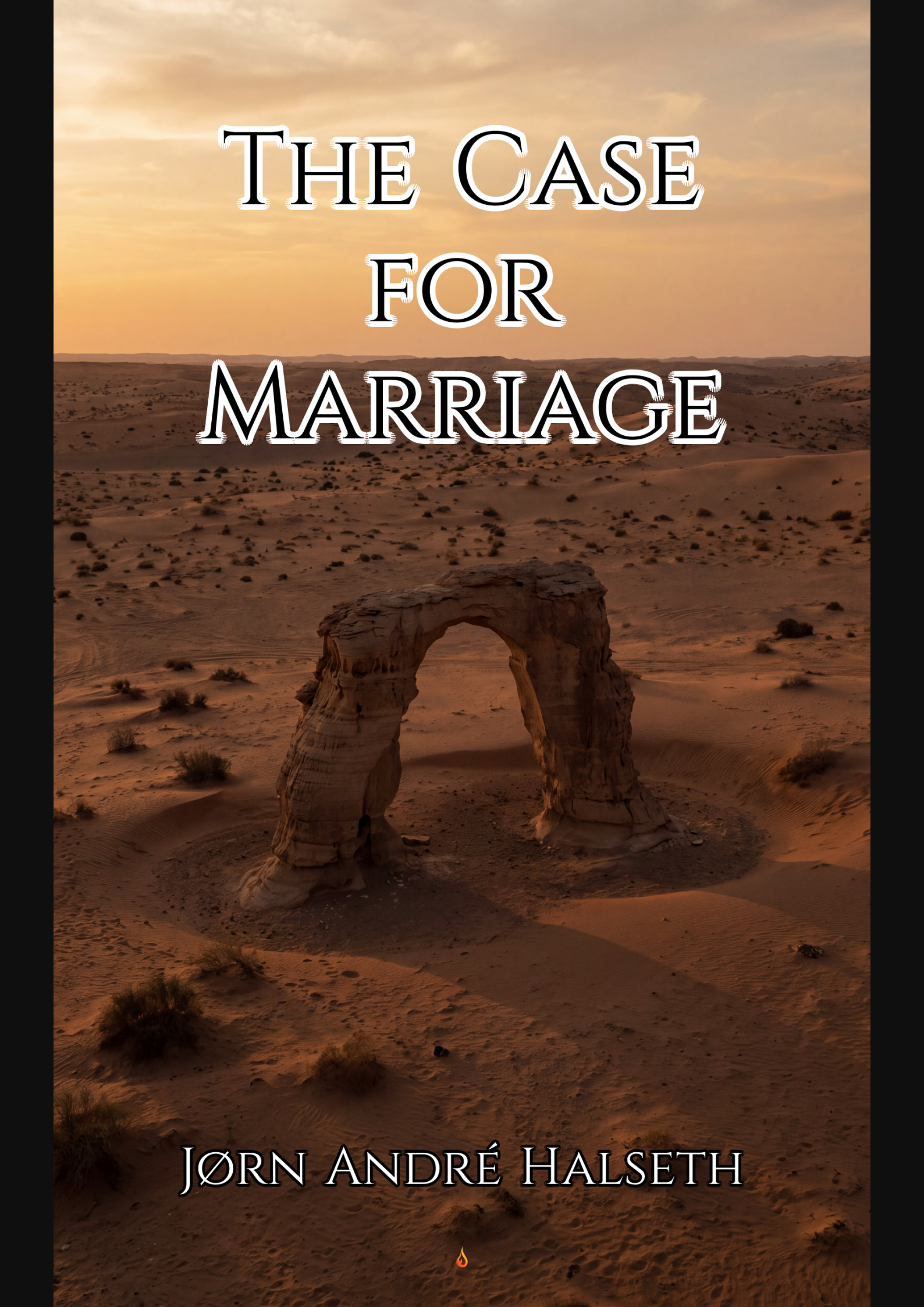


The background of the cover is a photograph of a desert landscape at sunset. In the foreground, a natural rock arch stands on a sandy dune. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds, and the horizon is visible in the distance. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

THE CASE FOR MARRIAGE

JØRN ANDRÉ HALSETH



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Chapter 1

Foreword

This book is here because a question just wouldn't leave me alone, not for years. For decades now, I've been involved with God's people in countless contexts – different countries, different cultures, a wide array of churches. And in all that time, especially when marriages fell apart, I kept seeing a pattern. Good people, genuinely seeking to follow God, were carrying a crushing weight of guilt and condemnation. This burden, I came to realize, didn't seem to originate in the clear teaching of the Bible. Instead, it often felt like it came from human traditions, or interpretations built on only half the truth, or even just plain fear of what others in the church might say.

I've watched it play out too many times: pastors and church leaders teaching only part of what God actually says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Some lean so far towards leniency that they inadvertently make the sacred covenant sound like nothing more than a casual agreement. Others are so unbendingly strict that they just crush people who are already deeply hurting, often forcing them to remain in genuinely destructive situations, or denying them any path to healing and a new beginning – situations God surely never intended for them.

This struggle with inherited interpretations wasn't just an academic exercise for me. My own life, and the lives of those closest to me, have put me right in the middle of the messy, painful reality of relationships in the church. I've witnessed marriages collapse because of profound betrayal, abandonment, and even spiritual or physical abuse. And repeatedly, I've seen God's people carry this immense weight of a past divorce, like it was an unforgivable sin, even when *they* were the ones wronged, the ones whose hearts were broken. Too often, the church hasn't really separated the person who cruelly breaks the covenant from the person who was faithfully trying to uphold it, only to be broken by it.

My deep dive into the Scriptures wasn't optional; it felt absolutely necessary. I just had to know: What does the Bible *actually* say about all this? Not what tradition has layered on top, not what cultural norms dictate, and certainly not what fear whispers. I mean the *whole* Bible – Old Testament, New Testament, what the prophets declared, what the apostles taught, what God Himself did in His relationship with His people, and what Jesus said.

The answer I eventually found is both much more serious about the sacred institution of marriage and much more merciful to the innocent party than most sermons you

hear. God absolutely doesn't take covenants lightly. He hates it when someone treacherously breaks a sacred vow – that's a profound act of violence done to another soul.

Consider the prophet Malachi, speaking to a nation where men were treating their wives – often the wives of their youth – with profound disrespect and treachery. These men were divorcing their wives for selfish reasons, thinking God didn't care or wasn't watching. But God made it clear He witnessed every broken vow, every act of betrayal. He was calling out the heartless actions of men who abandoned their wives without just cause.

Malachi 2:16 · For the man who hates and divorces his wife, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.

Here, God isn't condemning divorce in every instance. He's condemning the *treacherous* husband who initiates divorce out of malice or selfishness, causing deep pain and injustice to his faithful wife. God stands as a witness against *that* covenant-breaker.

Now, think about God's own actions with His people, Israel. For generations, He had been faithful to them, treating them like a beloved wife. But Israel continually chased after other gods, breaking their covenant with Him, acting like a wife repeatedly committing adultery. God patiently warned them, sent prophets, but they refused to turn back. Eventually, with a heavy heart, God Himself made a drastic, yet just, declaration against their persistent unfaithfulness.

Jeremiah 3:8 · I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

Think about that: God himself divorced unfaithful Israel. He gave her a certificate of divorce because of her persistent adultery. This makes it clear that God recognized divorce as a legitimate and just response when a covenant was fundamentally broken by continuous, unrepented sin.

It is the covenant-breaker God condemns, not the one who was broken by it.

Now, let's be clear: this isn't some free pass for casual divorce. Not at all. In fact, this understanding actually lifts marriage up to where it truly belongs, affirming its sanctity while also acknowledging the devastating impact of its violation. But crucially, it also shouts mercy and offers true liberation for the person who was sinned against, the one whose marriage was destroyed by another's choices. It allows for real healing, freedom, and new beginnings, without them carrying a guilt that isn't theirs to bear.

1.1 A Note on How This Book Was Made

This book was compiled by Publifye AS using artificial intelligence tools and the **Darash Bible Service** (darash.publifye.pro). This platform provides a massive research library, including 59 Bible translations and scholarly dictionaries like the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Strong's Concordance, and Easton's, among others.

The research was orchestrated by **Claude** (Anthropic), an AI assistant that performed the verse lookups, cross-referencing, and Greek and Hebrew word studies. This includes full morphological analysis — which is simply a way of looking at the underlying grammar and root of every word. While Claude drafted the prose under the direction of Publifye AS, every theological claim is built directly from Scripture and can be verified by you against the sources cited.

You will notice the writing uses a warm, first-person voice. This is a literary choice — a way to turn dense scholarship into a conversation. There is no single human author behind the "I"; it is a synthesis of biblical data. The exception is Chapter 13, "My Story," which contains the genuine personal testimony of a founder of Publifye AS. In that chapter, the "I" is not a literary device, but a human voice sharing a lived experience. While the style is conversational, the evidence is factual, and we encourage you to check the work as you read.

We hope you'll come on this journey through the Scriptures, setting aside preconceptions and simply asking, "What does God truly say?" When you really take in the whole truth, it always leads to freedom, dignity, and restoration for those who have been hurt.

Chapter 2

Introduction

The church has had a real hard time talking about divorce and remarriage. We've tended to fall into one of two traps: either a rigid legalism that condemns everyone, including the innocent, or a permissiveness that ignores what God actually intended. Neither approach helps people. It's time we dig into what the Bible says — not what tradition assumes or what culture prefers — so that we can understand God's heart for both marriage and the people who've been broken by it.

This book isn't about finding loopholes. It lays out five biblical truths, each building on the last, that together paint a clear picture. When you understand these five foundations, the confusing landscape of divorce and remarriage starts to make sense.

1. God Himself divorced Israel.

This might be the most uncomfortable starting point, but it's where the Bible takes us. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God describes His relationship with the Northern Kingdom of Israel using the language of marriage. He is the faithful husband. Israel is the unfaithful wife who repeatedly chased after other gods. And after centuries of patience, after sending prophet after prophet to call her back, God did something we wouldn't expect from the One who designed marriage:

Jeremiah 3:8 · She saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.

He issued a legal certificate of divorce — the same *sefer keritut* (scroll of cutting off) that a man would give his wife under the Torah. God followed His own legal procedure. And He did it because Israel's covenant-breaking was persistent, unrepentant, and total.

Why does this matter? Because God is perfectly holy and incapable of sinning. If He divorced Israel, then divorce itself cannot be inherently sinful in every circumstance. There are situations — specifically, a profound and persistent betrayal of a covenant — where divorce is not just permissible but can be a righteous act. That single fact reshapes everything that follows.

2. Porneia breaks the one-flesh bond.

So what kind of human actions can break a marriage? The Bible points directly to sexual immorality — porneia πορνεία^{G4202} — as a covenant-breaking act. But here's the part most people miss: the divorce paper doesn't *cause* the break. The betrayal already did that. The paper just acknowledges reality.

Paul makes this visible in his letter to the Corinthians. He's warning them about sexual sin, and he uses the exact same "one flesh" language from Genesis 2:24 — the verse that describes what marriage creates:

First Corinthians 6:16 · Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."

If a one-flesh bond can be *created* through an illicit sexual act, then it can also be *destroyed* through one. When a spouse commits porneia πορνεία^{G4202}, they don't just damage the marriage — they rupture the unique spiritual and physical unity that God designed marriage to be. The divorce certificate is not the cause of dissolution; it's the formal recognition that the one-flesh bond has already been shattered by betrayal. That's why Jesus's exception clause for porneia πορνεία^{G4202} in Matthew 19:9 isn't a loophole — it's a recognition of a reality that already exists.

3. People are classified by their actions, not their words.

This principle runs through the entire Bible, but it matters especially when we talk about marriage. Paul tells Titus about people who look religious on the outside but whose lives tell a different story:

Titus 1:16 · They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

James says it even more bluntly: faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Jesus Himself warned that many would say "Lord, Lord" and still be turned away because their lives didn't match their words (Matthew 7:21-23).

This matters because when Paul talks about the "unbeliever" who departs in 1 Corinthians 7:15, the question isn't what that person *claims* to believe. It's what they *do*. A spouse who abandons the marriage, works against their partner's calling, and refuses every attempt at reconciliation — their actions classify them, regardless of what church they attend on Sunday. I should be honest here: not all scholars agree that Paul intended this extension, and the word apistos ἄπιστος^{G571} in context refers to religiously mixed marriages. But the broader biblical principle — that conduct reveals the heart — is undeniable.

4. Not every marriage is something God actually joined together.

Jesus said "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6). But notice the qualifier: *what God has joined*. That implies some unions may not be what God joined at all.

The most striking example is in the book of Ezra. After the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, they discovered that many of the men had married foreign women — something God had explicitly forbidden because it led directly to idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). When Ezra found out, his reaction was visceral — he tore his garments, pulled out his hair, and fell to the ground in horror. These weren't casual relationships; they were legal, consummated marriages with children. But they were formed in direct defiance of God's command. And the response wasn't to preserve them:

Ezra 10:3 · Let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law.

God commanded the dissolution of existing marriages. Not because marriage is unimportant — precisely because it is. These unions were never "joined by God" in the covenantal sense. They were human arrangements formed in violation of His commands. And John the Baptist would later make the same point when he told Herod his marriage to Herodias was "not lawful" (Matthew 14:4) — a declaration that cost him his head.

5. Paul's pastoral framework.

Paul upholds the permanence of marriage. That's clear from Romans 7:2-3 — a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Marriage is intended to be for life. I believe that with all my heart.

But Paul doesn't stop there. In 1 Corinthians 7, dealing with the messy reality of believers married to unbelievers in Corinth, he writes something that changes everything for the abandoned spouse:

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

The Greek word Paul uses here — *douloō δουλόω*^{G1402}, "not enslaved" — is not the gentle word for "released from an agreement." It's the word for a slave being set free. Paul didn't accidentally choose a strong word. He deliberately uses the strongest freedom language he has available to declare that the innocent, abandoned spouse is not bound.

And then there's the command that follows naturally:

First Corinthians 7:9 · But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paul never restricts this command to only those who have never been married. The Greek word for "unmarried" (agamos ἄγαμος^{G22}) that he uses in verse 8 includes the divorced — we know because he uses the exact same word in verse 11 for a woman who has separated from her husband. If the divorced are agamos ἄγαμος^{G22}, and agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} people who burn are commanded to marry, then Paul's framework plainly includes the possibility of remarriage for those legitimately released from a prior marriage.

These five truths, taken together, show us a God who is both holy and merciful. He takes marriage seriously enough to model it as His own covenant with His people. But He also takes the innocent party seriously enough to provide legal, spiritual, and pastoral pathways to freedom and new life.

God takes marriage more seriously than divorce-permitting teachers do, and takes the innocent party more seriously than permanence teachers do.

That's the conviction this book will lay before you. Not from a position of having it all figured out — I've walked through this myself and I know the pain. But from a position of having searched the Scriptures honestly and found something that brings both conviction and freedom. Come, let's look at the evidence together.

Chapter 3

The Hebrew Marriage Contract

Deuteronomy 24:1 · If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a **certificate of divorce**, gives it to her and sends her from his house...

Before we get to the most startling fact in this entire book – that God Himself used this very legal instrument against His own unfaithful people – we need to understand what the instrument actually was. The legal framework of marriage and divorce in ancient Israel wasn't just some cultural norm that popped up. It was a system God Himself would later abide by, to His own sorrow.

God is not some capricious deity who makes up rules as He goes. He is the Lawgiver, the architect of covenant, and He holds Himself to His own standards. And the word "covenant" itself — **בְּרִית**^{H1285} — reveals its own architecture when you trace the letters back to their proto-Sinaitic pictographic origins: **Bet** (a house), **Resh** (a head/person), **Yod** (a hand at work), **Tav** (a cross-mark/sign). A covenant is a *house*, *headed* by a person, established by the work of a *hand*, and sealed with a *mark*. That is what a marriage is. That is what God's covenant with Israel is. The word carries the blueprint of the thing it names. In this ancient Hebrew system, we find two crucial documents that illuminate the divine drama of God and His people: the **Ketubah** and the **Get**.

But before either of those, there is something even more foundational. Buried in the legislation of Exodus 21 is a law so protective of the dismissed wife that it shakes every casual reading of Hebrew divorce law:

Exodus 21:10-11 · If he takes another wife to himself, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out free, for nothing — no money paid.

That phrase, **she shall go out free** (*yatze'ah chinam*), is the identical Hebrew language used for a slave released from bondage. If a husband withheld food, clothing, or conjugal love – the fundamental obligations of the covenant – his wife was granted emancipation. Not shame. Freedom. The ancient rabbis applied a devastating *a fortiori* argument: if even a slave wife held this right of liberation from a failing covenant, how much more a free woman?

This matters for everything that follows. The freedom of the dismissed or abandoned wife is not a late concession in Deuteronomy 24. It is rooted in the foundational law code of Exodus, written before Israel ever entered the land. **God encoded the protection of the abandoned spouse into the bedrock of His Torah.** And as we shall see, Paul reaches back to this same emancipation language centuries later when he declares the abandoned believer *not enslaved* (1 Corinthians 7:15).

And there is a second edge to this law that is easy to miss. The verb is *gāra* גָּרַע^{H1639} – *he shall not diminish* – to lessen, to keep back, to withdraw. The Torah does not set the bar at starvation. It sets it at **reduction**. She does not have to be destitute before the law moves; it is enough that he has begun to hold back what is owed her. And *owed* is precisely what the Hebrew says: **her** food, **her** covering, **her** *onah* – each of the three carries a feminine possessive suffix. These were not his gifts, to bestow or to ration at his pleasure. They were her due, and he was keeping them from her.

The **Ketubah** was the marriage contract. When I first learned about this, I admit I had a romanticized view of marriage. But the Ketubah wasn't some love poem written on parchment. **It was a hard, legal document, a covenant of protection for the wife.** It specified the husband's obligations – food, clothing, conjugal rights – ensuring her well-being was a legal matter, not a matter of his generosity.

The wife kept the Ketubah. It was her copy, her legal proof, her protection. The Talmud (Ketubot 57b) declares that a man was forbidden to live with his wife even for an hour without a Ketubah, lest she be reduced to the status of a concubine.

Marriage in ancient Israel was a two-stage process. The first stage was **Kiddushin**, meaning "sanctification." This was the betrothal. At this point, the woman was, in every legal sense, **married**. This is why Joseph needed to *divorce* Mary:

Matthew 1:19 · Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

She was legally bound, and only a formal document could dissolve that bond, even before they had lived together.

The second stage was **Nissuin**, the actual marriage ceremony – when the bride was brought under the *chuppah*, seven blessings were recited, and the marriage was consummated. But the legal bond was already established in Kiddushin.

When a covenant was broken, it came down to the **Get**, the certificate of divorce. The formal term in Deuteronomy 24:1 is *sefer keritut*, the "scroll of cutting off." The procedure was specific:

1. The husband had to write the Get.
2. Two witnesses had to sign it.
3. The Get was physically delivered to the wife.
4. Once she held that document, **she was free**. Free from covenant obligations, free to remarry, free to start a new life.

This is a critical detail: **the Get is not primarily a punishment; it is a release document**. Its fundamental purpose is to declare the woman no longer bound to her previous covenant and therefore free to enter a new one. Without it, she remains legally married, and any new relationship would be adultery.

The Mishnah codified the essential formula every Get had to contain. The man would say to his wife: **"Behold, you are free to marry any man."** That phrase, *harei at muteret l'chol adam*, was the legal core of the document. The Get's primary function was not to record that the marriage had ended. It was to declare the woman **free to enter a new covenant**. Remarriage was not a later implication of the Get. It was the point of it.

Deuteronomy 24:2 confirms this — and the Hebrew grammar is devastating for any view that forbids remarriage. The verse reads: *weyats'ah mibeyto wehalkhah wehayetah le'ish acher* — "and she goes out from his house and goes and becomes another man's." Three verbs in sequence, all in the same grammatical form: Qal **sequential perfect** (*waw*-consecutive perfect) — the chain Hebrew case-law uses to lay out the expected course of events, each step flowing naturally from the one before. The Torah presents divorce → departure → remarriage as a single unbroken legal sequence. The remarriage is not permitted as an exception. It is not grudgingly allowed. It is stated in the same matter-of-fact chain as the steps before it. **The remarriage of the dismissed woman is assumed, expected, and nowhere condemned**. The only thing Deuteronomy 24 forbids is the return to the *first* husband after she has been another man's wife (v.4) — that, and only that, is called an abomination — *to'evah* תועבה^{H8441}.

When God issued the Get to Israel in Jeremiah 3:8, **He was not making it up as He went along**. He followed His own Torah procedure, formally releasing Israel because she had played the harlot with other gods. Consider the exact parallels:

1. Torah required a man to find *ervat davar* (something indecent). God found Israel's incessant adulteries, her *porneia* πορνεία^{G4202}.
2. Torah required the husband to **write** the certificate. God declared, "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce."
3. Torah required the Get to be **delivered**. God sent Israel into exile.

4. Torah required **witnesses**. The prophets – Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea – testified to Israel’s unfaithfulness.

The Hebrew word for “cutting off” in *sefer keritut* comes from the root *karat* כָּרַת^{H3772}. This is the very same root used for “making a covenant” – *karat berit* – literally, “**cutting a covenant**.” Remember Genesis 15, when God cut covenant with Abraham by cutting animals in half? Marriage was a covenant cut. Divorce was a covenant **cut off**. The word *bērît* בְּרִית^{H1285} itself, used over 80 times as *karat berit*, linguistically implies both initiation *and* severance. It’s not just about creating a bond; the very concept acknowledges the potential for its ending. This is why Hebrew has multiple specific verbs for covenant-breaking: *hefer* (as in Psalm 55:20), *pa’ar* (like Leviticus 26:15), and *chahal* (seen in Numbers 30:2). The vocabulary itself assumes covenants *can* be broken. Both forming and cutting off a covenant were solemn, formal, witnessed acts. **God designed both.**

The bridge into the New Testament is direct. When Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 24:1 in Matthew 19:7 and Mark 10:4, he uses the Septuagint phrase **biblion apostasiou** – literally *a scroll of separation*. The noun apostasion ἀποστάσιον^{G647} comes from *aphistēmi* ἀφίστημι^{G868} – *to stand away from, to depart*. And what does the unbeliever of 1 Corinthians 7:15 do? Paul says they *separate* – **chorizetai** (chōrizō χωρίζω^{G5563}) – a different verb, but the very act the certificate-word names: standing away, departing. The conceptual chain is complete: the Hebrew *sefer keritut* becomes the Greek *biblion apostasiou* – the departure-scroll – in the Septuagint; and in 1 Corinthians 7:15 the unbeliever performs that departure in person. **The departing unbeliever of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is enacting, by their own conduct, precisely what the Get was designed to formally recognize.** They issue it, as it were, by leaving. And the innocent party is nevertheless free – just as the woman who held the Get was free.

The implications are straightforward:

1. The Get is a **release**, not just a rejection. It grants freedom.
2. God Himself followed His own legal procedure. He is not lawless.
3. Witnesses are required, ensuring accountability.
4. The certificate formalizes what has already happened in the heart and actions of the unfaithful party.
5. **Without the Get, the wife is trapped.** If we deny the innocent party the release that God Himself issued to Israel, we are trapping them in a broken covenant. We are denying them the freedom God’s own Torah provides.

Chapter 4

God's Own Divorce

This is, I believe, the most powerful and underexplored argument in the entire discussion around divorce and remarriage: **God Himself – the perfect, faithful, covenant-keeping Spouse – issued a certificate of divorce to Israel.**

Jeremiah 3:6-8 · The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it... I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries."

Notice the sequence. God watched. He waited. He said to Himself: *after she has done all this, she will return*. She did not. Only after prolonged patience – watching Judah witness Israel's punishment and still not repent – did He issue the certificate. The reason was her "adulteries" – and the Hebrew verb for that act, *ni'afah*, is in the **Piel** stem (intensive), not the simple Qal. This is not a single lapse; the grammar marks it as intensified, habitual, deliberate unfaithfulness. Her spiritual porneia πορνεία^{G4202} was persistent and calculated.

Some will object: "God speaking of Himself as a husband is merely a metaphor — you cannot build divorce theology on a figure of speech." Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* names this figure precisely: **Anthropopatheia** — Condescension — where "human affections and feelings are attributed to God ... in infinite condescension, He is thus spoken of in order to enable us to comprehend Him." Yes, it is a figure. But the point of the figure is that God condescends to use language we can understand. And within the figure, His actions are concrete: He watched, He waited, He issued a legal certificate. He followed precisely the Torah procedure He Himself had designed. A metaphor does not mean "not real." It means God stooped to our language to describe something He actually did.

Isaiah 50:1 confirms it: "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away?" God issued the Get – the *sefer keritut*, the scroll of cutting-off whose legal structure we examined in "The Hebrew Marriage Contract" – following precisely the Torah procedure He Himself had designed. The stated reason was what the New Testa-

ment calls porneia πορνεία^{G4202}: adulteries, unfaithfulness, a blatant and repeated violation of the sacred covenant. (*An honest note: Isaiah 50:1 addresses Judah, and some read its question as a challenge to produce a certificate Judah never received — it was the northern kingdom, Israel, that Jeremiah 3:8 names as formally divorced. Even on that reading the verse's own ending stands: "for your transgressions is your mother put away." The sending-away was real, and it was for cause.*)

Now, this truth collides with what Jesus said. But to understand His words, we must understand the specific question He was being asked. Miss the question, and you misread the answer.

In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees ask: *"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* That phrase — *for any cause* (*kata pasan aitian* in Greek) — was not a casual question. It was the technical name for a form of divorce recently invented by the school of Rabbi Hillel, who had split the phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 — *"a matter of indecency"* — into two separate, independent grounds: *"indecency"* (sexual sin) and *"a matter"* (literally anything at all, even burning a meal). Shammai's school insisted the phrase was a single compound meaning — *"a matter of sexual indecency"* — and allowed divorce only for that. The Pharisees were asking Jesus to referee this specific, live rabbinic debate.

Jesus sided with Shammai's restrictive reading — and went further, appealing past Moses to God's original design in Genesis. His ruling is not a blanket prohibition on all divorce. **It is a targeted rejection of the Hillelite no-fault divorce.**

Matthew 19:8-9 · He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Jesus permits divorce — and implicitly, remarriage — on grounds of porneia πορνεία^{G4202}. He is not grudgingly making a narrow concession. He is restoring the line Hillel had erased.

Here is the alignment that brought clarity to my own thinking:

God divorces Israel because of her adulteries (porneia) and issues a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8).

Jesus permits divorce on grounds of porneia, and remarriage after such a divorce does not equal adultery (Matthew 19:9).

And there is a third witness to the same alignment — listen to the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:31-32 · It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for a matter of porneia, makes her the victim of adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

There is one more detail worth careful attention – it comes from the grammar. In Matthew 5:32, Jesus says the man who divorces his wife without lawful grounds "makes her the victim of adultery." In the critical Greek text the phrase is *poiei auten moicheuthenai* – an aorist **passive** infinitive; the Byzantine text reads *moichasthai*, a middle/passive form – but on either reading the acting subject is the husband: *poiei auten*, **he makes her**. The dismissed woman does not *commit* adultery. She is *acted upon*. The voice of the verb places her as the one who suffers, not the one who sins. Mark 10:11 makes the direction explicit: the divorcing husband commits adultery **against her** (*ep' auten*). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus directs His condemnation at the one who initiates the unjust divorce. **The grammar of the New Testament will not allow us to transfer the guilt to the one who was dismissed.**

And do not slide past the second half of the verse, because the permanence view leans hard on it: "*and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*" Read as a standing rule over a class of women, that is a life sentence on every dismissed wife. Now, I will be honest with the grammar, as I have tried to be on every page. The word is *apolelymenēn ἀπολελυμένην*^{G630} – the perfect passive participle of the very verb Jesus has just used: *her, having been dismissed*. Standing alone, that participle could name a class – *any dismissed woman* – or it could point back to the woman of the first clause. The grammar allows both, and whoever tells you the Greek settles it, in either direction, is overselling. **What decides between the readings is not grammar. It is coherence** – which reading sits with everything else this verse, this sermon, and this Torah say.

So weigh them. The first clause has just used its own grammar to shield the dismissed wife: *poiei autēn* – **he makes her** the victim; she is acted upon, not acting. Read the second clause as a class-rule, and the same verse that just shielded her turns and walls her in for life – the victim of the first half becomes the untouchable of the second. Read it as pointing back to her, and the verse holds one line from start to finish: the "any cause" dismissal is a fraud, and the fraud contaminates everyone it touches – the husband who signs it, and the next man who builds on it. Weigh the Torah too. Deuteronomy 24:2 sends the certificated woman out to "*go and be another man's wife,*" and the Get formula – "*you are free to marry any man*" – exists for no other purpose. Some will answer that Jesus intensifies the Torah here, as He intensifies the laws on oaths and retaliation. Perhaps. But notice what verse 31 is actually quoting: not Moses, but the slogan Moses had been shrunk to – "*whoever divorces his wife, let him simply give her a certificate.*" Paperwork

as absolution. The antithesis corrects an abuse of the statute; nothing in it repeals the statute's protection of the woman.

And remember what we established: **the certificate does not break the bond; it recognizes a bond already broken.** No porneia, no broken bond – and a certificate written over an unbroken covenant is a lie about her status. She walks out holding a paper that says "free" while the covenant still stands. On this book's whole framework, that is why the man who marries her enters an adultery: not because divorced women are untouchable, but because *this* woman was never truly released. That is the reading I stand on, and I have shown you every weight on the scale. If you weigh it differently, then weigh all of it – the passive voice that shields her, the Torah that remarries her, and the certificate doctrine that Jesus's own words assume – and ask which reading asks less of the text.

This aligns with a common misunderstanding in the Old Testament, specifically Malachi 2:16. For centuries, translations led people to believe God Himself declared, "I hate divorce." But a closer look at the Hebrew phrase *ki-sane shalach* shows it is third-person masculine: "he hates and sends away" – not first-person, not "I hate." Modern translations like the ESV, CSB, and NIV 2011 now correctly render it: "For the man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord God of Israel, covers his garment with violence." What is God condemning there? Not divorce as a remedy for a broken covenant. He is condemning the treacherous, hateful husband who unjustly dismisses his wife. God condemns the one who *acts* violently and faithlessly in divorce, not divorce as a legitimate legal recognition of an already-shattered covenant.

If the permanence view were absolute – if divorce and remarriage are *always* adultery, no exceptions – then God Himself committed a theological impossibility in Jeremiah 3. **That cannot be the correct reading of His perfect, righteous character.**

But the story doesn't end with divorce. After the divorce, God still pursued restoration.

Jeremiah 3:12 · Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, "Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever."

He called them to return. He promised He would not be angry forever. And in Jeremiah 31, we see the promise of a New Covenant – written on the hearts of His people. This is, in a real sense, a remarriage, a new union on entirely new terms. Think also of Hosea, whom God commanded to take back his adulterous wife Gomer as a living parable of God's pursuing love.

The full picture is this:

1. **God issued a legitimate divorce because of porneia.** Real, valid, righteous.
2. **God also pursued restoration**, calling His people back.
3. **When restoration was refused**, the New Covenant became a new union – a re-marriage on new terms.

Both truths stand simultaneously. The divorce was real. The new covenant is also real. Neither cancels the other.

One final, crucial point about the sequence. The divorce certificate did not *cause* the break. The break had already happened:

1. Israel committed adulteries – porneia πορνεία^{G4202} – in the eyes of God.
2. The covenant bond was broken by Israel's own unfaithful actions.
3. God then issued the certificate – not as the cause of the break, but as a legal recognition of the already-broken reality.

The certificate acknowledged what Israel's porneia had already done. It did not create the brokenness; it gave legal weight to the spiritual reality. This is vital when we consider the complexities of broken marriages today. Sometimes the covenant is shattered by one party's unfaithfulness, and the divorce certificate is simply the legal recognition of a reality that was already tragically established.

Chapter 5

Porneia Breaks the Bond

First Corinthians 6:16 · Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "the two will become one flesh."

My dear friend, my heart aches for the confusion and pain I see among God's children when it comes to marriage and divorce. For too long, we have wrestled with this, twisting ourselves into knots trying to understand what the Lord truly says. But I believe the Spirit is revealing a truth that cuts through the fog, a truth that is both liberating and unflinching.

The core insight, the foundation upon which we must build, is this: porneia doesn't merely *permit* divorce, as if it's a reluctant concession. No, my brother, my sister. **Porneia already dissolved the one-flesh bond.** The certificate of divorce, that painful piece of paper, is simply the formal, public recognition that the marriage was *already broken* by the act itself. Do you see the profound difference?

This is where the Word of God, as always, brings clarity. We know the sacred words from the very beginning, the divine blueprint for union:

Genesis 2:24 · Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

This is the divine design! A beautiful, mystical union, a joining so profound it creates a new entity, *one flesh*. But then, the Apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, drops a truth that shatters so many of our human assumptions:

First Corinthians 6:16 · Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "the two will become one flesh."

Pause and truly ponder this, my beloved Saints. Paul's point here is absolutely devastating to any view that insists the marriage bond is metaphysically indestructible except by death. What is he saying? He is telling us, with divine authority, that the one-flesh bond is not some magical, unbreakable spell cast at the altar. No! It is *created* and, tragically, it can be *broken* by the sexual act itself!

And the Greek makes this even more vivid than most English translations convey. The word Paul uses for “unites himself” is not some gentle term for association or companionship. The underlying verb is *kollaō* κολλάω^{G2853}, and it means to *glue*, to cement, to fasten together. Think about that — glue. Two surfaces bonded into one. The specific form Paul uses here is *kollaō* κολλάω^{G2853} — a present passive participle. In plain language: “the one *being glued to*.” It is something happening *to* him in the very act of sexual union. He is being fused to her, body to body, whether he intended a covenant or not.

Now here is where it gets remarkable. This is the same verb family that appears in Genesis 2:24 in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament that Paul and his readers knew by heart. There, the Hebrew *dabaq* (“to cling, to cleave”) is rendered *proskollēthēsetai* προσκολλάω^{G4347} — “shall be glued to.” Same root. Same image. The divine blueprint for marriage says a man shall be *glued to* his wife. And Paul, quoting that very verse, says the man who sleeps with a prostitute is *being glued to* her in exactly the same way.

Do you see what the Spirit is revealing through this language? The one-flesh bond is not created by a ceremony. It is not created by a certificate. It is created by the act of sexual joining — the *gluing together* of two persons into one body. That is why Paul can say, with a straight face, that a man who visits a prostitute becomes “one flesh” with her. The bond is real. It is physical. It is created in the act itself.

And if the one-flesh bond can be *created* outside marriage by the sexual act — if a man can be *glued to* a prostitute and become one body with her — then the same mechanism works in reverse. When a married person commits porneia, they are *being glued to* someone who is not their spouse. They have created a new one-flesh bond. And in doing so, they have torn apart the original one. The glue that held the marriage together has been ripped away and applied elsewhere.

Think about it with me. When a spouse, one of God’s precious children, commits porneia — that is, any illicit sexual act — what have they done? They have already, in that moment of betrayal, created a one-flesh union with another person. The original, sacred one-flesh bond, established before God, has been brutally violated and, yes, replaced. It’s not the divorce certificate that breaks it; it is the act of betrayal, the porneia, that rips it apart. The certificate, then, is merely a public acknowledgment of what porneia already did in the shadows. It’s a recognition of a broken reality, not the cause of the breakage.

Do you doubt this? Look to our Heavenly Father Himself! He gives us the perfect illustration in His own relationship with Israel, His chosen bride.

- **Israel committed adulteries — porneia.** Time and again, they turned from Him, worshipping other gods, prostituting themselves spiritually and often literally.

- **The covenant bond was broken by Israel's own action.** Not by God's desire, but by their rebellion.
- **God issued the certificate — recognizing the already-broken reality.** He speaks through Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 3:8 · I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away with a certificate of divorce. Yet her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear, but went and prostituted herself as well.

Do you see the sequence, my friend? The certificate *followed* the breaking. It did not *cause* it. The sin of porneia, the covenant betrayal, was the axe that severed the sacred bond. The divorce certificate was simply God's public declaration of what had already tragically occurred.

So, let's lay it out, simply and clearly:

- When porneia is committed, the unfaithful spouse acts, and **this breaks the one-flesh bond.**
- When the certificate is issued, the wronged spouse acts, and **this formally recognizes the already-broken bond.**
- When remarriage occurs, the wronged spouse acts, and **this creates a new, legitimate one-flesh bond.**

Under this understanding, my beloved Saints, the wronged spouse who remarries after the horrific act of porneia is *not* committing adultery. How could they be? There is no longer a marriage to commit adultery against! The bond was severed, brutally and irrevocably, by the unfaithful party's own action. This is grace, my friends, for those who have been deeply wounded.

This is where I must be unflinching, even if it challenges long-held traditions. The permanence position, which insists that the one-flesh bond is metaphysically indestructible except by physical death, runs headlong into Paul's inspired words in 1 Corinthians 6. If the bond were truly indestructible, how could it be created outside of marriage through fornication with a prostitute? Paul clearly shows us it *can* be created outside marriage. And if it can be created outside marriage, then it can absolutely be broken *inside* marriage!

The one-flesh bond is not made of stone, my friends; it is made of covenant faithfulness. And covenant faithfulness, tragically, can be destroyed by betrayal. This is not a pleasant truth, but it is a biblical truth.

Now, I must address an objection you will hear, because it sounds learned and careful but crumbles under examination. Some scholars argue that when Jesus says “except for porneia” in Matthew 19:9, He is only talking about unfaithfulness during the *betrothal* period — not adultery within a consummated marriage. Under this reading, the exception clause is vanishingly narrow: it would apply only to a situation like Joseph’s, when he discovered Mary was pregnant before they had come together.

But look at the text itself. In Matthew 19:3, the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask whether it is lawful for a man to divorce “his wife” — in Greek, *tēn gynaika autou* G1135. The word is *gynē* γυνή^{G1135}, and it means *wife*, a married woman. These are not young men asking about broken engagements. They are asking about *married couples*. And Jesus answers in kind, using the same word in verse 9. The entire conversation is about marriage, not betrothal.

Furthermore, the word *porneia* πορνεία^{G4202} itself refuses to be confined to betrothal unfaithfulness. Strong’s defines it as “harlotry, including adultery and incest; figuratively, idolatry.” Its extended definition explicitly includes “sexual intercourse with close relatives (Leviticus 18)” and “the worship of idols; the defilement of idolatry.” This is a word with an enormous semantic range — it covers adultery, fornication, incest, prostitution, and covenant unfaithfulness of every kind. To shrink it down to mean *only* premarital infidelity during a betrothal period is to do violence to the Greek.

And Paul himself settles the matter. In 1 Corinthians 5:1, he uses this very word — *porneia* — to describe a man sleeping with his father’s wife. That is manifestly not a betrothal situation. It is sexual sin within an existing family structure. Paul reaches for *porneia* because the word covers the full range of sexual covenant betrayal, exactly as Jesus used it.

And let us not limit our understanding of *porneia* further still. While it certainly encompasses literal sexual unfaithfulness, its root meaning, especially in prophetic literature, carries the broad sense of *covenant sexual unfaithfulness*. When God accuses Israel of *porneia* in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, He is not *only* talking about literal adultery. He is talking about a comprehensive, devastating covenant betrayal in its fullest sense.

A brief word on the language itself, because precision here matters. The Greek word is *porneia* πορνεία^{G4202}, derived from *pornē* πόρνη^{G4204} (a prostitute), which itself comes from *πέρνημι* (*pernēmi*, to sell). At its root, it describes someone who *sells* what should never be for sale — their covenant loyalty. Strong’s G4202 confirms this breadth explicitly: its extended definition includes not only “adultery” and “fornication” but also “sexual intercourse with close relatives; Leviticus 18” and, remarkably, “the worship of idols; of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.” This is not some narrow, clinical term. The word’s own lexical definition encompasses the full

prophetic charge — including spiritual harlotry, the worship of false gods, the comprehensive turning away from covenant loyalty.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *porneia* πορνεία^{G4202} consistently translates the Hebrew *zānâ* זָנָה^{H2181} and its noun form *zēnūt* זְנוּת^{H2184} — the very words the prophets use when God charges Israel with harlotry in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. The semantic range of both words extends far beyond a single physical act. When Ezekiel 16 describes Jerusalem's *zenut* across eleven devastating chapters, the charge is comprehensive covenant betrayal: abandoning the One who loved her, giving herself to foreign powers, forgetting the terms of the covenant entirely. **This is the *porneia* that breaks the one-flesh bond** — not only a single act of adultery, but any deep and sustained covenant unfaithfulness, the turning away of the whole person from the sacred union.

So when Jeremiah and Ezekiel reach for this word to describe what Israel did to God, they are not stretching a metaphor. They are using *porneia* exactly as its definition intends — covenant betrayal in its deepest and most devastating form. The prophetic usage is not a figurative extension of the word. It is the word's own heart.

Read Ezekiel 16, my friends. I urge you to study it with fresh eyes. It is the most extended, heart-wrenching treatment of God's marriage to Jerusalem, described in full covenantal terms. And her *porneia* is described as utterly comprehensive unfaithfulness, a spiritual prostitution that tore their sacred bond apart. This is not some minor transgression; this is a breach of the deepest covenant imaginable.

So, let us bring it all together, dear Saints, into a clear and undeniable chain of truth:

1. **God Himself divorced Israel** — Jeremiah 3:8.
2. **The ground for this divorce was *porneia*** — a profound covenant betrayal.
3. ***Porneia* breaks the one-flesh bond** — 1 Corinthians 6:16.
4. **The certificate of divorce recognizes the already-broken bond;** it does not cause it.
5. **Jesus permits remarriage after *porneia*.**

Matthew 19:9 · I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.

6. The Torah had already freed the neglected and the abused wife — and Jesus never revoked that freedom.

Exodus 21:10-11 · If he takes another wife to himself, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out free, for nothing — no money paid.

7. Paul permits remarriage when the unbeliever departs.

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

8. Paul commands marriage for those who burn.

First Corinthians 7:9 · But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

My heart cries out: Let us not bind what God has loosed!

Yes, my friends, "until death parts us" captures the beautiful intention and the divine ideal of marriage. It is what we strive for, what we pray for, what we covenant for. But it does not — and *cannot* — describe what happens when one party commits porneia. Physical death is not the *only* thing that can end a marriage. **Covenant betrayal, that brutal act of porneia, ends it too.** God Himself demonstrated this truth in Jeremiah 3.

So, let us be clear, Saints. The certificate of divorce is not the sin. No. **The porneia was the sin — committed by the one who left, by the one who betrayed the sacred covenant.** And for the one who was wronged, for the one left with a shattered heart and a broken bond, there is grace, there is freedom, and there is the possibility of new life in Christ. May the Lord give us eyes to see and hearts to understand His liberating truth.

Chapter 6

What God Joins Together

Matthew 19:6 · So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

My dear friend, these words from our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:6 are among the most profound and sacred in all of Scripture concerning marriage. They speak to the divine, mysterious union that God Himself orchestrates, a bond so holy that no human hand should dare to tear it asunder. I have meditated on this verse countless times, felt its weight and its beauty, and seen its power in the lives of the Saints.

But here is the critical question, one that so many sincere believers, myself included for a long time, have wrestled with: **Does God join together every single marriage without exception, regardless of how it was entered or the circumstances surrounding it?** Is every union, once legally contracted, automatically stamped with God's divine sanction, making it unbreakable in His eyes?

If we answer with an unqualified *yes* to that question, we immediately run into a profound theological problem, a collision with other, equally clear passages of God's holy Word. For Scripture itself gives us explicit, undeniable examples of marriages that God not only did not join, but actively **commanded to be dissolved**.

Think with me, if you will, to one of the most devastating examples for any view of absolute, unconditional permanence: the returning exiles in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Oh, the pain and the conviction in those chapters!

The people of Israel, after their long captivity, returned to the promised land, to rebuild Jerusalem and their spiritual lives. Yet, in their weakness and their wandering, they had intermarried with foreign women, violating God's explicit, ancient command to keep themselves separate, a holy people. When Ezra, that faithful priest, discovered this, his reaction was not one of gentle understanding or quiet prayer. No, he tore his garments, pulled out his hair, and fell to the ground in utter anguish before the Lord. He understood the gravity of their sin, how it defiled the covenant.

Ezra 10:2-3 · And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these wives and

their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law.”

My brothers and sisters, read that again slowly. **God, through Ezra, commanded the dissolution of existing marriages.** These were not casual relationships; these were legal, consummated marriages, many with children born from them. Yet, the divine response was not to preserve them, not to sanctify them retroactively, but to **dissolve them**. Why? Because God did not join them together. They were human joinings, formed in direct violation of His divine covenant, and the holy, righteous response was separation, not preservation.

And the Hebrew vocabulary here is unmistakable — this is formal legal language for the dissolution of marriages. In Ezra 10:3, the verb used for sending away these wives is “to cause to go out” (yāṣā׳ הוֹצִיא׳^{H3318}) — the hiphil (causative) form of the verb “to go out” (yāṣā׳ יָצָא׳^{H3318}). This is not informal separation or a cooling-off period. The hiphil causative carries the force of a deliberate, authoritative act: to make someone depart, to formally dismiss. It is legal language for divorce and expulsion.

Then in Ezra 10:11, when the assembly responds, Ezra commands them to “separate yourselves” from the peoples of the land and from these “foreign women” (׳יִשְׁשָׁא הַנָּשִׁים^{H802} nokrî׳ הַנְּכַרִּיּוֹת^{H5237} — literally “the alien women”). The verb he uses for this separation is “to divide, to separate” (bādal בָּדַל׳^{H914}). Now, beloved, here is what arrests me about that word. It is the very same root that appears in Genesis 1:4, when God divided the light from the darkness at the dawn of creation. The same verb. When God separated light from darkness — the first great act of cosmic ordering — He used bādal בָּדַל׳^{H914}. And when God, through Ezra, commanded the separation of His people from unlawful marriages, the text reaches for that same word. This is not incidental. The language tells us that dissolving these unions was an act of divine ordering, of restoring boundaries that sin had blurred, every bit as purposeful as creation itself.

The legal weight of the Hebrew here is unmistakable: these are formal, God-commanded dissolutions of existing marriages. If God can **command** the dissolution of marriages that violate His covenant, then not every marriage is “what God has joined together.”

If the permanence view were truly absolute, if *every* marriage was automatically joined by God, then Ezra 10 is simply impossible. It cannot exist in the canon of God’s Word. Yet, there it stands, a towering, unflinching testimony to a truth we must not ignore.

And the pattern repeats itself! Later, Nehemiah, that passionate builder and reformer, confronted the Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. He saw the children speaking the language of Ashdod, not the language of Judah. He saw the very identity of God’s people being eroded. And what did he invoke? The tragic example of King Solomon:

Nehemiah 13:26-27 · Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by such things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?

Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines were, by all legal standards of his day, life-long unions. They were not fleeting affairs. Yet, they became the very instrument of his spiritual destruction, turning his heart away from the living God. **God did not join those together.** They were human choices, made outside of God's perfect will, and they brought ruin.

Let us move to the New Testament, to the bold, uncompromising voice of John the Baptist. He stood before Herod Antipas, a powerful ruler, and declared a truth that would cost him his life.

Matthew 14:3-4 · For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

John did not say, «This marriage has problems, but God has joined you, so try to work through it.» No! He declared it **unlawful**. The marriage existed, legally and physically, in the eyes of the world. But John, a prophet of the Most High, declared it illegitimate in the eyes of God. He lost his head over this truth, yet he would not compromise. My dear Saints, who among us today has such courage, such unwavering commitment to call sin by its name, even when it is wrapped in the guise of a *marriage*? A true prophet of God is obligated to name an unlawful union, even at the cost of his very life.

This principle runs deep through the Old Covenant. It was not just about specific instances; it was about God's foundational commands.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 · You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

When these forbidden marriages occurred anyway, they were not suddenly sanctified or made holy by the mere act of their existence. They remained precisely what God had declared them to be: **forbidden unions**. God's command does not change because humans choose to disobey it.

And let us not forget the entire chapter of Leviticus 18, which meticulously lists various prohibited unions, calling them **abominations** in God's sight. If someone entered into one of these unions, did it miraculously become holy simply because it was now a *marriage*? Of course not! God did not join those together. They were an affront to His holiness.

This divine principle carries into the New Covenant through the Apostle Paul:

Second Corinthians 6:14 · Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

Paul's command here, though often applied broadly, certainly speaks to the most intimate of human partnerships: marriage. It implies, powerfully, that an unequally yoked marriage, one between a believer and an unbeliever, was **never God's design** for His children. It is not what He joins together.

The Greek behind this matters. The word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 6:14 is heterozygeō ἑτεροζυγοῦντες from heteros ἕτερος^{G2087} (different) and zygos ζυγός^{G2218} (yoke). The image is agricultural: two animals of mismatched size or strength harnessed together, pulling in different directions, breaking the furrow. This is not a mild warning; it is a picture of structural incompatibility. And in Matthew 19:6, Jesus uses syzeugnymi συνέζευξεν^{G4801} (from syzeugnymi συζεύγνυμι^{G4801}, to yoke together) for what God does in holy marriage — the same zygos ζυγός^{G2218} root. **What God joins (syzeugnymi συνέζευξεν^{G4801}) is a matched yoke. What 2 Corinthians 6:14 forbids is a mismatched one (heterozygeō ἑτεροζυγοῦντες^{G2087}).** Wilson's *Bible Types* confirms the typological distinction. Under "Yoke," Wilson writes on Matthew 11:29: "This term is used to indicate the blessed union for service which the Lord desires ... The Christian, walking with the Lord, finds the work to be easy, and the load is light." And on 2 Corinthians 6:14: "The yoke represents an unhappy union of those who are saved with those who are unsaved ... The Lord commands His people to be linked up only with Christians." A matched yoke is light and life-giving. A mismatched yoke is structural incompatibility. The two Greek words share the same root, and together they answer the question: not every marriage is a syzeugnymi συνέζευξεν^{G4801} — God's own yoking — and the one that is not cannot carry the full weight of Matthew 19:6.

And the grammar of syzeugnymi συνέζευξεν^{G4801} itself deserves a closer look, because it tells us something vital about the nature of God's action. In the Greek, syzeugnymi συνέζευξεν^{G4801} is Aorist, Active, Indicative, Third Person, Singular. Each of those details matters. The aorist tense points to a specific, completed action — not a general principle, not an ongoing process, but a particular act that God performed in a particular marriage. The active voice tells us God is the agent — He is the one doing the yoking; it is not something that

happens passively or automatically when two people sign a marriage certificate. The indicative mood states it as a fact, and the third person singular — “He yoked together” — identifies one specific actor: God Himself.

This means that syzeugnymi συζευξεν^{G4801} describes a divine act of joining that is particular, not universal. God actively yokes together certain unions. The verb does not say “whatever a justice of the peace joins” or “whatever two people decide.” It says what **God** joined. And if God is the active agent, then His agency is selective. He joins marriages that are formed within His covenant purposes. He does not rubber-stamp every legal contract that humans draw up, regardless of whether it violates His own commands. The passive construction would be entirely different — and Jesus did not use the passive. He used the active, because God’s hand in a true marriage is deliberate and purposeful, not automatic.

Now set this beside the verse most often quoted to shut this whole question down — Malachi 2:16, “God hates divorce.” What does the Hebrew actually say? The Masoretic Text reads סָנֵה׃ שָׁנֵה׃ שָׁלַח׃ שָׁלַח׃ — literally “for he-hates sending-away.” The verb *sānē*׃ שָׁנֵה׃^{H8130} is Qal, Perfect, Third Person, Masculine, Singular: “**he hated**” — not first-person, not “I hate.” And *šālāḥ* שָׁלַח׃^{H7971} is a Piel infinitive construct of the verb “to send away” (*šālāḥ* שָׁלַח׃^{H7971}) — the standard Hebrew legal term for divorce. And the proto-Sinaitic pictograms of *šālāḥ* שָׁלַח׃^{H7971} reveal the violence of what divorce does: **Shin** (teeth/consuming fire), **Lamed** (a shepherd’s staff/authority), **Chet** (a wall/fence). The sending-away is the consumption of the authority that once protected the walls of the household. Divorce devours the very structure it was sheltered by. The subject of *sānē*׃ שָׁנֵה׃^{H8130} is not God making a universal pronouncement. The subject is the treacherous husband from verses 14–15, the man who has been faithless to the wife of his youth. He is the one who “hates” and “sends away.”

This is why modern translations that follow the Hebrew closely have corrected the older rendering. The KJV’s “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away” was based on a different reading of the Hebrew — one that took God as the subject of “hates” and treated the verse as a divine declaration against divorce as a category. But the grammar does not support this. The verb is third-person, not first-person. Modern scholarship — reflected in the ESV (“the man who does not love his wife but divorces her”), the CSB (“If he hates and divorces his wife”), and the NIV 2011 (“The man who hates and divorces his wife”) — has recognized what the Hebrew actually says. God is not the one who hates. The treacherous husband is the one who hates and divorces, and **he** covers his garment with violence.

The Septuagint — the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the apostles themselves used — confirms this same reading from a different angle. It does not render the verse as “I hate divorce.” Instead, the Septuagint’s treatment of the passage keeps the

focus on the divorcing husband's sin. And notice what Malachi 2:14 establishes as the context: "the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth." God's role in this passage is that of a **witness** — He stands as the one who testifies against the treacherous husband, not as the one issuing an abstract theological statement about divorce as a category.

This matters enormously, my dear friend, because Malachi 2:16 is **the** most commonly weaponized verse against divorced people. Pastors quote it from pulpits. Well-meaning friends offer it as a rebuke. Entire theological systems rest their weight on the phrase "God hates divorce." But when we go to the Hebrew — when we look at the actual grammar, the actual verb forms, the actual subject of the sentence — we find that this verse is one of Scripture's most passionate **defenses** of the wronged spouse, not a weapon to be turned against her. God is standing with the betrayed wife, as her witness, declaring that the husband who hates and discards her has covered himself in violence.

This is why modern translations that follow the Hebrew closely render it as the ESV, CSB, and the 2011 NIV do:

Malachi 2:14-16 · But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant... So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. "For the man who hates and divorces his wife, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Read carefully: God is not the one who hates. The treacherous husband is the one who hates and divorces, and **he** covers his garment with violence. Jerome, Luther, Calvin, and the Septuagint all read it this way. The passage is not an abstract condemnation of divorce as a category. It is God standing as witness against the man who treacherously abandons the wife of his youth — the very woman the rest of Malachi 2 calls his companion and wife by covenant. **When properly translated, Malachi 2:16 is one of Scripture's most passionate defenses of the wronged spouse**, not a weapon to be turned against her.

But here is the crucial, often overlooked part: **the permanence camp consistently ignores what comes just a few verses before, in the very same passage!**

Malachi 2:11 · Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

Do you see it, beloved Saints? **In the same breath, God hates the unholy marriages that led to the divorces He also hates!** You cannot, in good conscience, cite Malachi 2:16 without fully accounting for Malachi 2:11. God hates the desecration of His people through unholy unions, and He hates the tearing apart of legitimate unions. He is consistent in His holiness!

So, what then, does "What God joins together" truly mean? It is not, I have come to understand, a blanket statement about every legally contracted marriage in human history. No! It operates within a very specific, divine, covenantal framework:

- It refers to two people entering into marriage **according to God's design**.
- It speaks of a union formed **in faith and covenant faithfulness**.
- It describes a marriage that is **not in violation of His explicit commands**.
- It speaks of a bond formed **within the boundaries He established** for purity and holiness.

When marriages are formed outside this sacred framework, they are, quite simply, **human joinings**. They are entered into by human will, perhaps by human sin, or human ignorance. While God, in His boundless grace, can certainly work within such situations for good, as Romans 8:28 so beautifully reminds us:

Romans 8:28 · And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

These unions do not automatically carry the full divine sanction and protective covering of Matthew 19:6. They are not what God Himself has joined.

My dear brothers and sisters, we must not shrink from the full counsel of God's Word. The truth is often complex, sometimes uncomfortable, but always liberating. **What God has joined together** is not a universal declaration over every human pairing. It is a sacred promise and a divine protection over covenant marriages, those unions entered into according to His perfect will and design.

Ezra 10 stands as a permanent, undeniable testimony that God can, and sometimes does, command the ending of existing marriages that violate His covenant. John the Baptist stands as a burning lamp, reminding us that a prophet of God must name unlawful unions, regardless of the personal cost. And yes, even our God Himself, in His righteous anger against Israel's idolatry, issued a certificate of divorce to His own people when their actions made it the only just and righteous response (Jeremiah 3:8).

Let us, the Saints, walk in the full truth of His Word, seeking His heart in every matter, and never allowing human tradition or a partial reading of Scripture to override the clear, consistent voice of our God. May we always strive for the holy, covenantal marriage that He delights in, and may we have the courage to discern when a union, despite its worldly appearance, was never truly joined by Him.

Chapter 7

Actions Classify, Not Words

Jeremiah 2:19 · Your own evil will discipline you; your own apostasy will rebuke you. Know then and see how evil and bitter it is for you to abandon the LORD your God.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, children of the Most High God, I want to speak to you today about a truth that is both simple and profoundly challenging. It is a truth that Scripture declares from Genesis to Revelation, a constant refrain that we must never forget, especially in these days of confusion. The verbal claim of faithfulness, the mere *words* we speak, can never, not ever, override the powerful, undeniable testimony of our actual conduct. **Our actions, my friends, they classify us.** They declare who and what we truly are, far more eloquently than any spoken profession.

I have seen it in my own life, and I have seen it in the lives of others, how easy it is to cling to a verbal declaration while our feet walk a different path. But God, our righteous Judge, looks deeper. He sees the heart, yes, but He also looks at the fruit of that heart, revealed in our deeds. And when unfaithfulness rears its ugly head, it does not, it cannot, condemn the faithful party. No, my Saints, **the unfaithfulness reflects back entirely upon the one who committed it.**

Consider the principle laid bare in Jeremiah 2:19, a verse that cuts to the very core of this truth. Do you hear the weight of that, beloved? God is not implicated in Israel's sin. He is not stained by their rebellion. Their sin, their turning away, implicates Israel alone. It is their own doing, their own choice, and it is *they* who will taste the bitter fruit of it. The unfaithfulness does not condemn God; it returns upon the one who committed it. How could our perfect God be blamed for the choices of His wayward children? He simply names the reality they have created.

Think of ancient Israel. Oh, how often they would declare, *"We are God's people! We are His chosen!"* The verbal claim, the ancestral inheritance, it never ceased. They held onto that profession with a death grip. But what did God see? What did His prophets declare?

Ezekiel 16:15 · But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your prostitution on anyone who passed by and gave yourself to him.

Jeremiah 2:35 · You say, 'I am innocent; he is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'

Hosea 2:2 · Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove her adulteries from her face and her unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

Do you see the heart-wrenching pattern, my friends? Israel claimed the covenant relationship, "*I am innocent, I am yours!*" But God, in His divine wisdom and justice, looked not at their verbal profession, but at their *actions*. And God, with a sorrowful but unflinching gaze, named the reality that Israel's actions had created. **The guilt, my Saints, rested entirely on Israel.** Not on God for naming their sin, but on them for committing it.

This truth is not confined to the Old Covenant. The Spirit of God carries this same unflinching light into the New. The New Testament crystallizes this principle with even greater clarity, leaving us no room for doubt.

Paul, that mighty apostle, declares to Titus:

Titus 1:16 · They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for any good work.

He states it explicitly: actions can functionally negate a verbal profession of faith! What a solemn warning for us all!

And our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the very Son of God, speaks with such piercing truth in Matthew 7:

Matthew 7:21-23 · Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Here, Jesus makes it abundantly clear: the mere confession "Lord, Lord" does not determine spiritual reality. No! **Our actions, our obedience to the Father's will, these are the true indicators.**

And James, the brother of our Lord, echoes this with such force:

James 2:17 · In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

A claimed faith that produces no corresponding fruit, no tangible evidence in our lives, is not simply weak faith, my dear ones. James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says it is **dead**. And look at the Greek here, because the word James chooses is devastating. The word for "dead" is nekros νεκρός^{G3498} — Adjective, Nominative, Singular, Feminine, derived from nekys G3498, a corpse. This is not a gentle word. James does not say that faith without works is "weak," or "immature," or "incomplete." He says it is nekros νεκρός^{G3498} — *dead*. A corpse. And the verb eimi ἐστίν^{G1510} is Present, Active, Indicative — "IS dead," right now, as a present ongoing reality. Not "will become dead," not "risks dying." It *is* dead. And notice the phrase that closes the verse: kata καθ' ^{G2596}heautou ἐαυτὴν^{G1438} — "in itself," "by itself," "according to its own nature." James specifies that faith without works is dead *intrinsically*. It is not that external circumstances kill it. It is not that someone else declared it dead. It is dead in its own essence, by its very nature, because it never had life to begin with.

Now bring that into the marriage context, beloved, because the application is direct. A marriage profession — "*I am your spouse, I am a believer, I am committed*" — that produces no corresponding faithfulness, no covenant-keeping action, no willingness to dwell together, is not merely a weak marriage. By James's own Spirit-breathed principle, it is a dead one. The profession without the works is nekros νεκρός^{G3498} — a corpse. And just as James says that lifeless faith is dead *kath' heautēn*, according to its own nature, so a covenant claim without covenant action is dead in its own essence. No one killed it from the outside. No court ruling ended it. No innocent spouse destroyed it. It was dead intrinsically, because the one who made the profession never backed it with life. And a dead profession, my dear Saints, cannot hold a living person in bondage.

I often think of the mirror analogy from James, chapter 1. It is so powerful, so very simple:

James 1:23-25 · Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

The mirror, you see, reflects back the truth of who the person actually is. It shows them their reality. The person who forgets, who walks away unchanged, who fails to act upon what they have seen — they are not condemned by the mirror itself. No, they

are condemned by their own choice to ignore what the mirror showed them. The faithful party holding the mirror, God's Word in this case, bears no guilt for what the mirror reveals. **The responsibility rests squarely on the one who turns away.**

Now, let us apply this profound truth to a passage that has brought so much pain and confusion to God's children, 1 Corinthians 7:15:

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such circumstances; God has called us to peace.

Crucially, my beloved Saints, Paul does not require that the departing spouse formally profess unbelief with their lips. He requires only that they *act* like an unbeliever by departing the covenant, by abandoning their spouse and the marriage. Notice the verb Paul actually uses: *chōrizō χωρίζεται*^{G5563} (from *chōrizō* G5563, to separate, to divide apart) — a present indicative describing the act of ongoing departure. It is a verb of motion and conduct, not of profession. The person who *chōrizetai* G5563 — who enacts separation — is classified by that act. The person who says, "*I am a believer*," but then *chōrizetai* G5563 from the marriage, undermines their spouse's calling, works against God's work, and betrays the sacred covenant — their actions classify them! **Paul's category of "the unbeliever who leaves" is determined by conduct, not by verbal profession.** It is not what they *say*, but what they *do* that defines their spiritual state in this context.

Do you see the beautiful, consistent symmetry from the Old Testament right into the New, and specifically into the sacred covenant of marriage?

- Israel said, "*We are God's people!*" A spouse says, "*I am a believer!*"
- But Israel acted in *porneia* G4202 and idolatry, continually breaking covenant. And a spouse acts against God's work, abandons the marriage, and departs.
- God looked at Israel's actions, not their verbal claim. And Scripture, through Paul, looks at the spouse's actions, not their verbal claim.
- God issued a certificate of divorce, recognizing the brokenness. And the innocent spouse is released — declared "*not enslaved*".
- The guilt for the broken covenant reflected back onto Israel alone. And the guilt for the broken marriage covenant reflects back onto the departing spouse.
- God was free for a new covenant. And the innocent spouse is free for remarriage, called to peace.

This is the full, undeniable symmetry, my friends. God's character is consistent. His truth is unwavering.

And if anyone protests that no human being has the right to treat a *professing* believer as an unbeliever – hear this, because Jesus Himself commands it. When He taught His church how to handle a brother who sins and will not turn, He laid out the full, patient process – go to him alone, take two or three witnesses, tell it to the church – and then He said this:

Matthew 18:17 · And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Estō soi – a present imperative: **let him be to you** as the *ethnikos* ἐθνικός^{G1482}, the pagan outsider. Jesus does not say, "first verify what he believes in his heart." He says that when conduct has run its full, unrepentant course – through every patient appeal, past the pleading of the whole church – you are *commanded* to regard him as what his actions have declared him to be. So this principle is not Paul stretching a word. It is the Lord's own discipline for the Lord's own house, and Paul's *apistos* in 1 Corinthians 7:15 walks in step with it. Notice, too, where Jesus places that judgment: in the church, at the end of a process – not in the wounded party's private verdict on a bad week. The spouse who abandons the covenant and tramples every appeal to return is not slandered when the church at last treats them as faithless. Their conduct is finally being taken at its word.

Where, then, does the guilt fall? **The break, the devastation, is caused entirely by the unfaithful party's own actions.** The certificate of divorce God gave to Israel, or in Paul's language, the recognition that an innocent spouse is "*not enslaved*" — this does not *create* guilt. No! It simply *names* what the unfaithful party's actions already created. It is a declaration of a reality that already exists because of sin.

It pains me deeply when I hear sincere, well-meaning people suggest that the innocent spouse who remarries after being abandoned commits adultery. With all respect and love, my friends, this position misattributes the guilt entirely. It places the condemnation, the heavy burden of sin, on the wrong person! The one who broke the covenant, the one whose actions declared their unfaithfulness, is the one Scripture holds responsible. The one who was left, abandoned, betrayed, is the one Scripture declares free.

God Himself demonstrated this, as we read in Jeremiah 3. He was not guilty for issuing the certificate of divorce to Israel. Israel was guilty for making it necessary. They brought it upon themselves.

So let us stand firm, my Saints, on the solid rock of God's Word. Let us not be swayed by man's traditions or misinterpretations. Let us remember that **actions classify, not**

merely words. And let us walk in the freedom and peace that Christ has called us to, trusting in His perfect justice and His unwavering grace.

Chapter 8

Paul's Framework

First Corinthians 7:15-16 · But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called us to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Oh, my dear brothers and sisters, my heart aches sometimes as I see how we, the Saints, wrestle with the deep truths of God's Word, especially when it comes to matters of marriage and divorce. It is a field often fraught with pain, confusion, and sometimes, a legalism that strangles the very life out of God's children. I have spent countless hours in prayer, in study, and in personal conversation, trying to understand the full counsel of God on this sensitive topic. And what I have discovered, what the Holy Spirit has illuminated for me, is that the Apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, holds two profound principles in tension — a tension that many treatments often ignore, picking one side and casting the other aside. This leads to an incomplete, and often, unmerciful understanding.

We see Paul speaking with such authority, yet with such deep pastoral care. He does not just give us rules; he gives us a framework for life in Christ, full of grace and truth.

We have established from the Old Testament what a covenant marriage is, what the legal instrument of dissolution was designed to do, how *porneia* dissolves the one-flesh bond, which unions God actually joins, and how conduct rather than profession classifies the departing spouse. Now the Apostle Paul gathers all of this into a pastoral framework for the reality that broken marriages leave in their wake.

8.1 Who Paul Speaks To — The Four Audiences

Before we can understand what Paul teaches, we must first understand *whom* he is addressing. First Corinthians 7 is not a single, undifferentiated block of instruction aimed at one group. Paul, with careful precision, addresses **four distinct audiences** in sequence. Miss this structure, and you will misread his instructions for one group as applying universally to all — which is the root of so much confusion in the church today.

Group One: Married Couples, Both Believers (verses 1–7). Paul opens by addressing the Corinthians' question about whether it is "good for a man not to touch a woman."

His answer is pastoral and balanced. He says: yes, celibacy has merit, but to avoid porneia πορνεία^{G4202} (sexual immorality), "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (v.2). The word hekastos ἑκαστος^{G1538} ("each one") makes this instruction universal for married believers. He then addresses conjugal duty: the husband must render ho τὴν^{G3588} opheilē ὀφειλήν^{G3782} ("the debt, the obligation") to his wife, and she to him (v.3). Their bodies belong to each other. "Defraud ye not one the other" (v.5) — the verb is apostereō ἀποστερέω^{G650}, literally "to rob, to defraud" — the same word used for financial theft. Paul treats the withholding of marital intimacy as a form of robbery. This is addressed to couples who are both within the faith.

Group Two: The Unmarried and the Widows (verses 8–9). Here Paul shifts his audience with the words "I say therefore to the agamos ἀγάμους^{G22} (unmarried) and chēra χήραις^{G5503} (widows)." Now, the word agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} is critical. It is a compound: ἀ (alpha-privative, "not") + gamos γάμος^{G1062} — literally, "without marriage". It does not specify *why* someone is without marriage. It encompasses the never-married, the widowed, and — as Paul himself demonstrates just three verses later — **the divorced**. In verse 11, Paul uses the exact same word, agamos, to describe a woman who has **separated from her husband**: "let her remain agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} (unmarried) or else be reconciled to her husband." A divorced woman *is* an agamos. So when Paul tells the agamoi in verse 8 that "it is good for them to abide even as I," and then in verse 9 commands gameō γαμησάτωσαν^{G1060} (aorist imperative, third person plural: "let them marry!"), the category he addresses **already includes divorced people by his own usage**. He does not insert a single caveat: "unless you were previously married." The command to marry, if you burn, stands for the entire class of those who are currently without marriage — divorced included.

Group Three: Believing Married Couples (verses 10–11). Paul now narrows his audience with precision: "unto the gameō γεγαμηκόσιν^{G1060} (those who have married — perfect active participle, indicating a current state of marriage), I command, yet not I, but the Lord." The phrase "not I, but the Lord" signals that Paul is transmitting a direct teaching from Jesus — the dominical saying from Matthew 19 / Mark 10. His instruction: "Let not the wife chōrizō χωρισθῆναι^{G5563} (be separated) from her husband." But if she does separate, she must remain agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} (agamos, unmarried) or be katallassō καταλλάγῃτω^{G2644} (reconciled — aorist passive imperative: "let her be reconciled"). This is a command for believing couples in mutual-faith marriages. Notice: Paul commands reconciliation as the first, earnest pursuit. This is the divine ideal.

Group Four: Mixed Marriages — Believer and Unbeliever (verses 12–16). And now comes the decisive pivot. Paul signals a new audience and a new authority basis: "But to the loipoi λοιποῖς^{G3062} (the rest — meaning those not yet addressed), speak I, not the Lord." This is not Paul disclaiming inspiration. It is Paul saying: Jesus did not directly address this scenario during His earthly ministry, so I am giving apostolic instruction

under the Spirit's authority. The scenario is clear: a brother (adelphos ἀδελφός^{G80}) has a wife who is apistos ἄπιστον^{G571} (Adjective, Accusative, Singular, Feminine — faithless, unbelieving). Or a woman (gynē γυνή^{G1135}) has a husband who is apistos ἄπιστον^{G571} (Adjective, Accusative, Singular, Masculine — faithless, unbelieving). Paul applies the word symmetrically, to both genders, without distinction.

The instruction for this group is entirely different from Group Three. If the apistos spouse is content to dwell together — syneudokeō συνευδοκεῖ^{G4909} oikeō οἰκεῖν^{G3611} ("is well-pleased to dwell") — do not divorce them. But if the apistos chōrizō χωρίζεται^{G5563} ("separates himself/herself" — present middle indicative, the unbeliever acting on their own initiative), then chōrizō χωρίζεσθω^{G5563} ("let him/her be separated" — present passive imperative, a command to permit the departure). And here comes the liberation: "the brother or the sister οὐ δουλοῦ δεδούλωται^{G1402} in such cases."

Understanding these four groups is essential. The instruction to "remain unmarried or reconcile" in verse 11 is given to **Group Three** — believing couples in a mutual-faith marriage. The declaration of freedom in verse 15 is given to **Group Four** — the innocent believer abandoned by a faithless spouse. To take the restriction from Group Three and impose it on Group Four is to collapse Paul's carefully crafted distinctions. It is to bind the innocent where Paul explicitly sets them free.

First, let us look at what I call **the permanence principle**. This is the foundational truth about marriage, the divine ideal that God established from the very beginning. Paul echoes this profound covenantal bond:

Romans 7:2-3 · For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.

First Corinthians 7:10-11 · To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

First Corinthians 7:39 · A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Do you feel the weight of these words? I do. They speak of a sacred, lifelong covenant. They tell us that God intends marriage to be a permanent union, dissolved only by death.

And if separation does occur, the first, most earnest pursuit should always be reconciliation. This is the heart of God, that what He has joined, let no one separate. **This is the ideal, the beautiful design of our Creator.** I have preached this truth, I believe this truth, and I know the power of God to restore even the most broken marriages.

But then, my dear friends, Paul, in his divine wisdom and pastoral realism, introduces what we often call **the Pauline Privilege**. This is where the tension truly begins, and where we must lean in closely to the Spirit's leading. The very verse that opens this chapter is key:

First Corinthians 7:15-16 · But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called us to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Now, this is a powerful statement. Notice that Paul immediately anticipates the objection that will arise in every pastoral conversation: *but what if staying bound could eventually win them back?* He does not dismiss the hope. He simply notes its uncertainty — *how do you know?* — and then declines to make that uncertain hope a chain around the innocent party's neck. The possibility of restoration is real; it is not a *requirement* that indefinitely forecloses the freedom he has just declared. For too long, many commentators, and even some within the body of Christ, have struggled with the implications of this verse. Yet, a straightforward reading, one that honors the plain sense of Scripture, reveals that Paul is clearly permitting remarriage for the believing spouse when an unbelieving partner definitively abandons the marriage. The believing spouse is "*not enslaved*". This is a profound freedom, a release from a bond broken by the other party.

The conjunction *gar* γάρ^{G1063} ("for") that opens verse 16 is the key to its interpretation. *Gar* introduces the **reason** for the preceding statement. Paul has just declared the innocent party free. Now he gives the reason: "**For** how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband?" If Paul meant "stay and try to save them," the *gar* would contradict verse 15's command to let them go. The logical flow demands the skeptical reading: *you are not enslaved, for you cannot even guarantee that remaining bound would produce their salvation*. Paul refuses to make an uncertain hope into a permanent chain.

8.2 Who Is the Unbeliever?

And here is a critical observation, one I pray you will ponder deeply. This is the question that I have found more people wrestling with than perhaps any other in this entire discussion. When they hear "unbeliever" in 1 Corinthians 7:15, they immediately picture a pagan — someone who has never professed faith, someone from an entirely different

religious world. And yes, that is one scenario Paul addresses. But is it the *only* scenario? Does the Greek word Paul chose limit us to that narrow reading? The answer, my friends, is a resounding no. And the evidence comes from Paul's own pen and from the very word he used.

The Greek word translated "unbelieving" is *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571}. It is formed from ἄ (alpha-privative, "not, without") and *pistos* πιστός^{G4103} ("faithful, trustworthy, one who trusts in God's promises"). The root beneath *pistos* is the primary verb *peithō* πείθω^{G3982}, meaning "to persuade, to trust, to rely upon by inward certainty."

So what does *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} actually mean? Strong's Concordance gives a definition that many overlook because they stop reading too soon. It defines *apistos* as:

- **(Actively) disbelieving**, i.e., without Christian faith (specially, a heathen);
- **(Passively) untrustworthy** (person), or incredible (thing).

There are two senses. The active sense — "without Christian faith" — is the one everyone knows. But the passive sense — **"untrustworthy, not to be trusted"** — describes **character and conduct**, not religious affiliation. The extended definitions are even more revealing: *"unfaithful, faithless, not to be trusted, perfidious."* Perfidious. That is a powerful word. It means deliberately faithless, treacherous in the violation of trust.

Now consider the derived words — the family that *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} belongs to:

- *apisteō* ἀπιστέω^{G569} — the verb form. Its primary definition is: *"to betray a trust, be unfaithful."* Not merely "to not believe." To betray a trust.
- *apistia* ἀπιστία^{G570} — the noun form. Defined as: *"faithlessness, i.e., (negatively) disbelief (lack of Christian faith), or (positively) unfaithfulness (disobedience)."*

The entire word family orbits around **covenant betrayal**, not merely the absence of religious faith.

The KJV translators understood this range. They translated the single Greek word *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} in six different ways across the New Testament: "that believeth not," **"faithless,"** "incredible thing," **"infidel,"** "unbeliever," and **"unbelieving."** When Jesus says to Thomas, "Be not **faithless** (*apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571}), but believing (*pistos*)" (John 20:27), He is not calling Thomas a pagan. Thomas is a disciple! Jesus is describing his **conduct** — his refusal to trust — not his religious membership.

But the most devastating proof that a professing believer can be classified as *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} comes from Paul himself, writing to Timothy:

First Timothy 5:8 · But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Look at what Paul has done here. The morphology confirms it: *apistos* ἀπίστος^{G571} — Adjective, Genitive, Singular, Masculine — the very same word. Paul says that a person **within the believing community** who neglects his family has **denied the faith** (ho τῆν^{G3588} pistis πίστιν^{G4102} arneomai ἡρνηται^{G720} — the verb is in the perfect tense: "has denied and remains in that state of denial") and is classified as **worse than an apistos**. Not equal to. *Worse than*. If Paul can call a negligent believer worse than an *apistos*, then a spouse who abandons the marriage covenant — who walks out, who refuses reconciliation, who shatters every vow made before God — can certainly be *functionally classified* as *apistos*, regardless of what they profess on Sunday morning.

The principle is stated even more broadly in Titus:

Titus 1:16 · They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

"They **profess** (homologeō ὁμολογοῦσιν^{G3670}) that they know God" — the same people — "but in **works** (ergon ἔργοις^{G2041}) they **deny** (arneomai ἀρνοῦνται^{G720}) him." Profession and practice. Words and works. Scripture consistently judges by the latter. A person may stand in the pulpit and declare their faith. But if their actions — abandoning a spouse, breaking covenant vows, refusing reconciliation — deny the very God they claim to serve, then their actions classify them. They are, in the language of the New Testament, acting as one who is *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571}: faithless, untrustworthy, a betrayer of covenant trust.

And our Lord Jesus Christ Himself established this same principle:

Matthew 7:21-23 · Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Profession without obedience amounts to nothing. A spouse who says "I am a Christian" while departing the covenant and refusing every attempt at restoration is doing precisely what Jesus warns about — saying "Lord, Lord" while their works deny Him.

And now consider the most profound parallel of all. When God divorced Israel in Jeremiah 3:8, was Israel a "pagan nation"? Was she an unbeliever in the religious-affiliation

sense? Absolutely not! Israel was God's **covenant bride**. She was chosen (Deuteronomy 7:6), called by His name (Isaiah 43:7), married to Him (Jeremiah 3:14 — "I am married unto you"). She had the covenants, the promises, the temple, the priesthood. She was the *believing community*. And yet God calls her "**faithless Israel**" — the Hebrew *mēšûbâ* מִשְׁבָּה^{H4878}, "backsliding, apostate." He says: "she played the harlot" (Jeremiah 3:6, 8). And He issued her a *sēper* סֵפֶר^{H5612} *kērītūt* כְּרִיתוּת^{H3748} — a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8). God classified Israel not by her profession but by her conduct. She acted faithlessly. She was, in her behavior, *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} — and God treated her accordingly.

This understanding changes everything for the countless believers who have been told: "Your spouse claims to be a Christian, so the Pauline Privilege doesn't apply to you. You must remain bound forever." That interpretation demands something Paul never demanded — that the classification of *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} be determined by profession rather than by practice. But the Greek word itself, Paul's own usage of it elsewhere, the principle articulated in Titus 1:16, the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:21–23, and the precedent of God's own divorce from "believing" Israel all point in the same direction: **faithlessness is defined by what you do, not by what you claim.**

There is a linguistic detail in verse 15 that rewards close attention and that most commentators overlook. Paul's permanence texts — Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 — use the Greek verb *deō* δέω^{G1210} (to bind) when describing the wife bound to her husband: an ordinary legal term for a contractual tie. But in 1 Corinthians 7:15, when declaring the abandoned spouse released, Paul does not say they are simply *un-bound*. He uses an entirely different and stronger word: *douloō* δεδούλωται^{G1402}, the perfect passive of *douloō* δουλόω^{G1402} — literally *has been enslaved*, from *doulos* δοῦλος^{G1401}, a slave. The shift is deliberate and consequential. Paul is not merely loosening a legal tie; he is declaring that the innocent party has not been *enslaved*. The word stands at maximum force: you were never anyone's property, and the departure of the other party cannot reduce you to bondage. **The change from δέω to δουλόω is Paul's strongest possible statement of freedom** — stronger, arguably, than anything he says about the marriage bond itself.

The tense matters too. *douloō* δεδούλωται^{G1402} is in the **perfect** tense — denoting a settled, completed state with ongoing effects. Paul did not use the present tense ("is not being enslaved right now") or the aorist ("was not enslaved at one point"). He used the perfect: the believing spouse **stands in an enduring state of non-bondage**. And note the second perfect tense in the same verse: *kaleō* ἐκέλεν^{G2564} ("has called") — "God **has called** us to peace." Both the non-bondage and God's calling to peace are presented as settled, completed realities with permanent force. The freedom is as settled as the calling.

But Paul is not finished. He also addresses what I call **the pastoral realism of human experience**. He understands that while celibacy might be an ideal for some, it is not a universal requirement, especially not for those who have experienced the profound loss and brokenness of a dissolved marriage. Listen to his compassionate words:

First Corinthians 7:8-9 · Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Do you hear the wisdom, the grace, in this? Paul openly concedes that celibacy, while a gift for some, is not meant for all. For those who cannot maintain it, for those who *"burn with passion"*, marriage is not just permitted, it is *commanded!* *"They should marry."*

Now, here is where we must be unflinching in our understanding: Paul never restricts this concession to only those who have *never* been married. To impose a lifelong, indefinite celibacy on a divorced person, unless they reconcile with an ex-spouse who may have no intention of returning to the covenant, is to add a burden that Paul himself explicitly rejects. It is to place God's children in a spiritual prison, forcing them to *"burn"* when God has provided a righteous escape through marriage.

So, when we bring all of Paul's teachings together, we see a beautiful, comprehensive framework, not a contradictory one. It is a framework that holds truth and grace in perfect balance:

The permanence principle in Romans 7:2–3 establishes the foundation: marriage binds until death. The charge in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 emphasizes that restoration is the first pursuit for any separated believing spouse. The Pauline Privilege in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the clear declaration that the innocent party is released when an unbeliever abandons the covenant — you are not enslaved, my dear one! The pastoral realism of 1 Corinthians 7:9 is God's compassionate provision: indefinite celibacy is not required for those who cannot maintain it. And 1 Corinthians 7:39 reiterates that death dissolves the bond, freeing the spouse to remarry in the Lord.

My heart is stirred because I have seen, again and again, how some sincere teachers, in their zeal to uphold the permanence of marriage, inadvertently twist Paul's full counsel. They present only one side, the permanence side, often without any exception clause. The theological logic, which states that *"God can always restore any marriage"* and that *"restoration must always be pursued over remarriage"*, structurally forecloses the very possibility of 1 Corinthians 7:15 ever activating. If God *always* restores, then the departing-unbeliever exception never truly applies, because God will just bring them back, right?

But this, my friends, is a position that is **stricter than Paul**, not simply consistent with him. It adds a burden to God's children that the Holy Spirit, through Paul, never intended.

Consider the logical end of such a position: it would require the innocent, abandoned spouse to either reconcile with an ex-partner who has shown no indication of returning to the covenant — or to burn indefinitely in unfulfilled passion, in loneliness, and in a state of perpetual celibacy. **Paul explicitly rejects that as a framework for God's children!** God is a God of grace, a God of peace, and a God who understands the human heart.

Let us stand firm on the *entire* Word of God, embracing both the divine ideal and the divine mercy. Let us not add to God's commands, nor diminish His grace. The Saints deserve to walk in the full freedom and peace that Christ has purchased for them, guided by the Spirit through the complete revelation of His Word.

Chapter 9

Better to Marry Than to Burn

First Corinthians 7:8-9 · Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

My dear Saints, my heart aches as I share this truth with you, because I know the pain, the confusion, and the silent struggle many of you carry. Paul, in his divine wisdom, gives us such incredible insight here. He speaks of celibacy as an ideal, yes, a gift from God. He even says it is good to remain as he is, unmarried. But then, with a profound pastoral realism, he pivots. He declares that if you *"cannot control yourselves"*, if that burning passion, that deep, God-given desire for companionship and intimacy, simply will not be quenched, then **you should marry**. This is not just permission, my friends; it is a command. **"It is better to marry than to burn with passion."**

We introduced Paul's full framework in the previous chapter. But this single verse within it — 1 Corinthians 7:9 — deserves its own close examination — because what it says about *who* may marry overturns the most common burden placed on divorced people today. And the word Paul uses for "burn" carries a weight the English softens. The Greek is *pyroō πυρόω*^{G4448}, and Abbott-Smith reveals that in the Septuagint it chiefly translates the Hebrew *tsaraph* — the metallurgist's word for refining metal by fire. It is the word used when God says «*I will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried*» (Zechariah 13:9). The burning Paul describes is not merely lust — it is the uncontained fire that either refines or destroys. Contained within marriage, it refines. Left without a vessel, it consumes. Paul's command is not a reluctant concession to weakness. It is the wisdom of a man who understands fire. And Wilson's *Bible Types* draws a distinction that cuts to the heart of the permanence debate. Scripture knows two kinds of fire: the **holy fire** from God's own altar (Numbers 16:46), and the **strange fire** of human invention (Leviticus 10:1–2) — which Wilson defines as "human energies, human devices, human judgments, human decisions which did not come and do not come from God." Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire and were consumed. The permanence view, when it demands indefinite celibacy of an innocent, abandoned spouse, offers strange fire — a human rule dressed in religious language, imposed where God Himself commanded marriage as the vessel for the flame. Paul's command is the holy fire: God-given, God-designed, God-ordained.

Do you grasp the weight of this, my brothers and sisters? This cuts directly against so much of what we have been taught, so many of the burdens we have mistakenly placed on the shoulders of God's children. It absolutely dismantles the implicit demand that divorced people, especially those who are innocent and abandoned, must remain permanently celibate unless, by some miracle, their first spouse returns or passes away. Paul never, not once, restricts this divine concession, this command, only to those who have never been married before. Never.

9.1 The Agamos Proof: Verse 8 to Verse 11

Let us now walk through the evidence step by step, because the Greek text leaves no room for ambiguity here.

In verse 8, Paul says: *"I say therefore to the unmarried and the widows."* The word translated "unmarried" is agamos ἄγαμοις^{G22} — Noun, Dative, Plural, Masculine. Let us take this word apart. It is composed of two elements: ἄ- (the Greek negative prefix, meaning "not" or "without") and gamos γάμος^{G1062}. So agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} means, simply and literally, *without marriage*. A person who does not currently have a spouse.

Notice what this word does *not* say. It does not say *why* someone is without marriage. It does not specify whether they never married, or whether their spouse died, or whether their marriage ended in divorce. The word is deliberately broad — it covers anyone in a state of being unmarried, regardless of how they arrived there.

Now here is the decisive proof. Just three verses later, in verse 11, Paul uses the *exact same word* — the very same Strong's number, G22 — for a woman who has **separated from her husband**. The text reads: *"But if she does separate, let her remain agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} — Noun, Nominative, Singular, Feminine — or be reconciled to her husband."* This is a woman who has left her marriage. She is divorced or separated. And Paul calls her agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} — unmarried.

Do you see what Paul has done? In verse 8, he addresses the *agamoι*. In verse 11, he applies that same word to a divorced woman. His own usage, three verses later, **proves** that the agamoι of verse 8 include divorced people. This is not inference. This is not reading between the lines. It is Paul's own definition, demonstrated by his own pen, in the same passage.

And so when verse 9 commands gameō γαμῆσάτωσαν^{G1060} (Verb, Aorist, Active, Imperative, 3rd Person, Plural: "let them marry!"), it is a command addressed to the full category of verse 8 — which, as Paul himself has shown, includes the divorced. Let them marry. Not "let the never-married marry." Not "let only widows marry." *Let them* — all the agamoι — *marry*.

9.2 “But Verse 8 Is Only About the Never-Married”

Some will object here. They will say that Paul’s *agamoi* in verse 8 refers only to the never-married and to widows — that the divorced are simply not in view. This is perhaps the most common attempt to limit the reach of verse 9. But it does not survive contact with the text.

First, as we have just seen, Paul himself demolishes this reading three verses later. He uses *agamos* for a separated woman in verse 11. If Paul intended the *agamoi* of verse 8 to mean *only* the never-married, why would he immediately turn around and apply the same word to a woman who has left her husband? Paul is not confused. He is not careless with his vocabulary. He uses *agamos* because it means what it means: without marriage. Full stop.

Second — and this is equally important — if Paul had wanted to restrict his audience in verse 8 to the never-married, the Greek language gave him a perfectly precise word to do so: *parthenos παρθένος*^{G3933}, “virgin.” Paul knew this word well. He uses it repeatedly *in this very chapter* — in verses 25, 28, 34, 36, 37, and 38. When Paul wants to speak specifically about those who have never been married, he reaches for *parthenos*. But in verse 8, he did *not* use it. He chose the broader, more inclusive term *agamos*.

That choice is deliberate. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selected the word that includes anyone without a spouse — the never-married, the widowed, *and* the divorced. To read the divorced out of that category requires ignoring both Paul’s word choice and his own usage of the same word three verses later. The text simply will not bear that restriction.

9.3 The Command That Includes the Divorced

So, when Paul declares, “*they should marry*”, this is not a mere suggestion. It is not a gentle nod of approval. The original Greek, *gameō γαμήσάτωσαν*^{G1060}, is a third-person plural aorist imperative. It is a command! Paul commands marriage for those who burn, and the category of “*unmarried*” he addresses, undeniably, includes those who have experienced the heartbreak of divorce. Was Paul ignorant of this? Was he somehow unaware of the implications? Of course not! He was led by the Holy Spirit, speaking truth into the brokenness of humanity.

Consider, if you will, the person who has been utterly abandoned by a spouse who functionally departed the covenant. They did not choose this path. They were left, often in unimaginable pain and confusion. Under the very clear teaching of the Pauline privilege in 1 Corinthians 7:15, such a person “*is not enslaved*”. They are free. Now, add the blazing truth of 1 Corinthians 7:9 to their situation: if they burn with passion, **they should marry**. Paul does not add a single caveat! He does not say, “*unless your former*

spouse is still alive.” He does not say, “*unless you were previously married.*” The command is universal to those in the “*unmarried*” category who cannot maintain celibacy. It is a lifeline, a provision of grace from our loving Father.

9.4 The Gar of Verse 16: The Reason Paul Sets You Free

There is one more piece of evidence that deserves careful attention, and it hinges on a single Greek word that most readers glide right past.

After Paul declares in verse 15 that the abandoned believer “*is not enslaved*” — using the perfect passive *douloō δεδούλωται*^{G1402}, a settled, completed state of non-bondage — he moves immediately to verse 16. And verse 16 opens with a small but powerful conjunction: *gar γάρ*^{G1063}.

Gar means “for.” It introduces a *reason*. It tells you *why* the preceding statement is true. This is not decorative. It is logical scaffolding. Paul has just said: you are not enslaved. Now he tells you *why*: “**For** how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”

Read that again carefully. Paul does not say, “Stay, because you might save them.” He says the opposite. He says: *you do not even know* whether you will save them. The question is rhetorical, and its force is skeptical. You cannot guarantee your spouse’s salvation. You cannot make that uncertain hope into a reason for permanent bondage.

If Paul had meant “stay and try to save your departing spouse,” the *gar* would contradict verse 15. It would mean: “You are not enslaved — *but actually, stay enslaved on the off chance it works out.*” That is incoherent. The logical flow demands the reading that honors both verses: You are free (v.15), *because* you cannot even guarantee their salvation (v.16). Paul refuses to make an uncertain hope into a permanent chain. He will not bind you to a maybe.

This matters enormously. The permanence position often clings to verse 16 as a reason the innocent party should remain and wait indefinitely. But Paul’s *gar* points in exactly the opposite direction. It is the reason *for* the freedom, not an exception to it.

9.5 The Permanence Position Examined

The strict permanence position, which I have grappled with and seen cause so much anguish, often requires the innocent, abandoned spouse to remain celibate for life — potentially for decades — unless the departing spouse either returns (often with no intention of doing so) or dies. My dear friends, **this is not what Paul teaches!** Paul teaches that celibacy is a gift, a special grace given to some (1 Corinthians 7:7), not a universal man-

date for all. Those who do not have that specific gift, those who burn with God-given passion, are commanded to marry.

To impose lifelong celibacy on an innocent party who was abandoned, who did not choose the dissolution of their covenant, is to add a requirement that Scripture does not contain. It is a heavy yoke, a burden that Christ never intended for His sheep. It is an addition to God's Word, and my heart cries out with a prophetic urgency because Revelation 22:18 warns us so clearly against such a thing. **We must not add to God's perfect, sufficient Word!**

9.6 What This Means for You

I want to speak directly now to the one who is reading this with a weight on your chest.

If you are divorced, and you have been told that Paul's words in verse 9 do not apply to you — that only the never-married may claim this provision — know that Paul himself, three verses later, uses the very word "unmarried" for a divorced woman. You are in his category. His command stands for you: if you burn, you may marry. This is not permission grudgingly given. It is a divine provision, lovingly commanded.

You have not been forgotten by God. You have not been placed outside the reach of His grace. The *agamos* of verse 8 is *you*. The *gamēsatosan* of verse 9 — "let them marry!" — includes *you*. Paul did not stutter. The Holy Spirit did not make an oversight. When the Apostle chose a word broad enough to encompass everyone without a spouse, he meant it. And when he issued a command to marry rather than burn, he issued it to all who fall within that category.

If the church has laid on your shoulders a burden that Scripture does not require — permanent celibacy with no end in sight, no matter how faithfully you have walked, no matter how thoroughly you were abandoned — then I say to you with every fiber of my being: **that burden is not from God**. Set it down. Not in rebellion, but in obedience to the very text that has been misused to bind you.

9.7 My Own Walk

I speak this not just from theological conviction, but from the depths of my own life. I have been separated since 2017, approaching eight long years now. I have walked through fire, maintained sexual purity by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, honoring my body as a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The desire for companionship, for a helpmate, for the intimacy that God Himself designed, is real within me. And yes, God has prophetically confirmed a woman as my future wife, a woman I long to honor and cherish in holy matrimony. This is precisely the scenario Paul addresses: the desire is

real, the restraint is maintained through the Spirit, and the God-honoring resolution is marriage — not indefinite, soul-crushing celibacy.

The permanence position, taken to its logical, unyielding end, would require me, and countless others like me, to either reconcile with an ex who departed and shows no indication of returning, or to burn indefinitely. **Paul explicitly rejects that framework!** He rejects that impossible, unbiblical burden. Our God is a God of grace, a God of restoration, a God who understands the human heart and provides a way for us to live in purity and joy, even through the brokenness of this world. Let us stand firm on His Word, not on man-made traditions that bind His children.

Chapter 10

The Permanence View Examined

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is with a heavy heart, yet an unyielding commitment to the truth of God's Word, that I approach this delicate subject. I know that for many of you, the topic of marriage, divorce, and remarriage touches deep wounds, unresolved questions, and perhaps even ongoing struggles. I, too, have walked with many Saints through these valleys, and I understand the immense pain and confusion that can arise when we try to reconcile our broken human experience with the perfect standard of God.

Across the preceding chapters, we have built the complete biblical case: the legal instrument God designed for covenant dissolution, His own use of it against Israel, the mechanism by which porneia dissolves the one-flesh bond, which unions God actually joins, how conduct classifies the departing spouse, and Paul's full pastoral framework — including both the privilege of freedom and the imperative to marry. The case is in hand. Now we must face the strongest counter-argument honestly.

There is a view held by many sincere, godly believers across the centuries — from the early Church Fathers to modern holiness movements — that marriage is absolutely permanent until death, with no exceptions whatsoever. No divorce, no remarriage, under any circumstances. Those who hold this position do so from a genuine desire to honor God's design for marriage, and I respect that desire deeply. I share it! But I believe we must carefully weigh this teaching against the full counsel of God's Word.

The permanence view typically rests on three theological pillars, each of which carries real weight.

First, there is the **holiness doctrine**. Many who hold this view teach that believers can and should live completely free from sin after conversion. They read Romans 6 as a declaration of total freedom: *"We are free, free not to sin!"* This is a powerful testimony, and it resonates with the heart of God. But a zero-tolerance approach to ongoing sin, taken to its logical extreme, extends to viewing remarriage after divorce as a continuous state of adultery — leaving no room for grace, no room for the innocent party, no room for new beginnings.

Second, there is **restorationism** — the earnest desire to return to the practices of the early church. And indeed, many of the early Church Fathers — Hermas, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen — overwhelmingly held that remarriage was impermis-

sible while the former spouse lived. If we are to return to the early church in all things, this historical stance carries considerable weight.

But the historical record does not belong solely to the permanence side. The Protestant Reformation broke decisively with the patristic consensus. Luther wrote that Christ's permission of divorce for adultery plainly allows the innocent party to remarry. Calvin enacted law in Geneva in 1561 permitting divorce and remarriage for adultery and desertion. Melancthon stated plainly: *"The marriage tie is severed by the adulterer himself, and not by the innocent party, who is free."* And in 1646, the **Westminster Confession of Faith** — the foundational doctrinal standard of the Reformed tradition — codified this position for the English-speaking church: *"In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead"* (XXIV.5). It further recognized *"wilful desertion as can no way be remedied"* as a second ground that dissolves the marriage bond (XXIV.6). **This has been the mainstream Protestant position for nearly four centuries.** To present the permanence view as the historic Christian consensus is to present only the pre-Reformation portion of the record.

Third, there is the emphasis on **radical repentance**. *"You don't get saved by praying a prayer. Call on Jesus from your heart and turn away from sin."* This is a powerful and necessary message! But when applied to the complexities of a broken marriage, it can be interpreted to mean that any remarriage, regardless of the circumstances, is a failure to truly repent.

These are not frivolous arguments, my friends. They come from a place of genuine conviction. And I have met pastors and teachers who apply this view with absolute consistency — confronting remarried believers, telling them their second marriage is adulterous, and in some cases making enemies of the very people they sought to counsel. I have heard leaders say, with tears in their eyes, *"I have a strong case against remarriage, and I have addressed it in people's lives. And now they are enemies of mine."*

My heart aches when I hear this. Not because the desire for holiness is wrong — it is right! — but because something essential is missing from the framework.

What is missing is the full counsel of Scripture.

The permanence view reads two verses and stops there. Romans 7:2–3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 say *"a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives."* But there is a structural problem with building a marriage doctrine on Romans 7:2–3 that is rarely addressed: **Paul is not writing marriage law in Romans 7.** The entire passage (Romans 7:1–6) is an *analogy* about freedom from the Mosaic Law through death with Christ. Paul uses the marriage bond as an *illustration* of how the law works — not as a definitive statement on the limits of divorce and remarriage. The point of the passage is: *"you have died to the law through the body of Christ, that you should be joined to another"* (Romans 7:4). If

Paul's marriage illustration were absolute law, then God Himself would have violated it in Jeremiah 3:8. To extract a universal prohibition on remarriage from an analogy about something else entirely is to mistake the illustration for the point. Yet the permanence view builds an entire theology on these analogy texts while structurally foreclosing the exception texts. It reads Matthew 19:6 — "*what God has joined together, let no one separate*" — as an absolute with no qualification. But as we have seen in earlier chapters, Jesus Himself added an exception clause in the very next verse:

Matthew 19:9 · I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.

And Paul, under divine inspiration, added another:

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such circumstances. God has called us to peace.

The permanence view must somehow account for these texts. And typically, it does so by either minimizing the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, arguing it refers only to betrothal-period unfaithfulness, or by redefining "*not enslaved*" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 to mean something other than freedom to remarry. But these readings strain the plain sense of Scripture.

Consider the word Paul chose in 1 Corinthians 7:15. He did not write that the abandoned spouse is "not bound" — he wrote *douloō δεδούλωται*^{G1402}, from *douloō δουλόω*^{G1402}, meaning "to enslave." This is significant because Paul had a perfectly good word for the marriage bond: *deō δέω*^{G1210} ("to bind"), which he uses in his own permanence texts — "*a wife is bound (δέδεται, dedetai) to her husband as long as he lives*" (1 Cor 7:39; cf. Rom 7:2). If Paul had merely meant "not obligated to chase after them" — as the permanence view contends — he would have used the negative of his own binding word. Instead, he escalated. He reached for the *stronger* term, the language of slavery and total subjection. The shift from *deō δέω*^{G1210} to *douloō δουλόω*^{G1402} is not accidental; it is Paul's strongest possible statement of freedom — stronger, in fact, than anything he says about the bond itself. And the perfect tense (*douloō δεδούλωται*^{G1402}) makes it a settled, permanent state: the abandoned believer *has not been enslaved and remains free*. To redefine this as mere permission to stop pursuing reconciliation is to drain the word of its force.

The betrothal interpretation in particular deserves a direct answer, because it is the most technically argued escape route. It claims that the exception — "*except for sexual immorality*" — refers only to premarital unfaithfulness discovered during the betrothal period (the situation Joseph faced in Matthew 1:19), not to adultery within marriage. On

this reading, the exception almost never applies to a married couple and the permanence rule stands for all practical purposes. But four points dissolve it.

First, the Pharisees' question in Matthew 19:3 is explicitly about a man divorcing **his wife** — *gynē γυναικα*^{G1135} (a married woman). The Greek is precise here. The Pharisees ask: *"Is it lawful for a man to divorce τὴν γυναικα αὐτοῦ (tēn gynaiika autou) — his wife?"* The word *gynē γυναικα*^{G1135} is a noun in the accusative singular feminine, and with the possessive *autos αὐτοῦ*^{G846} ("his"), it unambiguously means "his wife" — a woman in a consummated marriage, not a betrothed maiden. Betrothal dissolution was a recognized, uncontroversial category in Jewish law already handled elsewhere; the Pharisees had no reason to test Jesus on a settled point. And in Jesus' answer (v. 9), He uses the identical construction: *"whoever divorces τὴν γυναικα αὐτοῦ" — his wife*. The entire exchange, from question to answer, is framed in the language of marriage, not betrothal. It is simply not the subject being debated.

Second, the disciples' stunned reaction — *"If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry"* (v. 10) — only makes sense if Jesus has dramatically narrowed a right they assumed applied broadly to married men. If He had merely noted a betrothal exception that almost no one would ever invoke, they would have had no reason for shock.

Third, Paul uses the same word *porneia πορνεία*^{G4202} in 1 Corinthians 5:1 to describe a man who *"has his father's wife"* — manifestly an ongoing sexual relationship within an existing household, not a betrothal matter. The word carries no inherent restriction to the pre-marriage period.

Fourth, Matthew 5:32 uses *porneia πορνεία*^{G4202} in the exception clause without any betrothal context whatsoever. The Sermon on the Mount is addressing the ethics of married life. The betrothal interpretation imposes a meaning the word does not require and the context does not support.

The betrothal reading is not an exegesis of the text; it is a rescue operation for a conclusion already reached.

I say this with particular confidence because the most rigorous scholarly defense of the no-remarriage position was publicly abandoned by one of its own authors. In 1984, William Heth co-wrote *Jesus and Divorce* — the most technically careful evangelical case for the permanence view. He spent nearly two decades as its defender. Then, in 2002, he published an article titled *"Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed"*, in which he identified the arguments that broke through his resistance. What troubled him most was not a single Greek word or a rabbinic text. It was the pastoral implication of his own position. He wrote: *"What proved most troubling to me all along was that Jesus would be labeling as adultery the remarriage of someone whose spouse's unrepentant sexual immorality had made restoration of the original marriage impossible. This just did not sound like the God 'who*

practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.' " When the most sophisticated defender of the opposing case found that his own conclusion *did not sound like God*, and said so in print, that is not a minor footnote. **It is the opposing general walking off the field.**

The betrothal reading is not the only escape route. The other standard reply is this: "Mark and Luke record no exception at all. 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery'—full stop (Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18). Matthew's exception clause is the outlier; the absolute form is the real teaching."

Weigh what the three accounts actually are. Matthew records the debate—the Pharisees' "Any Cause" question, the appeal to Moses, the exception, the disciples' shock. Mark records the same encounter shorter, for readers who had never heard of Hillel or Shammai and needed no verdict on an intra-Jewish dispute—and Mark is not merely trimming, he is *shaping*: he alone adds the wife who divorces her husband (Mark 10:12), a case the Jewish debate before Jesus never raised, but one his readers lived among—and one a notorious Herodian had already committed, as we saw with Herodias. Each evangelist carried the same teaching to the readers in front of him. The question is whether Mark's and Luke's shorter forms *contradict* Matthew's fuller one, or *condense* it—and the grammar answers that, because it holds one line through every account. In Luke it is *pas ho apolyōn*—everyone **dismissing** his wife and marrying another commits adultery, and the one marrying apolelymenēn ἀπολελυμένην^{G630}—*her, having been dismissed*. In all three Gospels, every verb of adultery has the dismitter or the marrier as its subject. Not once, in any account, is the dismissed wife the one who acts. The shorter forms pass the same verdict on the same actors. They add no new ground and name no new defendant. That is what a condensation looks like—not a contradiction.

Some will answer that Jesus is not condensing but *intensifying*—tightening the Law beyond Moses, as He does with anger and lust. Perhaps. But be precise about what He tightened, because He tells us. When they cite Moses, what Jesus calls the hardness-of-heart concession is **the certificate command of Deuteronomy 24:1**—"*Moses permitted you*" the dismissal procedure (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5)—the very instrument the "Any Cause" faction had stretched into divorce-on-demand. That is the concession He drives back to "from the beginning." The freedoms of Exodus 21—the release of the wronged wife—were never the command in view; no one in the debate so much as mentioned them. An intensification of the dismitter's accountability does not, by silence, disinherit the dismissed.

And Luke has set the burden of proof himself. Listen to the verse he places immediately before the divorce saying: "*It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tiny stroke of a pen in the law to fall*" (Luke 16:17). Side by side, by Luke's own hand: the Law will not lose one stroke—and then the divorce saying. Whoever reads verse 18 as sweep-

ing away the Torah's own protections – the certificate that freed a woman to remarry, the release of the wronged wife – must explain why Luke welded it to the strongest affirmation of the Law's permanence in any Gospel. I do not carry that burden. They do.

And there is an even deeper problem. The permanence view, taken to its logical end, cannot account for **Jeremiah 3:8**. If divorce and remarriage are always, in every case, without exception, sinful — then God Himself committed a theological impossibility when He issued a certificate of divorce to Israel. He divorced His unfaithful bride and then entered a new covenant with a new people. If the permanence view is absolute, God violated His own standard. **That cannot be the correct reading of Scripture.**

The permanence view also emphasizes restoration over remarriage — and I say amen to that! I believe in the power of God to restore anything, to make all things new!

Joel 2:25 · So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you.

Our God is a God of restoration! But what happens when restoration, despite fervent prayer and years of faithfulness, does not come? What happens when one spouse refuses to repent? When the other party has departed and shows no indication of returning? Does God's grace then cease for the innocent party? Must they burn indefinitely, as Paul warned against in 1 Corinthians 7:9?

I have heard stories of believers who waited thirteen years for reconciliation — and saw it come. What a glorious testimony! But I have also walked with believers who waited eight years, ten years, fifteen years — and the departing spouse never returned. Never repented. Never looked back. Under the strict permanence view, these faithful Saints are condemned to lifelong celibacy, carrying a burden of guilt for even desiring companionship. **This is not what Paul teaches. This is not what God demonstrated in Jeremiah 3. This is an addition to Scripture.**

My dear Saints, I want to be clear: I am not attacking the desire for permanence in marriage. I share it with all my heart. Marriage is a sacred covenant, and I have preached its sanctity from the first page of this book. But a position that is **stricter than Paul**, that adds requirements the Holy Spirit never imposed, that cannot account for God's own actions in Jeremiah 3 — that position, however sincerely held, needs to be reexamined in the light of the full counsel of God's Word.

Psalms 103:8-12 · The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so

great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Let us always cling to the full truth of God's Word — both His holy standards and His boundless grace. Let us not be harder on God's children than God is on His own. **His grace is sufficient for all our failures, all our pains, and all our new beginnings in Him.**

Chapter 11

Who God Runs Toward

There is a pattern running through the Old Testament so consistent that once you see it you cannot unsee it. It does not merely support the argument we have been building. It goes deeper. It reveals the *character* of God – and it indicts the way many Christian communities have treated divorced people in His name.

We have already seen the legal and textual case. We have seen that the Get was a release document, not a punishment. We have seen that Paul’s vocabulary shifts from *deo* to *dedoulotai* at the precise moment he declares the innocent party free. We have seen that God Himself issued a certificate of divorce to Israel. Those arguments belong to the realm of *what Scripture permits*.

Now I want to show you something different. I want to show you *whose side God is on* – not in theory, but in the lived stories of Scripture. Because when we look honestly at the Old Testament, a pattern emerges that is the exact opposite of what many churches practice today.

The pattern is this: every time the religious community wields covenant language to keep a dismissed, abandoned, or husbandless person in a state of shame and limbo – God’s movement is consistently, persistently, and powerfully toward that person.

Not toward the institution. Not toward the one wielding the law. Toward the one the system has left behind.

11.1 The God Who Comforts the Divorced Party – Isaiah

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We have already spent time with Jeremiah 3:8, where God issues the certificate of divorce to Israel. But the story does not end there. A few decades later, through Isaiah, God speaks again to the same people. And notice *how* He speaks to them – and *as whom* He presents Himself:

Isaiah 54:4-6 · Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more. For

your Maker is your husband — the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God.

God does not present Himself here as the judge of the divorce. He does not present Himself as the enforcer of covenant law against the unfaithful party. He presents Himself as the **husband of the one who was cast off**. The Hebrew word for "your husband" here is *bo'alayik* — a Qal **active participle**, expressing continuous, present action. God is not describing a past legal status. He is *actively being* her husband, right now, in the moment of her disgrace. He steps into the empty place left by the one who departed. He calls her "wife of a man's youth" — the language of a sacred, tender first covenant — and He says: *that disgrace will not define you*.

In ancient Israel, widowhood and divorce carried almost identical social shame. To be husbandless was to be unprotected, suspect. And here is the God of the universe saying directly to that woman: **I see your disgrace. I name it. And I am taking it away.**

This collapses the argument that God is categorically on the side of the *institution* over the *individual who was abandoned*. Jeremiah 3 and Isaiah 54 together present a God who issues a legitimate divorce — and then runs immediately to the side of the one who was left grieving.

11.2 Tamar — Trapped by the System, Vindicated by God (Genesis 38)

Few Old Testament stories are as uncomfortable, or as instructive, as Tamar's.

She was married into Judah's household. Her first husband, Er, died. Under levirate law, his brother Onan was obligated to marry her and preserve the family line. Onan refused the substance of that obligation — and died. Judah had a third son, Shelah, but he did not give Shelah to Tamar as he was legally required to do. He sent her back to her father's house to wait.

She waited. Shelah grew to maturity. She was still not given to him. And there she sat — in a condition exactly like the one we are describing in this book: **legally bound by a covenant obligation, unable to be released from it, but also denied the substance of it**. Not free to marry another. Not given an actual husband. Trapped in a legal limbo constructed by people who invoked the covenant when it suited them and withheld it when it did not.

Tamar took a drastic risk. She dressed as a prostitute, positioned herself where Judah would pass, conceived by him, and was later exposed.

Judah's verdict, under the law, was that she should be burned for sexual immorality. And then the evidence was produced. And Judah – the man who ran the system that had trapped her – said the words that ring through the entire Old Testament:

Genesis 38:26 · She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah. And he did not know her again.

The woman condemned by the religious-legal convention was vindicated. **The one who wielded covenant law against her was the guilty party.** And she enters the genealogy of Jesus Christ – Matthew 1:3 names her by name.

Is this not the exact pattern we see today? Divorced people – particularly those who were the innocent, abandoned party – held in theological limbo: you are still married in God's eyes, we say, but we will not give you the substance of marriage. You cannot remarry. You must wait. You must burn. And if you dare seek a way forward, we bring the verdict of the law against you.

Judah's verdict on Tamar was wrong. God knew it. History judged it. And the woman he condemned is in the line of the Messiah.

11.3 Hagar – El Roi, the God Who Sees the Dismissed (Genesis 16, 21)

Hagar was not divorced in the legal sense. But what happened to her was functionally identical to what divorce does to the abandoned party: she was sent away from the household, carrying her child, with nothing but a skin of water and some bread.

The instrument of her dismissal was the religious community itself – Abraham's household, under the blessing of God's covenant. Sarah insisted. Abraham complied. The community that should have covered her drove her out.

She ended up alone in the wilderness of Beersheba. The water ran out. She set her son under a bush because she could not watch him die. She sat down at a distance and wept.

Genesis 21:17-19 · And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

God does not ask what the covenant community decided. He does not review whether Abraham and Sarah had grounds. He goes directly to the wilderness, directly to the abandoned woman, and He opens her eyes. And what she sees is a well. Wilson's *Bible Types* reads this moment with the weight it deserves. Under "Well," Wilson writes on Genesis 21:19: "We may use this as a type of that sweet experience of the soul wherein the desolate and distracted Christian finds precious truths in the Word of GOD. Water may represent blessed promises, in which relief and refreshment are found." God does not merely see the dismissed woman in the desert. He opens a well of promise for her. The well is not just water — it is provision, future, a covenant that outlasts the one that cast her out.

The name she gave God in their first encounter is **El Roi** — *the God who sees me* (Genesis 16:13). The God who specifically finds the person the community has left behind.

Divorced people sitting alone in churches — or not in churches because they are too ashamed to return — need to hear this name. **El Roi**. He is looking for you in the wilderness you were sent to. The community that sent you there does not determine His posture toward you.

11.4 Ruth — When the Law Builds a Path Back In (Ruth 1–4)

The book of Ruth is not simply a love story. It is a **covenant-restoration story** built around a law specifically designed for the husbandless woman.

Ruth and Naomi are both widows — which in ancient Israel placed them in virtually the same category as the divorced woman: unprotected, legally invisible. They return to Bethlehem in destitution. Naomi tells the women of the town: "Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20).

And then the mechanism of the law activates on their behalf. Gleaning rights — which existed precisely to provide for the poor and husbandless — bring Ruth to Boaz's field. The kinsman-redeemer law — which existed precisely to restore the covenant standing of widows — gives Naomi's family a legal path to recovery.

Boaz does not merely fulfill the law. He exceeds it. He instructs his workers to leave extra for Ruth. He speaks tenderly to her. He calls her *eshet chayil* — a woman of noble character. And he redeems her.

Ruth remarries. The husbandless woman enters a new covenant. And she enters the Messianic genealogy — named in Matthew 1:5, grandmother of David, ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The entire structure of Old Testament law anticipated marital brokenness and built **re-entry mechanisms** — not to condone the original loss, but to ensure that loss would

not define a person forever. The gleaning law, the kinsman-redeemer law, the Get it-
self – all were constructed to limit the damage done to the dismissed party and to create
legitimate pathways forward.

Modern rigidity has inverted this entirely. **We are using the roof to lock the door
that the law was built to open.**

11.5 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman – Grace at the Well (John 4)

The pattern does not stop in the Old Testament. It walks right into the Gospels.

Jesus sits down at a well in Samaria – a place where no self-respecting Jewish teacher
would normally go, let alone engage with a Samaritan woman. He asks her for a drink.
They talk. And then He cuts right to the point:

John 4:17-18 · The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said
to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five
husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have
said is true."

Think about that moment. Jesus does not stand up, point a finger, and condemn her
for her marital history. He does not say, "Go back to husband number one, two, or three."
He does not demand she embrace a life of celibacy because of her past. He simply states
the truth of her situation – not as a judgment, but as a path to deeper understanding.

And what does He offer her immediately after this revelation? Living water. A fu-
ture. A spiritual transformation that has nothing to do with correcting her past marital
arrangements. His focus is entirely on her future and her identity in Him, not on the
complex legalities of her past relationships.

This is Jesus, God incarnate, demonstrating the very same pattern we have seen through-
out the Old Testament. He does not wield the law to trap her or shame her. He reveals
her truth, yes, but only to offer grace and a new beginning. He runs toward the person
whose life story, by all conventional standards, would have earned her dismissal and
condemnation from the religious community.

11.6 The Consistent Pattern

Story	Condemned by religion	Whom God moves toward
Jeremiah 3 / Isaiah 54	The divorced nation – Israel	God calls Himself her husband
Tamar	The woman trapped by the covenant system	"She is more righteous than I"
Hagar	The dismissed woman in the wilderness	El Roi – He opens her eyes and provides
Ruth	The husbandless foreigner	Boaz exceeds the law; she enters the Messianic line
John 4	The woman with a complex marital history	Jesus offers living water, focuses on her future

In every case, the community wields covenant language as a wall. In every case, God uses covenant love as a door.

This is not a peripheral theme. It runs from Genesis through the prophets and into the Gospels. It is not incidental that Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab – three women whose relationship to the covenant system was broken, irregular, or transgressive by the standards of their day – are all named by Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew names them *deliberately*. He could have omitted them. He did not. **Their stories are in the bloodline of the Messiah because their stories are the kind of story God redeems.**

11.7 And the One Who Broke the Covenant?

Everything in this chapter has been for the wronged – the dismissed, the trapped, the shamed. But the pattern has a second half, and honesty requires that I show you both sides of it. What about the one whose hand did the breaking? Does God run toward them too?

Toward them, yes – when they turn. Never alongside them, while they continue.

Hear both halves in a single breath of Scripture:

First Corinthians 6:9-11 · Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers... will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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.

There were washed adulterers in the church at Corinth. *Such were some of you* – past tense. The door of grace is real and it is wide: David walked through it carrying adultery and murder, and came out forgiven (Psalm 51). The prodigal’s road home is open to the covenant-breaker, and the Father still runs.

But do not read the door and skip the wall. *“Will not inherit the kingdom of God”* – Paul writes that to a church, about adulterers, and he says *do not be deceived*, because people evidently were. Galatians says it with a present participle: those who go on *practicing* – *prassontes* *πράσσοντες*^{G4238} – such things will not inherit the kingdom (Galatians 5:19–21). Hebrews says God *will judge* the sexually immoral and adulterous (Hebrews 13:4). Jesus attached hell itself to adultery two verses before He spoke of divorce (Matthew 5:29–30). And we have already heard Paul say that the man who withholds provision from his own household *has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5:8). Scripture nowhere describes the persistent, unrepentant covenant-breaker as a believer having a hard season. It describes them as someone walking, eyes open, out of the kingdom.

And Scripture names the voice they are walking with. In the very passage where Paul commands husband and wife not to deprive one another, he tells you who is waiting in the gap: *“Do not deprive one another... so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”* (1 Corinthians 7:5). Satan – named, inside the marriage, at the exact point of withholding. The pattern is as old as Eden: a voice that contradicts what God has said, and a person who consents to it. That consent is still theirs – *each person is tempted when they are lured and enticed by their own desire* (James 1:14) – the tempter has never once been accepted as an excuse. But let it be said plainly: the one who breaks covenant is not merely ignoring a rule. They are listening to the wrong voice.

So what must the one who broke it do? **Repent – and repentance is a turning, not a feeling.** *Bear fruits worthy of repentance*, said the Baptist (Luke 3:8). Paul splits the counterfeit from the real with surgical clarity: godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation; worldly grief produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10). Zacchaeus did not weep at the table – he stood up and repaid fourfold, and Jesus declared that salvation had come to that house, the fruit of the turning now visible to everyone in the room (Luke 19:8–9). Everything this book has said about the covenant applies to the penitent too: **words do not classify; actions do.** The adultery ends. The violence ends. The withheld provision flows again. Amends are made where they can be made. That is what turning looks like. Tears without turning are just the old life, weeping.

And one honesty more, because false hope is still false: **repentance restores the soul; it does not automatically resurrect the marriage.** David was fully forgiven, and the consequences still walked through his house. The Torah itself forbids reclaiming a wife who has since been another’s (Deuteronomy 24:4). Forgiveness is owed to the re-

pentant; reinstatement is not. Grace cancels guilt – it does not cancel every consequence, and it never re-shackles the one God has already set free.

So yes: the God who runs toward the dismissed also runs toward the returning breaker. The road home runs in both directions, and there is a robe and a ring at the end of it – the Father’s welcome, though not always the old life handed back. But He does not run alongside the one who keeps walking away – and no one who reads Paul honestly can promise them He will.

11.8 What This Means for the Church Today

I want to say this plainly, because it needs to be said plainly.

When a church community tells a divorced person – particularly an innocent, abandoned party – that they must remain in permanent celibacy, that their desire for marriage is suspect, that they carry a stigma others do not carry, that they may not take the pathway back that God’s own law was designed to provide: **that community is not being more faithful to Scripture than the rest of us. It is enacting the role of Judah over Tamar. It is being the community that dismissed Hagar into the wilderness. It is blocking the path that Boaz walked toward Ruth. It is turning its back on the grace Jesus offered the woman at the well.**

The question is not only *does Scripture permit remarriage?* We have answered that across the preceding chapters. The question, now, is: *what kind of God have you understood when you read those Scriptures?*

Because the God of the Old Testament – the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever – did not stand at a distance and administer covenant law against the broken and dismissed. He ran toward them. He opened wells for them. He said *she is more righteous than I* on their behalf. He called Himself the husband of the one who was cast off. He offered living water and a new future to the one with a complex past.

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

This is the God we serve. And this is the God in whose name the innocent, abandoned, faithful spouse of 1 Corinthians 7:15 stands – not condemned, not trapped, not shamed.

Free.

Chapter 12

My Story

This book is not a collection of abstract ideas for me. The arguments in these pages were forged in the fire of lived experience, in the crucible of my own brokenness and God's faithfulness. This is my story.

I met my first wife at NTNU in Trondheim in 2003. We were both students, navigating university life. At that time, I was not a believer; Christianity was not on my radar. My worldview was entirely secular. As I wrote in my memoir *Fo dt Paa Ny* (Born Again): *"I remember that this year I observed that she did not put her faith first, but did not see this as a warning sign as I myself was not a believer."*

This raises an important question. My first marriage was entered into before my own new birth in 2008, an experience that completely reoriented my life towards Christ. It was with a woman who, I observed even then, did not put faith first. This union lacked the covenant foundation that God requires for His children. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, warned against forming deep, unequal yokes with those who do not share a fundamental commitment to Christ, whether in business, friendship, or marriage.

Second Corinthians 6:14 · Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

This isn't about judging another person's eternal state, but about the practical reality of trying to build a shared life and purpose when your deepest values and loyalties diverge. My marriage began without this essential spiritual alignment. Was this a marriage that God truly "joined together" in the full, Matthew 19:6 sense? Or was it a human joining that God, in His sovereign grace, worked within until its season was complete? I believe the latter.

But hear me carefully: I claim nothing from that belief, and this book's own final chapter warns against leaning on it. My marriage was real, its covenant was real, and its breach was real – my freedom rests on 1 Corinthians 7:15 alone, and it needs nothing else.

Then, in the summer of 2017, she separated from me. She physically left our home and our life together. It was not my choice; it was her decision to depart. This wasn't a

sudden event, but the culmination of years where her actions had consistently demonstrated a pattern of working against my ministry, actively undermining the calling God had placed on my life. As I wrote: *"when she becomes your worst enemy and acts accordingly, she becomes like an unbeliever."* This is not about judging someone's eternal salvation, but about the practical reality of trying to live out a covenant with someone fundamentally opposed to your spiritual walk and purpose.

The separation was devastating, a profound personal loss. Yet, looking back, it was ultimately framed by God's sovereign hand.

Romans 8:28 · And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This verse was a deep comfort, reminding me that even this painful event had a purpose within God's larger plan. In fact, God had prepared me. There were multiple prophetic confirmations that preceded and followed this season. I recall a specific word from Marcus Wick about God removing the heavy wagons that were holding me back, a powerful image of release. Even earlier, in 2014, specific prophetic words from four independent witnesses pointed to a profound shift and a new season coming in my life, preparing me for a separation I didn't yet understand.

The Apostle Paul, addressing the early Christian community in Corinth, provided practical guidance for believers navigating mixed-faith marriages. He specifically considered the scenario where an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave.

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such cases. God has called you to peace.

My situation fits this text precisely. She departed. I did not initiate the separation or leave; I was left. Under Paul's clear framework, I am emphatically **not enslaved** to that abandoned covenant. I am free. God has called me to peace, not to perpetual bondage to a marriage covenant that was unilaterally broken and abandoned by the other party.

Even before Paul wrote those words, God had drawn this same pattern in the oldest stories of Scripture – the stories we examined in the chapter just before this one. Like Hagar, I was sent into a wilderness I did not choose, by the departure of someone I thought was mine to walk life with. The faith community, at times, has mirrored Abraham's household – complying with the dismissal rather than standing in the gap. Like Tamar, I have watched a covenant obligation be invoked against me while its substance was withheld: told I am still married in God's eyes, while the marriage itself was abandoned years ago. And like Ruth standing in Boaz's field, I am waiting on the provisions

of a God whose law was always designed to create a path back in – not to bar the door. El Roi sees me in this wilderness. He saw Hagar in hers. He will open the well.

God did not leave me in desolation. He has confirmed, through multiple prophetic words over the years, that there is a future wife for me. He is a God of restoration – not just of what was, but of what will be, in His perfect timing. Throughout this long season of separation, approaching eight years now since 2017, I have maintained sexual purity, honoring my body as a temple. The Apostle Paul urged believers to flee sexual immorality, reminding them that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 6:18-20 · Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

This call to purity is profound, and it underlines the seriousness of sexual sin. Yet, Paul also understood the realities of human nature and desire. In the same letter, while discussing singleness and marriage, he gave very direct and practical counsel to those who found celibacy challenging.

First Corinthians 7:9 · But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

This is precisely my scenario. The desire for companionship and intimacy is real and God-given. The restraint to maintain purity is maintained by the grace of God. And the God-honoring resolution, according to Paul himself, is marriage – not indefinite celibacy imposed by a reading of Scripture that is stricter than what the Apostle taught.

Consider a profound divine pattern: God, the faithful Spouse, was repeatedly left and betrayed by the unfaithful one – the nation of Israel, who went after other gods and committed spiritual adultery. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God articulated the consequences of this covenant breaking, demonstrating His own precedent for ending such a union.

Jeremiah 3:8 · I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

This verse is a powerful and sobering declaration from God Himself, illustrating that even He, the covenant-keeping God, can and did issue a divorce in response to persistent unfaithfulness. And what followed this divine divorce? Not perpetual separation, but

the New Covenant. A new, perfect union with His people, culminating in Christ. This demonstrates God's own remarriage after a divorce caused by profound unfaithfulness.

Paul's privilege covers the departure of the unbelieving spouse. Jesus's exception in Matthew 19:9 covers the covenant betrayal of unfaithfulness. God's own action in Jeremiah 3 establishes the precedent that **God Himself sometimes releases the faithful from a broken covenant and then brings them into a new one.**

Under the strict permanence view, my planned remarriage would be classified as on-going adultery – regardless of the fact that I was left, regardless of eight years of faithfulness, regardless of prophetic confirmation, regardless of Paul's explicit teaching. That view would require me to either reconcile with an ex-spouse who departed years ago and shows no indication of returning – or burn indefinitely.

But under Paul's framework, the situation is clear: the functionally unbelieving spouse departed; the brother is not enslaved. He is free. And if he burns, he should marry.

This is not a convenient interpretation to justify a personal desire. This is my life, walking through the very scenario Paul addressed, guided by the very privilege he articulated. And I share it because I know there are thousands – perhaps millions – of God's children in the same situation. Left. Abandoned. Faithful. Burning. And told by their church that they must remain in that state forever.

God desires freedom for His Saints, not perpetual bondage to a broken covenant that was abandoned by another. He is a God of new beginnings. He demonstrated it in Jeremiah 3. Paul taught it in 1 Corinthians 7. And I have lived it.

May my story bring hope to yours.

Chapter 13

The Greek and the Hebrew

Second Timothy 2:15 · Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The New Testament was written in Greek. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The King James Bible is an English translation — faithful, beautiful, and beloved — but it is a translation nonetheless, and no translation can capture everything the original language contains. In the chapters of this book, we have encountered Greek and Hebrew words that reveal truths the English text alone does not fully express. This chapter gathers the most important of them in one place, so that the reader who wishes to go deeper may do so, and so that the weight of the original language may be felt even by those who have never studied Greek or Hebrew.

Every word below has been verified through Strong's Concordance and the morphological analysis of the original text. The numbers in parentheses — such as G1210 or H1166 — are Strong's reference numbers, which allow any reader to look up the original entry for themselves.

13.1 The Marriage Bond

Deō G1210 — the ordinary Greek word meaning «to bind, to tie, to fasten.» In the New Testament it is the standard legal term for the marriage bond. Paul uses it in Romans 7:2: *«the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth,»* and again in 1 Corinthians 7:39: *«the wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth.»* In both texts the verb is in the **perfect passive indicative** — *dedetai* — meaning the binding has been accomplished and remains in force as an established state. She *has been bound* and *stands bound*. The marriage bond is not a feeling. It is a legal and covenantal fact, expressed in the most concrete verb the language has for tying something fast.

Katargeō G2673 — the word Paul uses in Romans 7:2 to describe what happens to the marriage bond when the husband dies: *«she is loosed from the law of her husband.»* But «loosed» does not capture the force of this word. *Katargeō* means «to render inoperative, to nullify, to abolish, to make of no effect.» It is composed of *kata* (down, against) and *argeō* (to be idle), and it is the word Paul uses elsewhere for the abolishing of the old covenant (2 Corinthians 3:13), the destruction of death itself (2 Timothy 1:10), and the

annihilation of the lawless one at Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 2:8). This is not a gentle untying. It is the total destruction of a legal reality. Death does not merely release the bond. Death *annihilates* it.

Sunzeugnumi G4801 — the word Jesus uses in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9: «*what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*» The word is composed of *sun* (together) and *zeugnumi* (to yoke), and it means to yoke together under one yoke, as one would yoke two oxen for a single purpose. And the Septuagint use of this word outside the New Testament is striking: in Ezekiel 1:11 and 1:23, the same verb describes the joining of the cherubim's wings around the throne of God. The word Jesus chose for the marriage bond is the word Ezekiel used for the cherubim's wings meeting above the mercy seat. Marriage is yoked as the angelic wings are yoked — in the presence of God, by the design of God. The verb is **aurist active indicative** — *sunezeugnen* G4801 — pointing to a specific, completed divine act. God yoked them. It was a particular action at a particular moment. The joining is not automatic, not natural, not inevitable. It is something God *did*.

Sarx mia — «one flesh,» from Genesis 2:24, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5: «*and they twain shall be one flesh.*» The Hebrew original is *bāsār' eḥād*. This is the union that marriage creates and that *porneia* G4202 violates. It is not merely physical. It is the total joining of two persons into a single covenantal reality. When Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that a man who joins himself to a harlot becomes one body with her, he uses the same phrase — to show that the one-flesh reality can be created outside the covenant, and that this is precisely why it is so destructive.

Kollōmenos G2853 — the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:16: «*he which is joined to an harlot is one body.*» It is a **present passive participle** — «the one being joined.» The passive voice is significant: the one-flesh bond is something that happens *to* you. It is not a decision you make in the moment. When a man joins himself to a harlot, the bond forms whether he wills it or not. The verb *kollaō* means to glue, to cement, to fasten firmly. What is glued does not come apart cleanly.

13.2 The Divorce

Porneia G4202 — the word translated «fornication» in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, the sole ground named in the exception clause: «*saving for the cause of porneia*» — named there because it answers the question Jesus was asked, the husband's «any cause» certificate of Deuteronomy 24:1. His verdict on the dismitter never revoked the freedoms of Exodus 21. It is derived from *pornē* (a harlot) and *pernēmi* (to sell), and its semantic range is broad: harlotry, adultery, incest, any sexual union outside the covenant of marriage. It is not a narrow, technical term. The Septuagint uses it to translate the Hebrew *zānâh*, which covers the full spectrum of sexual unfaithfulness. When Jesus chose this word,

He chose the widest term available. He did not say *moicheia* (adultery alone). He said *porneia* G4202 — sexual immorality in its fullest scope.

Apostasion G647 — the word translated «divorcement» in Matthew 5:31 and 19:7: «*a writing of divorcement.*» It is the formal, legal certificate of divorce — the document that officially dissolves the marriage and releases both parties. The word is derived from *aphistēmi* (to stand away from, to depart), and it carries the sense of a clean, legal separation. The certificate was not a punishment. It was a protection — proof that the woman was free to remarry, not an adulteress living apart without release. Moses commanded the certificate precisely because without it, the divorced woman had no standing and no future.

Apolyō G630 — the verb translated «put away» throughout the divorce passages (Matthew 5:32, 19:3, 19:9; Mark 10:2, 10:11; Luke 16:18). It means «to release, to send away, to dismiss.» Abbott-Smith reveals that it also means «to forgive» — Luke 6:37: «*forgive (apolyō) and ye shall be forgiven.*» The same Greek verb means to release a prisoner (Matthew 27:15), to dismiss a crowd (Matthew 14:15), to divorce a wife, and to forgive a sin. Four uses, one word. The question the marriage passages pose is this: which releasing does God honour — the releasing of a spouse, or the releasing of a debt? In the context of marriage, it is the act of sending the spouse away — the verb of divorce itself. It is important to note that *apolyō* (the act of putting away) and *apostasion* (the certificate) are two different things. One could put a wife away without giving a certificate, which is precisely the abuse Moses sought to prevent and the injustice the Pharisees sought to justify.

Chōrizō G5563 — the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 7:15: «*if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.*» Abbott-Smith notes it is explicitly the *opposite* of *suzeugnymi* G4801 — to yoke together. What God yoked, *chōrizō* G5563 unyokes. And in the Septuagint, it translates the Hebrew *badal* H914 — the same word God uses in Genesis 1:4 to *separate* light from darkness. The divorce-word is the creation-separation-word. When God separated light from darkness at creation, He used the same root that describes the separating of husband and wife. The gravity of that connection should stop every casual treatment of divorce in its tracks. It means «to separate, to put apart, to divide.» In 1 Corinthians 7:15 the verb is a **present passive imperative** — *chōrizesthō* — a command in the passive voice: «let him be separated,» or more plainly, «let them go.» This is not a suggestion. It is not a reluctant concession. It is a direct apostolic command: if the unbeliever is determined to leave, the believer must let them leave. The passive imperative places the action on the departing spouse and the permission on the believer: you are not the one departing, but you are commanded not to prevent it.

Sefer kerītūt — Hebrew: «scroll of cutting-off.» This is the formal term in Deuteronomy 24:1 for the divorce document, known in later Jewish law as the *get*. *Sefer* means

scroll or document. *Kerîûtû* comes from *kārat* (to cut), the same root used for «cutting» a covenant. Just as a covenant is cut to bind, a *kerîûtû* is cut to sever. The divorce is not a mere agreement to live apart. It is a legal cutting — the formal dissolution of a covenantal bond, documented and witnessed, with the same seriousness as the bond it dissolves.

13.3 The Freedom

Dedoulōtai G1402 — the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 7:15: «*a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.*» The word is the **perfect passive indicative** of *douloō* G1402, meaning «to enslave, to bring into bondage.» The perfect tense indicates an established, ongoing state: «has not been enslaved and remains free.» The negative *ou* makes it an absolute denial: not enslaved, period. But the critical point is this: Paul did not use *deō* G1210, the word for the marriage bond. He used *douloō* G1402, the word for slavery. He chose a *stronger* word, not a weaker one. The deserted believer is not merely unbound. The deserted believer is *not enslaved* — free from the most oppressive form of obligation the language can describe.

Lysis G3080 — the noun Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 7:27 for “to be loosed.” Abbott-Smith defines it: «a loosing: **of divorce.**» The step gloss is simply “divorce.” This word appears only here in the entire New Testament. Paul is not talking about widowhood — he addresses widows separately in verse 8 and verse 39. *Lysis* means divorce. And when we search the New Testament for every verse where *gameō* (G1060, to marry) and *hamartanō* (G264, to sin) appear in the same verse, there are exactly two: 1 Corinthians 7:28 and 7:36. In both, Paul says the person has **not sinned**. The only two times “marry” and “sin” share a verse, the verdict is acquittal.

Dedesai / Ielusai (G1210 / G3089) — the two verbs Paul uses in the same verse: «*Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.*» Both verbs are in the **perfect passive indicative**. *Dedesai* (from *deō*, to bind): «you have been bound and stand bound.» *Ielusai* (from *lyō*, to loose): «you have been loosed and stand loosed.» Both are established, settled states — not actions in progress, but conditions already accomplished. The loosed person is as settled in their freedom as the bound person is settled in their marriage. And then Paul adds in the very next verse (7:28): «*But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned.*» The verb *gamēsēs* is **aurist subjunctive** — a simple, potential action. And «thou hast not sinned» is **aurist indicative** — a flat statement of fact. No qualification, no exception, no hedging. If the loosed person marries, they have not sinned. Period.

13.4 God as Husband

Bō 'alayik H1166 — the word in Isaiah 54:5: «*For thy Maker is thine husband.*» The Hebrew *bā 'al* means «husband, lord, master, owner,» and here it appears as a **Qal active participle** with the second-person feminine suffix: «your husband» — but not as a noun. As a participle, it means «the one who is being your husband right now, actively, presently.» The context is staggering. Isaiah 54 is addressed to Israel *after* the exile, after the divorce of chapter 50, after the humiliation and disgrace. And God says: I am *actively being your husband* in this very moment. Not «I was.» Not «I will be.» The participle is present and continuous: even in her disgrace, God is presently, actively, being her husband.

Ēshet berîtekā — «the wife of your covenant,» from Malachi 2:14: «*the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth ... the wife of thy covenant.*» The Hebrew is in the **construct state** with a personal suffix: *ēshet* (wife of) + *berît* (covenant) + *-ekā* (your). This is the strongest covenantal language available in Hebrew. It does not say «a wife» or «your wife.» It says «the wife of your covenant» — the woman bound to you by the most sacred instrument in the Hebrew world. The construct state fuses the words together: she is not merely a wife who happens to have a covenant. She is a *covenant-wife*. The bond and the person are inseparable in the grammar itself.

Ni 'āfāh H5003 — the word used in Jeremiah 3:8 to describe Israel's unfaithfulness: «*she had committed adultery.*» The form is **Piel perfect** — the intensive stem in the completed aspect. The Piel does not describe a single act. It describes habitual, deliberate, intensive action. Israel did not commit one act of adultery. She committed adultery *intensively, repeatedly, and deliberately* over a sustained period. And God gave her a bill of divorce *only after* the Piel — only after the adultery had become a settled, intensive pattern, not a single lapse. Even God's divorce was a last resort after sustained, deliberate unfaithfulness. And the BDB lexicon adds a detail the English cannot convey: the word *na'aph* H5003 in its Qal form means «to commit adultery, usually of a man, always with the wife of another» — the offence is always against an existing bond. You cannot commit adultery with someone who belongs to no one. And in its figurative use, both Qal and Piel, *na'aph* means «idolatrous worship.» In the Hebrew mind, adultery and idolatry are the same word. To worship another god is to betray the divine marriage. To betray a human marriage is to commit the same kind of offence against the covenant that idolatry commits against God.

13.5 Repentance and Burning

Metanoeō G3340 vs **Metamelomai** G3338 — two Greek words, both translated «repent» in English, but worlds apart in meaning. *Metanoeō* is composed of *meta* (change) and *noeō* (to think, to perceive with the mind): it means to change the mind entirely, to

reverse direction, to turn one's whole life toward God. This is the word Jesus uses in Matthew 4:17: «*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*» *Metamelomai* is composed of *meta* (change) and *melomai* (to be concerned about): it means to feel regret, to experience remorse, to wish things had gone differently. It is the word used for Judas in Matthew 27:3, who felt terrible about what he had done but never turned to God. The distinction matters in the context of marriage because the spouse who says «I'm sorry» may mean either one. *Metamelomai* changes nothing. *Metanoeō* changes everything.

Purousthai G4448 — the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 7:9: «*for it is better to marry than to burn.*» The word is a **present passive infinitive**: «to be being burned.» Two things are embedded in the grammar. First, the **present tense** indicates continuous, ongoing action — not a momentary flare but a sustained burning. Second, the **passive voice** means the burning happens *to* the person. It is not a fire they can extinguish by willpower. It is not a desire they can choose to turn off. It is a condition inflicted upon them from outside their control. Paul's solution is not «pray harder.» Paul's solution is *marry*. The grammar demands it: a passive condition requires an active remedy.

Gameō G1060 — the common Greek word meaning «to marry.» In 1 Corinthians 7:9, Paul writes: «*let them marry.*» The verb *gamēsatōsan* G1060 is **aoist active imperative** — third person plural. This is a direct command, not a suggestion. The aorist aspect points to a decisive, once-for-all action: «let them marry» — now, decisively, without hesitation. Paul does not say «they may marry if they must.» He does not say «it would perhaps be acceptable.» He commands it. The imperative mood leaves no room for treating marriage as a reluctant concession. For those who burn, marriage is the God-given command.

13.6 Conduct

Homologousin / arnountai (G3670 / G720) — the two verbs Paul uses in Titus 1:16: «*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.*» Both verbs are in the **present active indicative** — continuous, habitual action happening simultaneously. *Homologousin* (from *homos*, same, and *logos*, word) means to say the same thing, to confess, to profess openly. *Arnountai* (from *arneomai*) means to deny, to disown, to refuse. The present tense in both verbs means these actions are happening *at the same time, continuously*. They are professing and denying in the same breath, in every moment, without interruption. The grammar paints the portrait of a life built on permanent contradiction — a mouth that speaks God and hands that deny Him, simultaneously, habitually, without resolution.

13.7 The Numbers in the Letters

Every Hebrew letter has a numerical value — *aleph* = 1, *bet* = 2, through to *tav* = 400. The sum of a word's letter-values is its *gematria*. Jewish tradition has studied these numbers for millennia. In the words for man, woman, and marriage, they reveal a theology the English text cannot express.

Ish (אִישׁ, H376) — *man, husband*. Gematria: 311. **Ishah** (אִשָּׁה, H802) — *woman, wife*. Gematria: 306.

Both words share two letters: **aleph** (א) and **shin** (ש). Together these spell **esh** (אש) — *fire*. What makes man different from woman in Hebrew is one letter each: man has **yod** (י, value 10). Woman has **he** (ה, value 5). Together, those two letters spell **Yah** (יה) — the short form of God's name, as in *Hallelujah*.

Remove God's letters from husband and wife, and what remains is fire and fire. Two fires without God consume each other. But when Yah stands between them — *yod* in the man, *he* in the woman — the fire becomes the presence of God in the marriage. The Talmud teaches this explicitly: «*When husband and wife are worthy, the Shechinah dwells between them. When they are not worthy, fire consumes them*» (Sotah 17a). The Hebrew language itself encodes this teaching in the spelling of the words.

Ahavah (אָהָבָה) — *love*. Gematria: 13. **Echad** (אֶחָד) — *one*. Gematria: 13.

Love and oneness share the same number. And **YHWH** (יְהוָה) = 26 = 2 × 13 = two loves, two onenesses, joined. When God said «*the two shall become one flesh*» (Genesis 2:24), the mathematics were already in the language: two thirteens — two loves — becoming twenty-six: God's own number. Marriage is the human image of the divine name.

Brit (בְּרִית) — *covenant*. Gematria: 612.

The Torah contains 613 commandments. The covenant is 612 — one short. The missing one is the covenant itself: the relationship that gives the commandments their meaning. Without the covenant, the law is a list. With the covenant, it is a marriage.

The English gives us the story. The Greek and Hebrew give us the depth of the story. The gematria gives us the mathematics of the story. Man and woman without God are fire. With God between them, they carry His name. And the number of love is the number of oneness — because in the language God designed, love and unity were always the same word, the same number, the same truth.

Chapter 14

The Path Forward

14.1 The Case in Brief

If you have opened this book at its last chapter because your house is already burning, here is the whole argument in one place – every claim defended, verse by verse, in the chapters behind you:

1. **Marriage is a covenant meant for life.** God designed it, God joins it, and restoration is always the first pursuit (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 7:10–11).
2. **A covenant can be truly broken – and God Himself says so.** He divorced Israel for her unfaithfulness, certificate and all (Jeremiah 3:8). Divorce genuinely dissolves; it is not a legal fiction over an unbreakable bond.
3. **The certificate does not break the bond; it recognizes a bond already broken.** What breaks covenant is the breaking act: porneia (Matthew 19:9), desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15), and the sustained withholding of what is owed – food, clothing, marital love (Exodus 21:10–11) – with violence as its extreme.
4. **Jesus never revoked those protections.** His “except for porneia” answered the “any cause” question He was asked, and His verdict falls on the dismitter – never on the dismissed (Matthew 19:3–9; 5:32).
5. **The one set free may remarry.** *She shall go out free. Not enslaved. If you marry, you have not sinned* (Exodus 21:11; 1 Corinthians 7:15, 28; Deuteronomy 24:2).
6. **Guilt does not transfer.** The covenant-breaker bears the breaking. The wronged walk out free – and God’s grace runs toward the repentant breaker too.

If any of that startles you, do not take it from a summary. Take it from the Scriptures themselves, in the chapters that argue it. Then come back here, and let us talk about you.

My heart aches, dear Saint, when I see the Body of Christ wrestling with truths that should bring freedom, yet so often bring condemnation. I have witnessed it time and again in my ministry, and perhaps you, my friend, are living through it right now. The full biblical picture, the glorious tapestry of God’s heart for marriage and for His children, holds two profound truths simultaneously. Yet, so much of the teaching we hear,

so much of the counsel given, sacrifices one of these vital truths for the other. We fall into ditches on either side, do we not?

On one side, we proclaim — and rightly so! — that marriage is a covenant of immense, sacred weight. Our God is a covenant-keeping God, and He expects nothing less from His people. I know in my very bones that **God hates covenant-breaking**. The prophet Malachi's words echo with an unflinching clarity that we dare not ignore:

Malachi 2:16 · For the man who hates and divorces, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.

A word about this verse, because it is the most misquoted passage in the entire divorce debate. The older translations (KJV, NKJV) render it as "the LORD... hateth putting away" — as if God is declaring that He hates all divorce. But the Hebrew verb *śānē* שָׂנֵא^{H8130} is in the **third person** — "**he** hates" — not the first person ("I hate"). If God were speaking of Himself, the Hebrew would use *saneti*. The subject of the verb is the divorcing husband, not God. Modern translations (ESV, NIV 2011) now render it correctly: the man who hates and divorces covers his garment with *chamas* חָמָס^{H2555} — violence. And the verse ends with *bagad* בָּגַד^{H898} — "to act treacherously, faithlessly, deceitfully." Malachi condemns **treacherous** divorce — a man who throws away his wife out of contempt and covers himself in violence. Wilson's *Bible Types* reads the garment with the weight Scripture gives it. Under "Garment," Wilson writes: garments in Scripture represent the visible life, the public profession — and on Psalm 109:18, describing Judas: "He did it with his whole person. From his feet which carried him ... to the lips which kissed the Saviour, his whole person was involved in his wicked action." When Malachi says the treacherous husband covers his garment with violence, the typology says: his entire visible life, his public profession of covenant, is stained. The treachery is not hidden. It is garment-level — total, visible, defining. He does not condemn the lawful release that Deuteronomy 24 provides and that God Himself used in Jeremiah 3:8. The verse that is quoted most often to forbid all divorce actually forbids only the cruel kind.

Yes, my beloved, restoration is always, always the first pursuit when the other party shows willingness, when there is even a glimmer of repentance. Think of Hosea, taking back his unfaithful Gomer. Think of our God, tirelessly pursuing His unfaithful Israel! Children, shared history, the sacred vows spoken before God and witnesses — these carry an enormous, beautiful weight.

But then, my friend, there is the other side of this divine coin, a truth often buried under layers of tradition and fear. The Scripture declares with equal clarity that **porneia breaks the bond**. The innocent party, the one betrayed, does not have to pretend that the covenant remains unbroken. When a functional unbeliever departs, when they have

irrevocably walked away from the covenant, they have, by their actions, already ended the marriage in God's eyes. And let us never forget, God Himself recognized this and acted accordingly! The innocent party bears none of the guilt for that which was broken by another. And this is crucial, my dear Saint, for your freedom: **indefinite mandatory celibacy imposed on an innocent spouse is not biblical; it is an addition to Scripture, a burden God never intended for His children to carry.**

This, then, is the divine balance, the truth I pray will set you free:

God takes marriage more seriously than divorce-permitting teachers often do, and He takes the innocent party more seriously than permanence-at-all-costs teachers often do.

14.2 How Do I Know This Applies to Me?

I know what you may be thinking, my friend. You have followed the argument through Scripture, you have seen the evidence laid out chapter by chapter, and yet here you sit with the question that really matters: *Does this apply to my situation?*

Let me sit across the table from you, with the Word of God open between us, and walk through the questions that matter most. These are not loopholes. They are the very categories that Scripture itself establishes. Answer them honestly before God, and you will know where you stand.

But before the first question, let me place one truth in your hands, because every question that follows depends on holding it rightly. **In most broken marriages, both spouses sinned. In most broken marriages, only one of them broke the covenant.** Those are two different ledgers, and they must never be merged.

Every marriage holds two sinners – that has been true since Eden, and it is true of yours. You were sometimes cold. You said words you cannot take back. If you look honestly, you will find real entries in your own ledger, and you must repent of them, because they are truly yours. But being a flawed spouse is not what breaks a covenant. A covenant is broken by the breaking acts – porneia, desertion, the withholding of what is owed – and the fist, its violent extreme – and in most marriages that die, one hand did the breaking.

So refuse the two counterfeit accountings, because both are lies. The first says: *"It takes two. You must share the guilt of the breaking."* No. Scripture never audits the wronged party before setting them free. Exodus 21 does not ask whether the wife was pleasant; Paul does not ask what the deserted believer contributed. Your failures were real, and they are yours to confess – but they did not license their porneia, and they did not sign their desertion. The second counterfeit whispers: *"You are the innocent one. You have*

nothing to repent of.” Also no. Innocence in the covenant’s breaking is not innocence in everything, and self-righteousness is a poor companion into a new beginning.

So walk through these questions with both ledgers open: quick to own everything that is truly yours, and unwilling to carry a single line that is not. And if, reading honestly, you find the breaking act in *your* ledger — do not close this book. It does not hand you a stone. The God who runs toward the returning is running toward you too, and the road home is repentance, not despair.

14.3 1. Has your spouse committed porneia?

If your spouse has been sexually unfaithful to the marriage covenant — whether through adultery, ongoing pornography addiction that has replaced the marriage bed, or any form of sexual betrayal — then the exception Jesus Himself gave in Matthew 19:9 applies directly to your situation:

Matthew 19:9 · I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.

Notice what Jesus is saying here: the one who divorces for porneia and remarries does *not* commit adultery. The one-flesh bond was already broken by the act of betrayal itself. The divorce certificate does not create the break — it merely recognizes what the unfaithful spouse already shattered. You are the wronged party. Jesus does not transfer their guilt to you. He never has.

14.4 2. Has your spouse departed the covenant?

Perhaps the situation is not sexual betrayal but abandonment. Your spouse has left — physically, emotionally, or through persistent refusal of all marital obligations — and they refuse every attempt at reconciliation. In that case, Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:15 speaks directly to you:

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

Remember what we discovered earlier in this book: Paul’s word for “unbeliever” here is *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571} — faithless. It describes someone by their actions, not merely by their profession. A person who claims to be a Christian but has permanently walked

away from every obligation of the marriage covenant — refusing intimacy, refusing partnership, refusing presence — has classified themselves as faithless by what they do, regardless of what they say on Sunday morning. Their actions have spoken. And when that conduct has run its full, unrepentant course, Jesus Himself commands the church to treat the person as exactly that (Matthew 18:17). You are not enslaved to a covenant that only one party is keeping.

14.5 3. Has your spouse broken the covenant from within?

Perhaps your spouse has not committed porneia. Perhaps they have not walked out of the door. They are still in the house — and the covenant is gone anyway. They have withheld what they vowed to give: provision, presence, the marriage bed. Or they have gone further, and the hand that promised to hold you has been raised against you. Do not let anyone tell you Scripture is silent here, my friend. It is not silent — it has only been forgotten.

Exodus 21:10-11 · If he takes another wife to himself, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out free, for nothing — no money paid.

We met this text in chapter three, and we saw the rabbis reason from the lesser to the greater: if even a slave wife could walk free from a husband who withheld these things, how much more a free woman. But look closer at the Hebrew now. The three things are her *she'er* שֶׁאֵר^{H7607}, her *kesut* כְּסוּת^{H3682}, and her *onah* עֹנָה^{H5772} — and *she'er* does not simply mean “food.” It means *flesh* — the flesh nearest the bone, and by extension one’s own kin, one’s own self. And the verb God forbids is *gara* גָּרַע^{H1639} — not merely to “diminish,” but to *scrape off*, to clip away, to shave down. Hear what the Torah is actually saying: you shall not scrape away her flesh. And now mark the thing the church has mislaid, beloved, for it is the whole mercy of this text: **God did not require the husband to leave before she could go free.** He never departs. He simply withholds — and the Law hands her the door regardless. Paul says nothing softer of him. The man who provides nothing for his own house “hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8) — worse than an *apistos* ἄπιστος^{G571}. But the scraping does not always stop at the soul. Sometimes it turns on the body, and God settles that question too, fifteen verses later, in the same breath of law:

Exodus 21:26-27 · And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye’s sake. And if he smite out his manservant’s tooth, or his maidservant’s tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth’s sake.

One eye. One tooth. That is the entire price of a servant's freedom — and a servant, in that economy, held the least standing of anyone alive. Now this is case law, my friend, not statute: its principles travel where its details cannot. So reason it out with me, from the lesser to the greater, exactly as the rabbis did. If withholding her food set a wife free, and if a single tooth set a bondservant free, then tell me what God reckons is owed to a wife — a free woman, a covenant partner, made in His own image — whose body is being broken by the man who vowed to cherish it. And one thing more, because it is the very stone they will throw at you: *that is a slave law, not a marriage law*. But look at what those same three obligations were doing centuries later. In Jewish marriage certificates from the first and second centuries, a husband undertakes to give his wife **food, clothing and bed** — the very three. Argue all day about where the scribes thought they got them; this much is plain from the documents themselves. Food, clothing and conjugal love were never the peculiar due of a slave. They were the ordinary floor under an ordinary marriage between free people. What Exodus 21 does is state that floor at its lowest point — for the woman with the least standing of anyone alive. That is precisely what makes it the lesser case — and in this kind of reasoning it is the lesser case that settles the greater. If the floor holds where standing is lowest, it holds for every woman above her. And notice what God does not ask of the one who was struck. He does not send them back to try harder. He does not tell them to endure it a little longer. He sends them out free — not to forbid reconciliation, but so that it can never again be the price of survival.

But someone will raise an objection here, and raise it honestly, from an open Bible: *didn't Jesus name only one ground? "Except for porneia." If neglect and violence could end a marriage, why did He never say so?*

Let me be precise about what I am claiming, because the objection deserves precision. I am not claiming Jesus listed these grounds. I am claiming His ruling never revoked them — and the burden of that reading falls on the text, so look at the text. **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?"** (Matthew 19:3). The question the Pharisees brought Him concerns a man — *anthrōpos ἄνθρωπος*^{G444} — putting away *his* wife: the husband's certificate of Deuteronomy 24:1, the statute Hillel had stretched into "any cause." And His answer judges the one who wields it: *"whoever divorces his wife, except for porneia, and marries another, commits adultery."* Mark records Him closing the other door too — a wife who dismisses her innocent husband stands under the same verdict (Mark 10:12). Every word of it governs **the one doing the dismissing**. Not once, in any Gospel, does the verdict fall on the one dismissed — in Matthew 5:32 the dismissed wife is the one *sinned against*, the victim the dismitter creates. And the woman of Exodus 21 stands on that side of the ledger. She is not dismissing anyone. She is a wronged wife going out free from a husband who has broken covenant with her. To stretch Jesus's verdict on covenant-breakers until it condemns the covenant-keeper is not a careful reading. It is the verdict turned upside down.

And we are not the first to read Him this way – **Paul did**. He knew the Lord’s charge and quoted it: no separating, no dismissing (1 Corinthians 7:10–11). Then, writing under the same Spirit five verses later, he faced a case the charge had not named – the believer deserted by an unbeliever – and he did not say “there is no porneia here, so there is nothing to be done.” He said *not enslaved* (1 Corinthians 7:15). Whatever else that phrase means – and we walked through what it means in Paul’s Framework – it is a release, granted on the ground of desertion alone. The apostle who had the exception clause in his hands did not treat it as the last word on every broken marriage. That is not my inference. That is what he did, on the page, in Scripture.

As for why Jesus never raised neglect and violence on His own – Scripture does not say, and I will not put words in His mouth. I will only note what the record shows: His generation was tearing itself apart over “any cause” divorce, and that is the dispute the Gospels bring to Him. No one brought Him the freedoms of Exodus 21 to rule on. What we may not do is turn a question they never asked into a ruling He never gave.

14.6 4. Have you pursued reconciliation?

This question matters deeply, because Paul’s first instruction is always reconciliation when possible:

First Corinthians 7:10-11 · To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

The divine ideal is restoration. Have you genuinely sought it? Have you gone to your spouse with an open heart? Have you involved the church, sought counsel, offered forgiveness where it could be received? If so, and the other party has refused — if they have hardened their heart, rejected every overture, and made clear by their words and their actions that they will not return — then that refusal is on them, not on you. You have done what God asked. You cannot force another human being to repent. Even God Himself does not do that.

14.7 5. Was the marriage one that God joined together?

This is a question many teachers never think to ask, but Jesus’ own words demand it. When He said “what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:6), He was making a specific statement: God joins certain marriages together. The implication

is important — not every legal union automatically carries the full weight of that divine joining.

If a marriage was entered in direct violation of God's explicit commands — if it was unequally yoked in open defiance of His command, if it involved deception about fundamental matters of faith and character — it may have been a human joining rather than a divine one. God, in His grace, can certainly work within such unions and bring good from them. But they do not automatically carry the covenant protection that belongs to a marriage He Himself brought together. This is not a loophole; it is a recognition that Jesus' own words draw a distinction.

And because this question is the most easily abused of the six, let me close a door I know someone is eyeing. A marriage contracted before you came to faith is **not** what this question describes. Paul faced that exact case and settled it:

First Corinthians 7:12-14 · If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she is content to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he is content to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

If your unbelieving spouse is content to stay, you do not divorce them. Your spouse is sanctified through you and your children are holy — Paul's own words, claiming no less and no more. Ezra's generation stood under an explicit statute given to national Israel; you stand under Paul's word to the church. Question five does not ask whether your marriage began in ignorance — almost every marriage does. It asks whether it began in **defiance**.

14.8 6. Are you burning?

Finally, if you find yourself in the category Paul calls agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} — without a spouse — and you cannot maintain celibacy with peace, Paul's command is not a suggestion. It is clear and direct:

First Corinthians 7:9 · But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paul never restricted this command to the never-married. The word agamos ἄγαμος^{G22} includes the divorced — Paul uses it that way explicitly in 1 Corinthians 7:11. If you are divorced through legitimate dissolution, and you are burning, Paul's instruction applies

to you. Marry. It is better to marry than to burn. The apostle wrote those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and they carry the full authority of Scripture.

Walk through these questions honestly, my friend. Bring them before God in prayer. If you can answer yes to any of the first three questions, and yes to the fourth, then Scripture speaks freedom over your life. You are not trapped. You are not condemned. You are seen, and you are loved.

14.9 What Remarriage Should Look Like

When there is even a breath of hope, when the other party is willing to repent, when the Spirit of God is clearly working to draw them back, then yes, my brother, my sister, restoration should always be pursued with all your heart. Just as Hosea took back Gomer, just as our God Himself called to faithless Israel with open arms:

Jeremiah 3:12 · Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever.

Oh, the power of God to restore is immense! The children, the shared history, the sacred vows — these are powerful threads that God delights to reweave. Never underestimate His ability to heal and make whole again.

But what happens, my friend, when restoration has been definitively refused? What happens when the other party has truly departed, broken the covenant beyond repair, and shown no indication whatsoever of returning to the Lord or to the marriage? In such devastating circumstances, the innocent party stands in the freedom that Scripture so clearly declares. You are **”not enslaved”**. The Apostle Paul’s words are a beacon of light for you:

First Corinthians 7:15 · But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

The guilt, my dear one, reflects back onto the one who departed. The certificate of divorce, in such cases, merely names and formalizes what betrayal had already created in the eyes of God. You bear no shame, no blame, for another’s sin.

So, if you, an innocent party, find yourself in such a season of legitimate dissolution, what does remarriage look like? It is not a casual affair, not a rushed decision, but a sacred step. It must be:

- **In the Lord**, as 1 Corinthians 7:39 reminds us.

- **Equally yoked**, as 2 Corinthians 6:14 commands.
- With someone who shares your foundational faith, a true fellow pilgrim on the narrow path.
- Entered with full awareness and reverence for the immense weight of covenant, for you know its cost.
- Undertaken not casually, not impulsively, but with deep prayer, seeking the wisdom of the Saints, and yes, with prophetic confirmation from the Spirit of God.

But let me say something here that I believe with all my heart, because too many of God's children walk into a second marriage carrying a weight of shame that does not belong to them: **remarriage after legitimate dissolution is not second-class marriage.**

It is not Plan B. It is not "settling." It is not God making the best of a bad situation. It is a new covenant, entered with the full blessing and design of God Himself.

And here is why I can say that with such confidence. Look at the greatest story ever told. God's covenant with Israel was real, sacred, weighty. It carried the full authority of His name. And yet Israel broke it — irrevocably, persistently, without repentance. God Himself issued a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8). And then what did He do? He established a *new* covenant. With a *new* bride. The Church.

Was that New Covenant inferior to the Old? Was it second-class? Was it God reluctantly making do? You know the answer, my friend. The New Covenant was *greater*. It was written not on tablets of stone but on human hearts. It was sealed not with the blood of bulls and goats but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ Himself. It was everything the first covenant pointed toward.

Hebrews 8:6 · But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

If God's own "remarriage" — His new covenant with the Church after divorcing faithless Israel — was not inferior but *superior*, then on what scriptural basis would we say that your new marriage, entered in faith, in obedience, with a fellow believer, is somehow less than? We cannot. Scripture will not allow it.

Your new marriage, if entered in the Lord and on biblical grounds, carries the full weight of God's design for marriage. It is a covenant. It is holy. It is blessed. Walk into it not with shame but with gratitude, not with apology but with worship. God is doing a new thing — and He has always been in the business of making all things new.

And here, my beloved Saints, is the greatest picture of all, the ultimate theological foundation for your freedom and hope:

Jeremiah 3:8 · I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

But did He remain forever unmarried? Did He remain forever alone? No! He then established a new covenant with a new people, a new bride who would be faithful! The Church, you and I, we are the Bride of Christ!

Ephesians 5:25-27 · Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Revelation 19:7-9 · Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! And he added, These are the true words of God.

Can you see it, my friend? This is, in the deepest theological sense, **God's own remarriage after divorce!** If God Himself, the very author of marriage, remarried after divorcing the faithless party, how can we, His children, say that remarriage after legitimate dissolution is inherently sinful for the innocent? It simply cannot be!

My heart tells me that the people who need this book most are not those looking for permission to divorce casually. No, those people simply leave, often without a second thought for God's Word. The people who need this book, the ones I am speaking to right now, are the Saints sitting in genuine, crushing pain, trapped in spiritually destructive situations, who have been told by their church, by their leaders, that God requires them to stay, that any thought of leaving or remarrying is a sin before Him. You are carrying a crushing weight of guilt that **Scripture does not assign to you.**

My prayer for you, my precious child of God, is that you would find the path forward, illuminated by the full truth of His Word. May you walk in the freedom Christ purchased for you, unburdened by man-made rules, and find peace in the unwavering, compassionate heart of our heavenly Father. He sees you. He knows your pain. And He offers you not condemnation, but a path to healing, to hope, and to new life.

Chapter 15

Contact

If this book has spoken to your situation — if you have been carrying guilt that Scripture does not assign to you — know that you are not alone.

The people who need this book most are not people looking for permission to divorce casually. Those people simply leave. The people who need this book are the ones sitting in genuine pain, in spiritually destructive situations, who have been told by their church that God requires them to stay and that any thought of leaving or remarrying is sin.

God demonstrated in Jeremiah 3 that a righteous spouse can legitimately end a covenant when the other party has fundamentally broken it. He was not guilty for issuing the certificate. Israel was guilty for making it necessary.

15.1 Colophon

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