



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC)

---

**Creation/Publication Date:** February 1992

**Author/Group Responsible for its Production:** Charles Yates, George Atkinson, William Griffin,  
Earl McNutt, William Morrow

**Status of Paper:** Discussion Paper mandated by the General Conference 1990 – Resolution #21

**Description:** This is a response to the mandate by the General Conference 1990 to consider changes to the General Constitution and By-Laws to make provision for our pastors to be allowed to perform marriages for persons divorced prior to conversion.

---

## **REPORT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE**

### **GENERAL CONFERENCE 1990 -- RESOLUTION #21:**

"WHEREAS the Western Ontario District passed the following resolution at their district conference, and

WHEREAS the Scriptures teach the totality of the cleansing blood of Christ when a person sincerely repents and turns to the Lord, and

WHEREAS we place certain restrictions on the access of all divorced persons to the ministries of the PAOC,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Western Ontario District request that our General Conference make allowance for persons divorced prior to conversion to be remarried by our pastors.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the General Executive appoint a committee to consider changes to the General Constitution and By-Laws to make provision for our pastors to be allowed to perform marriages for persons divorced prior to conversion, and to present these amendments to the 1992 General Conference.

MOVED and SECONDED

MOVED and SECONDED to make the following amendment by addition to the end of the resolution:

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that there be a study of the biblical, social, and pastoral implications of divorce and remarriage and, further, a definition of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and that this be presented by February 1, 1992 to all credential holders.

The amendment was

CARRIED

The resolution, as amended, was

CARRIED

### **COMMITTEE:**

The Committee appointed by the General Executive was composed of the following members:

G. Atkinson	Pastor, Scarborough Gospel Temple
W. Griffin	Executive Director, Church Ministries
E. McNutt	Pastor, Stone Church
W. Morrow	Superintendent, Western Ontario District
C. Yates	General Secretary

### **RESOURCE PEOPLE:**

The Committee requested John Stephenson, a Bible College teacher at EPBC, to do research on the relevant Biblical texts and to meet with the Committee on several occasions. Others who were invited to make oral and written presentations are:

V. Grieco	Pastor, Leamington Full Gospel Tab.
A. Saunders	Parkwood Counselling Centre, Windsor
W. Dawes	Pastor, Peterborough Northview Church

### **WRITTEN SUBMISSION:**

The Committee received many written submissions from a wide cross-section of the Fellowship. See APPENDIX 1.

### **REFERENCES:**

The Committee listed a significant number of reference books, articles, and manuscripts related to the topic.

See APPENDIX 2.

### **TOPIC:**

The following quotations taken from the written submissions indicate the sensitivity and complexity of the problem which the Committee **faced when considering the** subject of **divorce** and remarriage.

"The question of divorce is one that perennially interests and agitates the church."

"The pain of a marriage breakdown is increasingly widespread and often unbearable, and the pastor needs wisdom and compassion in sharing and ministering to a complex and difficult situation."

"For centuries scholars have wrestled with the Biblical statements on divorce and remarriage and their pronouncements have been contradictory."

### **STRATEGY OF THE COMMITTEE:**

After due consideration of its mandate, the Committee purposed to follow the course of action outlined below:

1. Assemble material on the subject which reflects opinions held by scholars and practitioners who have a fundamental commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures. The material will be offered to the credential holders of the PAOC as objectively as possible showing what "good" men have said on both sides of the subject. The Committee will not attempt to present an exhaustive coverage of the subject but shall exercise the prerogative of selecting material which it believes is representative of significant positions and meaningful to the reader.
2. Present the material in the order of social, Biblical, and pastoral implications. The rationale for the order of treatment is that the subject arises in a social context and must be addressed in its cultural milieu by the relevant Scriptures. It is the task of the pastor to apply

appropriately the unchanging, but freshly examined, Biblical principles to the current social situation.

3. Present definitions which adequately describe the PAOC's current views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.
4. Offer opinions to the constituency on how our present definitions of marriage, divorce, and remarriage would be altered if a different interpretation of the relevant Biblical texts were to be chosen.
5. Respond to the instruction **by the 1990 General Conference** to prepare amendments to the 1992 General Conference "to make provision for our pastors to be allowed to perform marriages for persons divorced prior to conversion." The amendments will be mailed to the constituency along with any other proposed changes to the Constitution and By-Laws 60 days prior to the 1992 General Conference.

The Committee wishes to note that a careful review of this report may provide a more Biblically sound alternative than the change proposed at the 1990 General Conference.

### **SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There is little doubt that Canadian views on the subject of divorce and remarriage have changed dramatically in the past 25 years. Prior to legislative changes in 1968, a small percentage of marriages ended in divorce.<1> The basic reasons for the low number of divorces may have related to a higher moral respect for the institution of marriage and a concern for the stability of the family. The low number may also have been influenced by the complex and costly ordeal of securing a divorce. With the most

<1>The average number of divorces per year for the period 1966-68 was 11,000 according to the Canada Year Book 1990, (Published by the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion, 1989), n. 2.9.6 Divorces.

recent liberalization of divorce procedures in 1986<2> and the virtual disappearance of the stigma of divorce in all sectors (political, professional, business, community, and even some religious groups), the incidence of divorce has become commonplace in our society.

It is possible to measure the extent of the problem from perspectives which may produce varying statistics. For example, in 1987 there were 182,151 marriages and 90,985 divorces in Canada. Using these statistics, the "divorce rate" could be calculated to be 49.95 per cent. The example may be misleading because there are separate significant factors which relate to both the couples who were divorced and the couples who were married in the year. Other methods for arriving at statistical conclusions attempt to take into account the significant variables. A study in Context,<3> a quarterly publication edited by Don Posterski, refers to 15 per cent of a specific age group (40-49) who were married and divorced by 1984. By projecting this 15 per cent over the expected lifespan of this specific age group, it has been calculated that 28 per cent of this particular group would be divorced at some point in their life. With reference to second and third marriages, most studies demonstrate that the rate of divorce is higher than for first.

For our purposes, it does not seem important to decide which set of statistics should be used to describe the divorce situation -- the critical observation is that far too many marriages end in divorce. There is an erosion of the traditional sacredness, as well as the appreciation of the practical value, of the permanent marriage.

When a previous generation of credential holders and lay delegates faced the issue at the 1970 General Conference in Victoria, BC, they recommended that the PAOC not change its position regarding divorce and remarriage. Although 60 per cent of Canadians were in favour of relaxing divorce laws, according to a poll taken in 1966, the delegates at the 1970 General Conference indicated that the PAOC should hold the line against the attack on marriage. Some of the words used in Resolution #14 convey the general sentiments of the delegates:

<2>"In 1986, Canada's divorce law was simplified so that there is only one ground for divorce: marriage breakdown. This is now considered to have occurred if the spouses have lived apart for one year. Previously a three-year separation was required unless other grounds, such as adultery, could be proven." Canadian Global Almanac 1992 (Toronto: Global Press, 1992), p. 480.

<3>Don Posterski, ed., Context (Mississauga, Ontario: MARC Canada, September, 1991), p. 3. That any seeming discrimination within the church against a divorced person remarried and whose spouse is still living, be understood as a measure to preserve the sanctity of marriage in those not affected, especially in this day of moral decline and not as a measure of discrimination against the victim of a broken marriage, and

That we recognize that marriage, though terminated by divorce for any reason, is a divine institution designed for the earthly lifetime of the partners and that divorce can never produce a satisfactory solution to marital problems and, though it might give some measure of respite, it nevertheless must suffer some penalty in this life where the divine law has been broken.<4>

Following the new Canadian divorce legislation in 1968 which simplified procedures, the number of divorces increased steadily through the 1970s. Again the delegates of the 1978 General Conference in Calgary requested a committee to study the Biblical material on the topic and make a presentation to the following General Conference. When the 1980 Conference convened in Hamilton, the delegates were not prepared to approve any of the options presented to them, although a majority of the voting delegates indicated they wanted a change in the current position. Still another study committee prepared a resolution on the subject of Divorce and Remarriage for the 1982 General Conference in Winnipeg. At that Conference less than a majority voted in favour of the resolution offered. The topic was considered again at the 1986 General Conference in Edmonton. This time the resolution requested the delegates to change our position with reference to persons who were divorced before their conversion. Once more, the Conference defeated the motion leaving the Fellowship with the position as it had been defined in the 1970 Resolution #14.

The number of divorces continued to rise through most of the 1980s with a slight decline at the end of the decade. The decline might be viewed as a hopeful sign if it were not also true that an increasing number of people avoided marriage by staying single or opting for common-in-law relationships.<5> The fact that the question has been raised again by the 1990 General Conference in Winnipeg is evidence that pastors are experiencing growing pressures to re-examine our position on the subject. The pertinent observations may be summarized:

<4>The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 27th Biennial General Conference, Victoria, BC, Resolution #14 -- Divorce and Remarriage.

<5>In 1989, the number of marriages was 190,640; in 1975 it was 197,585. The Canadian Global Almanac 1992, p. 479.

- 1. In the midst of moral and marital chaos what our society needs most is a presentation of Truth. Regardless of the personal experiences and preferences of the membership of .the PAOC, there is a foundational commitment to the Scriptures as the Word of God and, therefore, the rule of life. We must examine our position to discover what the unchanging Word says to our particular social situation in 1992.**
- 2. A significant percentage of adults who are presently -,being converted in our churches are divorced. If they wish to be remarried, our ministers are unable to officiate at their weddings. They may be remarried by a secular official, or a minister of another denomination, and maintain official membership in one of our churches.**
- 3. A significant number of adults who are presently being converted are remarried with a former spouse still living. These people are eligible for membership in our churches but ineligible**

to hold certain offices in the church. They are also ineligible for credentials with The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

4. The focus in our Fellowship historically has been on the prohibition of remarriage rather than the limited reason(s) for which the Scriptures permit a divorce. Generally, we have not offered discipline to the divorced person or withheld privileges as long as the person did not remarry.
5. Divorce statistics have increased not only in the general population but also among the members and adherents of our churches. Often a divorce results in one or both spouses leaving the church. The services of the minister and church which may have been a vital part of a person's life become limited, at least with reference to sanctioning another marriage with a new spouse.
6. Divorced and remarried people occupy a special status among the body of believers. It may be argued that there is a natural and inescapable consequence for having precipitated, or having been the victim of, the breakup of a marriage. It may also be argued that placing them in a special category is unfortunate but necessary in order to present a clear message concerning God's ideal for marriage. Whatever the line of reasoning, the present situation is that those who have failed in marriage are treated differently in some ways from any other group of sinners.
7. A growing number of adults are opting for "living-together" arrangements which allow them to escape the commitments involved in marriage. Our society and government has given recognition to common-in-law relationships as being legally equivalent to marriage in some respects -- especially in regard to property and children. Pastors usually encourage such people who come into our churches to either sever the relationship or get married. Our ministers are allowed to officiate at weddings of people who have been involved in what the church would consider an immoral lifestyle, but not if they have been married previously and have a former spouse still living.
8. Adults get divorced, but children get divorced too. With the significant number of families in the church which have been touched by divorce, it is obvious that there are literally thousands of children and young people in our churches who share the pain. We are aware that our treatment of the subject of divorce and remarriage has a bearing on the welfare of these children.

It is important to note that the relevant Biblical passages were written in very different social contexts. Later in this presentation, in the section BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS, there will be a more detailed discussion of these Scriptures. Our purpose in this section is to note the influence of the social situation on the development of regulations and customs.

Genesis 2:24. The first statement in the Bible about the marriage relationship between a man and a woman refers to the time before sin had entered the world. It anticipates that there would be a permanent bond between the partners in marriage. Jesus referred to this passage as a description of God's ideal for marriage.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4. After sin entered the world, the institution of marriage was negatively affected like everything else. Imperfect people participated in imperfect marriages. The social situation to which Deuteronomy 24 was first addressed was one in which divorce and remarriage were a fact of life. It will be referred to later in the Gospels as a time when evil ruled and men's hearts were hardened. The ancient customs related to divorce and marriage were the product of a patriarchal age which acted without due appreciation for the value and rights of women. Moses simply attempted to regulate what was already happening. He dealt primarily not with divorce but with remarriage in this passage. Specifically, after reporting that men were divorcing their wives "for something indecent," he addressed only a small percentage of the cases of remarriage since his statements referred to a man remarrying a woman to whom he had previously been married.

The most that can be said is that Moses permitted or accepted the situation as it was being practiced by not offering any correction or condemnation. The important point to be made is that apparently because of the social implications in the evil society, Moses settled for a divorce and remarriage situation which was short of the ideal presented in Genesis 2.

Ezra 10. This passage refers to a very unique situation. The Hebrews had married pagan women and conceived children by them. Divorce was prescribed by Shecaniah and Ezra as a means of protecting the religious purity of the Hebrew community. The interesting point is that the sanctity of the marriage bond was considered less valid than the need to protect the religious heritage. There is no reference to the topic of remarriage in the passage.

Gospels. The issue of divorce and remarriage was hotly debated by the main rabbinic schools identified with Shammai and Hillel. The Shammaites claimed that the "something indecent" of Deuteronomy 24, which was considered to be legitimate and compulsory grounds for divorce, to be adultery. The Hillelites, taking a much more liberal stance, claimed that the "indecency" could refer to "any cause." It appears that there were no limitations placed upon remarriage if a certificate of divorce had been issued.<6> It is in this context which Jesus insists that the discussion should not rehearse legalistic interpretations based upon the passages attributed to Moses but rather should evoke a spiritual commitment to the older and more authoritative statements in Genesis 2.

Jesus shows how evil spreads in a society when one person does the wrong thing. When a person divorces a spouse, "except for marital unfaithfulness," the person commits adultery when he remarries, causes the former spouse to commit adultery when she marries again, and also causes the new person in the second marriage to commit adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-11; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18).

Pauline. The early years of the history of the church were volatile to say the least. The traditional boundaries of the people of God had to give way and make room for the "whosoever will." The Gentiles who flooded into the church did not have the background of Old Testament laws. There were many moral issues which the new Christian church had to address.

<6>A bill of divorce which apparently was used among the Jews of the Diaspora illustrates in some of the statements the general acceptance of remarriage: "Thus I do set free, release thee, and put thee aside, in order that thou may have permission and the authority over thyself and to go and marry any man thou may desire. . . . in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." Quoted from Encyclopedia Judaica by J. Carl Laney, The Divorce Myth (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1981), p. 31.

**The Apostle Paul was commissioned by God to be the major teacher as the doctrinal and ethical foundations of the church were built upon the Chief Cornerstone. The sacred truths which were revealed to him and which were recorded in the letters he wrote to churches and individuals make up a large part of the New Testament.**

**When the Corinthians raised some questions about marriage and divorce, Paul was able to rely upon the known words of Jesus for some answers and report what the Spirit was saying through his own lips on other issues. There are some observations which can be made about the difference in the social situation which Paul addressed as compared to the Pharisaical setting in which Jesus spoke:**

1. **1 Corinthians 7:2 -- "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband." The immorality of Corinth was infamous.**

2. The **strong patriarchal system of Judaism was under some attack due to the influx of gentile women. Paul is careful to show that both male and female have rights and obligations. When Paul uses the Lord as his authority to prohibit divorce, he uses the wife as the initial subject of his sentence: "A wife must not separate from her husband . . . " (1 Corinthians 7:10). Paul, admitting that he is not quoting Jesus, also states that even if the wife is an unbeliever, she should not be divorced if she is willing to remain married to her Christian husband; he then repeats the scenario with the genders reversed.**
3. **Paul comments on the delicate tension between a person's natural sex appetite and the desire to serve God. The unmarried Corinthians are advised to remain single, presumably so that they can serve God more devotedly. But if their singleness should facilitate immoral temptations, it is proper for them to marry. He also observes the sanctifying influence a person may have on his/her unbelieving spouse and children.**
4. **There are also some special factors for the Corinthians which Paul refers to as "the present crisis" (v.26), "many troubles in this life" (v.28), and "the time is short" (v.29).**
5. **The Apostle informs the Corinthians that if an unbelieving wife or husband leaves, "a believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances" (v.15). The critical question is whether or not the "desertion" of one spouse leaves the remaining spouse free to remarry.**

**In the developing first-century church the people were not always familiar with the Old Testament, the rabbinic teachings, and certainly not the statements of Jesus. With such rapid growth among people who had been associated with pagan religions, the early apostles found it necessary to give specific directions in some areas -- including eligibility for leadership roles.**

**In Judaism, leaders were identified and groomed for their responsibilities from birth. Such was not the case in the early church. The Book of Acts reports the actions of the apostles to fill the gap left by Judas, to appoint deacons who would assist in the administrative and charitable matters, to settle doctrinal issues and practices, and a host of other issues. The Apostle Paul, who himself had to demonstrate his right to leadership, offered specific advice on determining leadership in the local church. One of the factors was marital status.**

**In his letters to Timothy and Titus, while listing the qualifications for overseers (elders) and deacons, Paul states that the Christian leader should be "the husband of but one wife." <7> The historical position of the PAOC with reference to divorce and remarriage, and more specifically with reference to the eligibility for leadership of a remarried person whose former spouse is still living, is that the Apostle's declaration means that a person who has had a marriage relationship with more than one living spouse is not eligible for the offices of overseer or deacon.**

**Some Bible scholars think that Paul was addressing the issue of polygamy in the early church.<8> Others believe that Paul was listing a number of areas where a Christian leader should provide a proper example in the way he lives out his Christianity. Rather than seeing the "one wife" phrase as a reference to a person's marital history, it is viewed as a demand for current marital faithfulness -- a man was expected to be a "one-woman man" similar to the requirement of older widows to have been a**

<7>I Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6. Generally, these passages are discussed in relation to Romans 7:1-3 where Paul states that death frees the surviving spouse. It must be admitted that we do not insist that an overseer (elder) or deacon be married although such an inference is part of the same statement.

<8>John Calvin advanced this view in his commentary on the letters to Timothy and Titus. Polygamy was accepted in Judaism but it does not appear to have been a common practice in New Testament times.

10

"one-man women" in order to qualify for the special "list" in the local church.<9>

The significant point in relation to social implications for the PAOC is the desire and/or need of some local churches to consider divorced and remarried people as candidates for the deacon board. The question of the eligibility of divorced and remarried people to receive ministerial credentials has come into sharper focus with the applications from such people to attend our Bible Colleges. In some situations, the Fellowship trains them for ministry and then pronounces them ineligible for credentials.

## **BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS**

In this section we propose to examine the relevant Biblical passages on the subject of marriage and divorce. Special attention will be given to the manner in which the Jewish rabbis Jesus, and the Apostle Paul interpreted the passages and spoke to the topic within the context of Jewish culture. Reference will also be made to the viewpoints of current Christian commentators.

Before launching into the task, however, it may be helpful to summarize the three basic questions which surround the topics of marriage, divorce, and remarriage:

1. Is marriage, by definition, permanent until death?
2. Does the Bible allow divorce in limited circumstances?
3. Does the Bible allow remarriage in limited circumstances?

The following is a brief synopsis of the various answers to these questions which have been, and are currently being advanced, by evangelicals. The unique approach to these questions taken by Roman Catholic writers is not included here.<10>

1. Is marriage, by definition, permanent until death?

<9>See Gordon Fee, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus. New International Biblical Commentary 13 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988); Craig S. Keener, And Marries Another (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), pp. 90-95.

<10>The best source for an overview of these ideas is Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views, edited by H. Wayne House. Carl Verge's unpublished study notes on this book are

also of help here. For the Roman Catholic perspective see James Castelli, What the Church is Doing for Divorced and Remarried Catholics (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1978).

Many writers have argued that marriage is permanent as seen in the Biblical language used in relation to marriage.<11>

For example, the term "one flesh" emphasizes that the unity which marriage brings between a man and a woman is so strong that it cannot be broken except by death.



They would argue, further, that marriage must be understood in the light of ancient treaties. In such documents a covenant, unlike a contract, is legally binding even though the other party refuses to honour his/her part of the agreement.

On the other hand, many scholars would argue that indissolubility is not supported by the Scriptural accounts. They would assert, for example, that "one flesh" is impossible to understand apart from seeing it as a metaphor for spiritual and emotional union. Apart from possible reference to sexual intercourse, the idea of "one flesh" does not make sense when forced to refer to something literal.

Still others would ask, "When does marriage occur? Is it possible that two people can become legally married in the eyes of the state and/or the church without becoming married in the eyes of God?" This kind of argument, although now found among some evangelicals, has been taken over from Roman Catholic thought and, of necessity, belongs in the whole system of Roman Catholic teaching which focuses on the idea of "annulment."

## 2. Does the Bible allow divorce in limited circumstances?

Many writers have devised arguments which answer this question with a resounding "No!"

Through an appeal to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, they would argue that Moses only describes the circumstances leading to divorce but does not sanction it. Divorce is not prohibited but neither is it approved. Further, the words of this passage were written to discourage divorce by making it difficult for a husband to get his wife back. Also, they argue, the return may have been prohibited so that the first husband could not profit economically. In short, divorce was only tolerated because of the people's sinfulness.

A second argument is made through an appeal to the book of Ezra. When the command is given to divorce wives in Ezra 10, the marriages referred to are marital unions which were not legal in Judaism and therefore could be dissolved.

<11>e.g. "cleave" -- Genesis 2:24; "covenant" -- Malachi 2:14, Proverbs 2:17; and "one flesh" -- Malachi 2:15, 1 Corinthians 6:16.

12

Also, in Malachi 2:16, the prophet asks, "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His". Further, the Lord states unequivocally, "I hate divorce".

Another argument made by those who oppose divorce for any reason is that civil divorce only provides for legal dissolution in the eyes of the state but not constitutional dissolution. In other words the "one-flesh" relationship is so strong that divorce cannot sever it.

Much attention is given by these writers to the so-called "exception clause" in Matthew 19:9. Some would affirm that this exception refers only to incestuous marriages which were not legal in the first place. Others follow the same line of reasoning but argue instead that these marriages refer only to those in the "betrothal" or engagement period which would mean that the union would not yet have been consummated -- thus, "divorce" was permissible in such a situation.

Another innovative argument is possible, here, related to the broader issue of redemption. All exegesis of Biblical passages must be informed by the basic premise that marriage is integrally tied to God's plan of redemption. Marriage was designed to give rise to a social unit which would facilitate God's redemptive program. Therefore, divorce and remarriage are not just isolated issues in themselves, to be resolved in a theological vacuum. They must be seen as tied to God's very plan for humanity and, as such, they are never right actions.

A final approach by those who argue for denial of divorce under any circumstances is that of cultural argument: the drive for more liberal approaches to divorce is fueled by the impact of secularization on the church. Therefore, the argument affirms, Christians must not compromise due to pressure from the world; the stand on divorce must not be "softened."

Other scholars answer this second question with the opposite but often equally vehement assertion, "Yes!"

Focusing on Deuteronomy 24, these writers note that divorce is a given in this passage. The issue to which Moses is addressing himself, they claim, is remarriage.

Others would take from Jesus' words that the basic principle governing the institution of divorce was "hardness of heart." Thus, they contend, if God allowed divorce in the Old Testament for "hardness of the heart" (consistent sinning), then why not now?

Most who would argue for the possibility of divorce as a viable course of action in certain circumstances would agree that divorce is never good, as shown in Matthew 19:7-8: ". . . but from the beginning it was not so." It was God's intention that marriage be forever and that there should be no divorce. Also,

### 13

many would accept the idea that the Mosaic laws concerning divorce<sup><12></sup> were only given as a civil arrangement to prevent greater evils. However, they would argue that Jesus gives one reason for divorce. He abrogates the Mosaic commands in both Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:9 by giving "marital unfaithfulness" as the only cause which can justify divorce.

Others see the injunction "Let no man put asunder" as a basis for divorce. A prohibition necessarily presupposes the ability of a person to do that which is prohibited. That a command not to break is given implies the ability to break. Affirming that divorce is always a tragic circumstance, these writers argue that the decision to divorce is a highly personal one which can only be decided by those who are involved. This injunction, then, is a prohibition on others who might interfere with a marriage. Those involved must reach their decision without pressure to divorce from external sources.

Some would say that, like Jesus' hard words about anger and lust, permanence in marriage must be understood as the presentation of the God-given ideal. Failure to meet the ideal is always a sign of brokenness. Therefore, both divorce and remarriage are always sinful. However, in this fallen world difficult choices must sometimes be made among alternatives which are all bad. In these difficult cases, divorce and/or remarriage may be the least "bad" of the available choices. 1 Corinthians 7 provides a good example -- a Christian should not initiate divorce but if the other partner does then the one left is free to choose future actions.

Various scholars would interpret the words "not bound" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 as a statement which allows divorce for desertion.

Other scholars would make the argument that the Bible's teaching on divorce is intended primarily for the people of God (Jews in the Old Testament and Christians in the New). Therefore, the argument runs, this teaching is only relevant to the non-Christian in some undefined "extended" sense. The message God gives to His people is three-fold: a) marriage is to be a life-long relationship (Genesis 1:27 and 2:24); b) the basic position of Scripture is to prohibit divorce (Matthew 19:9 is a statement of fact not an exception); c) if there is divorce, the two must remain celibate (1 Corinthians 7:11, cf. Mark 10:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Since these passages are only directly relevant for the Christian, it may be argued that they do not apply to the non-Christian. Thus, those who were non-Christians before divorce could remarry after they have become Christians but those who were divorced after salvation could not remarry.

<12>See Deuteronomy 22:13-19,28-29; 24:1-4; Leviticus 20:10.

### 3. Does the Bible allow remarriage in limited circumstances?

Those who would respond in the negative concerning even the possibility of divorce and some who would allow divorce reply to this question with an emphatic "No!"

This approach can begin at Deuteronomy 24. Some writers note that, in this passage, it is the second marriage which brings "defilement". From the use of the same word in Leviticus 18:20 and Numbers 5:13-14, they conclude that the term "defilement" means "adultery".

In reflecting on the "exception clause" in Matthew 19:9, a variety of writers assert that the crucial clause refers only to divorce. This can be done by interpreting verse 9 as a statement which implies two subjects: " anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and anyone who marries another woman commits adultery."

In the writings of those who hold to this opinion an appeal is often made to early church history. They claim that the early church position was to deny remarriage. Therefore, the precedent was set for the rest of the history of Christianity.

The "one flesh" argument is often an emphasis for those who hold to this position. They state that sexual sin is not strong enough to destroy the bond of a "one-flesh" relationship. Therefore, remarriage would be compounding the evil through an adulterous life-style. The pastoral difficulties here are all too apparent. One writer, C. Laney, tries to mitigate the obvious problem of remarriage among divorced Christians by suggesting that adultery through remarriage is only confined to initial consummation. Therefore, remarried Christians may stay in their second marriages.

Paul's comments on being "unbound", in 1 Corinthians 7, pose a problem for those who deny the possibility of remarriage. This is overcome through the observation that Paul uses different

terms when referring to divorce (7:15) and to physical death of a marriage partner (7:39). Therefore, Paul's teaching is interpreted as stating that the deserted spouse in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is no longer bound by the duties of marriage but that is a long way from saying that he/she has the freedom to remarry.

Although it represents a hermeneutic foreign to our understanding of the nature of Scripture, some scholars would note that the "exception clause" in Matthew is not repeated in either Luke or Mark (cf. Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11). Therefore, they would argue, the clause represents a Matthean addition and was not said by Jesus.

The so-called "Eunuch saying", which appears immediately following the "exception clause", has also become a source for those who would deny remarriage. They argue that the response of

the disciples to Jesus' words indicates that they understood He was teaching an absolute prohibition on remarriage.

As there are many scholars who would reject the possibility of remarriage, there are just as many who would strongly affirm that, under certain circumstances, remarriage is permissible.

Often, these writers point to Deuteronomy 24 as the old Testament basis for their belief. They contend that Moses is giving an exception to an otherwise general permission for remarriage in Judaism. They argue that the issue in this passage is not the second marriage but the third to the first husband. Further, they would point out that the pronouncement of divorce in Judaism implies acceptance of remarriage.<13>

Those who would allow remarriage usually focus on the "exception clause" of Matthew 19 as the most crucial Scriptural reference. They would argue that the synoptic writers often included further data that they deemed appropriate to their purposes but which might be ignored by one or both of the others. Thus, this clause should be viewed as one more piece of data which Matthew quoted from the Lord's teaching.

Further, they would argue that Matthew 19:9 clearly allows for both divorce and remarriage based on the exception of marital unfaithfulness. No matter how one analyzes this passage grammatically, they would assert, there is only one subject present, not two. Therefore, the verse must be understood in the sense that any person who divorces and remarries based on adultery in the first marriage does not him/herself commit adultery.

Continuing in their analysis of Matthew 19, some would view the disciples' reaction in the "Eunuch saying" as a realization that Jesus was disagreeing with the permissive attitude towards divorce found among some Rabbis. Marriage was not to be taken lightly when the only just cause for divorce was marital unfaithfulness.

Some writers use the Corinthians chapter to bolster their case. They claim that, in 1 Corinthians 7:12, Paul makes it clear that Jesus did not give direction for "mixed" marriages. Thus, since there are no direct instructions the church should not issue a blanket prohibition on remarriage but should carefully evaluate each case.

In appealing to 1 Corinthians 7:15, many would affirm that Paul allows for remarriage if divorce occurred because of

<13>The central statement in the divorce decree was, "Behold, thou art permitted (free to be married) to any man" (Gittin 9:3).

16

desertion. **They claim that the absence of this provision in 7:10-11 does not invalidate its presence in 7:15, any more than the lack of the exception clause in Matthew 5:31-32 invalidates its presence in Matthew 19:9.**

**Some make the argument that the admonition to remain in whatever state one finds him/herself in 7:17 refers to the divorced in the same way that it applies to the widowed. This warning is given not in the sense of a command but as a pastor's advice.**

**Finally, the theological argument is made by some that, while remarriage is never "right," it may be "acceptable" for a variety of reasons. In this broken world, individuals can find themselves in circumstances where they are faced with decisions, none of which are good. In these cases they must choose the least wrong choice. Thus, remarriage in some circumstances can be the best choice from among the possible alternatives.**

### **Biblical Passages**

**We propose to offer an analysis of the relevant Biblical passages. There will be some duplication of what has been said to this point.**

**Genesis 2:22-24.** The search for the Biblical understanding of marriage, divorce and remarriage must begin where Scripture begins:

**Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (NIV)**

**Through these statements, in a world and at a time unstained by sin and brokenness, God establishes His plan for the union of man and woman. Of crucial importance in these statements is the principle that man should "be united" ("cleave" - KJV) to his wife. The Hebrew term used here means literally "to cling" or "to keep close." Nicoll notes that the root idea behind this term is "to glue" or "to stick to."<14> Brown, Driver and Briggs, the writers of the most universally recognized lexicon on the Hebrew language, assert that the meaning is figurative in reference to loyalty and affection but with the idea of close**

<14>W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament (New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), 3:373.

"physical proximity retained."<15> Here is a strong statement of the power and enduring nature of the marriage bond.

The term "one flesh" is also of obvious importance. Strongly alluded to in Malachi 2:15 and used explicitly in Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; Ephesians 5:31; and 1 Corinthians 6:16, this term provides the greatest challenge to those who would argue for the possibility of dissolving marriage without physical death. Brown, Driver, and Briggs state that the intent of the Hebrew term in Genesis 2:24 is to affirm that the wife and husband become "kin;" the man and woman begin a new family.<16>

Every reference to "one flesh" in the New Testament appears in exactly the same form. Arndt and Gingrich, the most important Greek Lexicon which we have, notes the many usages for the term "flesh" but offers no help in understanding this particular usage of the term.<i7> Both Vine and Thayer argue that flesh can be understood figuratively in reference to a close relationship. Nicoll goes further and asserts that the term, "one flesh," refers primarily to sexual intercourse but, mirroring the Hebrew understanding of flesh as indicative of the whole human being, he states that the term also includes "unity of the soul." In other words, the intimacy of physical union implies a unity of love and purpose. This would make sense of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 6:16 when he says that sex with a prostitute makes "one flesh." Sexual intercourse, by its very nature, is such an intimate act that it fosters spiritual unity; it engenders the relationship of "one flesh." Without the commitment to one another implied by intercourse, intercourse itself becomes empty and perverted.

Jesus, Himself, served as a commentator on the Genesis passage (Mark 10:1-9). In His response to questions on divorce from the Pharisees, Jesus appealed, not to the history of Rabbinic thought, but directly to the ideal for marriage as found in Genesis 2. He stated emphatically that any allowance for divorce was due to the destructive nature of sin and was not part of God's desire or plan for marriage.

In *conclusion*, Genesis states, in no uncertain terms, that God's plan is for humans to dwell together in families through

<15>F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 179.

<16>Ibid., p. 142.

<17>W. F. Arndt and F. W. of the New Testament and Other (London: University of Chicago  
Gingrich, A Greek-English Early Christian Literature Press, 1957), pp. 750-52.  
Lexicon

the institution of marriage. The language chosen affirms the importance and depth of the marriage relationship.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4. When the Jewish people sought to deal with the issues of marriage and divorce they appealed primarily, throughout the centuries, to this passage of Scripture:

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, and if, after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.

The appeal to these verses in order to arbitrate matters of divorce contains three key implications: first, in both Moses' era and throughout Jewish history, divorce was a tragic fact of life; second, Scripture affords very little instruction on the correct way to regulate divorce and remarriage; third, remarriage was generally possible whenever a proper divorce had been obtained.

In the first part of the passage, Moses is not presenting reasons for divorce but is reporting the process. In the second part, he deals with a highly technical case.<18> William Heth has provided a catalogue of different interpretations for this difficult passage:

1. A third marriage is not possible since the woman is considered to be adulterous through the second marriage;
2. This law was intended to prevent hasty divorce in a first marriage;
3. This law is consistent with the Jewish view that a man must not have intercourse with his wife after she has had it with another man;
4. This law views the second marriage as perfectly legal and is designed to provide stability for it;
5. This law is based on the incest legislation of Leviticus 18. Through the second marriage the woman has forged a link between the two men so that the two husbands would

<18>Other examples of technical exceptions to the general acceptance of remarriage after proper divorce may be found: for example, the laws governing priests in Leviticus 21:7.

19

now **be regarded as brothers; therefore, the third marriage would be regarded as incest.**<19>

**All agree that this passage was written to discourage divorce by making it difficult for a husband to get his wife back after he had divorced her. Of the interpretations offered above, only number "1." argues that the second marriage was viewed as adulterous because the woman is said to have been "defiled." It would seem, however, the natural sense of this passage is not a comment on the second marriage but, in this highly unique circumstance, on a prevention of a third. The issue here is a husband's efforts to regain his wife after her remarriage and subsequent divorce from a second man. Remarriage itself was not the issue.**<20>

**R. Westbrook's recent research into Jewish practices and other Near Eastern Law Codes has provided a new understanding of the nuances conveyed by this passage: through finding "indecent" in his wife the first husband would have been able to keep the dowry and avoid paying a divorce settlement. Upon her second divorce, the woman may have found herself in relatively wealthy circumstances through receipt of wedding gifts and divorce payments. The return was prohibited so that the first husband could not reap illegitimate financial gain through benefiting twice, first by rejecting his wife and then, when it suited him, by accepting her. This interpretation is commanding support among scholars since it is consistent both with the Mishnah and documents in the surrounding culture. W. Radda, for example, supports this view in his thesis.**<21>

**The point here is that this passage, one of only a few written in Scripture on this subject of divorce and remarriage, appears to be an attempt by Moses to regulate remarriage in one small aspect only.**

**By the first century the major rabbinical schools had developed widely differing responses to the issues of divorce and remarriage. All their discussions focused around Deuteronomy 24,**

<19>Wayne House, ed., Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 84.

<20>Ibid., pp. 84,85.

**<21>William Raccah, "Against But For: Jesus' View on Remarriage In Light Of The Biblical, Extra-Biblical, and Rabbinic Literature On Divorce and Remarriage," (An unpublished Master of Arts thesis, 1980). When reading the Mishnah, one is struck with the importance and, therefore, the time spent on the articulation of financial implications of divorce; see Kethuboth 6-7; Kiddushin 2, The Mishnah, Herbert Danby, translator and editor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).**

20

specifically the term "something indecent" or "unclean." The most noteworthy observations here are, first, faced with a lack of didactic material on these issues in Scripture they were forced back on this passage; second, unlike Moses, they did not focus on remarriage in their discussions of Deuteronomy 24, but, instead, used it as the basis for their teachings on divorce. The key question with which the Jews grappled, both in their exegesis of Deuteronomy 24 as well as their study of Scripture as a whole, was not "When is it possible to grant remarriage?" but "What constitutes 'proper divorce?'" Generally, it appears that remarriage was a given once proper divorce had taken place. The Mishnah reserves a whole section for laws on divorce<22> but only offers a few scattered references for remarriage. The divorce declaration, itself, as recorded in Gittin, implies that remarriage was acceptable once proper divorce occurred: "Behold, Thou art permitted (free to be married) to any man."<23> In addition to the restrictions placed on remarriage in Deuteronomy 24 and Leviticus 21, the only other limitations were those meant to prevent collusion, between an adulterous woman and her lover, in the divorce or murder of the previous spouse.<24>

The rabbinical school of Shammai argued that divorce was not acceptable except for marital unfaithfulness ("porneia"), sexual sin. In this tradition, "something unclean" was interpreted narrowly as sexual infidelity on the part of one of the marriage partners.

The school of Hillel represented a much more liberal tradition: Divorce was possible if the husband found "indecentcy (or uncleanness) in anything" with regard to his wife. Sample sins that could lead to divorce in this tradition included appearing in public with uncombed hair, speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence, fighting in the house, and ruining his dinner.<25>

Recently released excerpts from the Dead Sea scrolls, reveal yet another strand of Jewish exegesis on this subject: the Qumran community refused to become embroiled in the controversy over the proper interpretation of "something unclean" and denied the possibility of divorce and remarriage for any reason.<26>

<22>Gittin, The Mishnah.

<23>Gittin 9:3.

<24>Gittin 4:3; Yevamoth 4:9. <25>Gittin 9:10; Ketuboth 7:6. <26>See Robert Herron, Jr., "Mark's Jesus On Divorce: Mark (Footnote Continued)

21

The lack of discussion on remarriage in the reflection of Jewish theologians on this passage is striking. Further, the lack of debate on the twin issues of divorce and remarriage in general so that this passage became the focus of exegetical analysis among the Jews, is also surprising.

Gospels. When Jesus proclaimed His teaching on divorce and remarriage, He would have been entering a highly controversial and political arena. These issues were prominent in the

consciousness of first century Palestinians due to the political intrigue in their own government. Mark makes explicit note of the united efforts of the Pharisees and Herodians to kill Jesus. The questions of the Pharisees on divorce and remarriage in Mark 10 would have been most newsworthy in a political climate in which the popular John the Baptist had been assassinated for refusing to recognize the divorce and subsequent remarriage of Herodias, the king's new wife. Thus, the Pharisees may have been seeking to cause Jesus to fall into disfavour with the king by asking Him questions regarding the proper grounds for divorce.<27> When Jesus began to respond to these questions, the listeners undoubtedly would have been wondering which rabbinical school Jesus, the new Rabbi, would support.

The teaching which Jesus gave concerning these issues circumvented the whole discussion of the rabbinical schools. He avoided the debate on Deuteronomy 24 and instead appealed to the ideal found in Genesis 2.

In the New Testament, a variety of passages record the words of Jesus regarding divorce and remarriage. Three of these (Matthew 5; Mark 10; and Luke 16) are usually considered together. All offer the same teaching: anyone who remarries after being granted a divorce is committing adultery because the civil divorce did not dissolve the marriage. Civil divorce, as permitted by Moses, was only granted, Jesus says, as a response to, and a function of, the fallen world corrupted by sin. Further, all it accomplished was the provision of a legal and social basis for the permanent separation of spouses. "At the beginning," Jesus emphasized, God ordained marriage to create a unity of "one flesh" (Mark 10:2-12).

In these three parallel accounts there are subtle differences as each Gospel author includes details of Christ's teaching according to their individual concerns at that moment.

(Footnote Continued)

10:1-12 Reconsidered," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 25:3, September, 1982, 273-76; Edward Dobson, "Divorce in the Old Testament," Fundamentalist Journal, October, 1985, 39-40; David Clyde Jones, "The Westminster Confession On Divorce And Remarriage," Presbyterian, 16:33-35.

<27>Herron, 276-77.

## 22

**Mark affirms that our Lord said divorce and remarriage are wrong; Matthew quotes Jesus as saying that divorce, except for sexual sin, is wrong; and Luke condemns divorce and remarriage giving the most succinct version of the teaching possible in the middle of a sort of omnibus bill of mixed teachings.**

**Much of the discussion surrounding divorce and remarriage has centered around the difficult passage in Matthew 19:9:**

**Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

**The "Exception Clause." There are two ways of approaching the words "except for marital unfaithfulness." Some have taken Matthew 5, Mark 10 and Luke 16 as a unified whole which teaches that divorce and remarriage are wrong and then brought this understanding to the Matthew 19 passage. In other words, the argument reads in the following way:**

**Matthew 5, Mark 10, and Luke 16 teach that divorce and remarriage are wrong. Matthew 5:31-32 gives one acceptable reason for divorce. Given the clear understanding of the three passages already cited, Matthew 19 must not be giving an exception for remarriage but rather only confirming that marital unfaithfulness may be reason for divorce.**



A different approach to this text would be to see it as consistent with and part of the previous three. In other words, Matthew, in chapter 19, is making explicit a final detail of Jesus' words: since divorce is granted for sexual sin, so remarriage is permissible because true divorce in God's sight (the dissolution of marriage as opposed to only permanent separation of spouses) has resulted from the marital infidelity. To the Jewish mind, remarriage would have been understood as a given from Matthew 5; if there is proper divorce then permission for remarriage was taken for granted. All Matthew 19 does is make explicit that which had been implicit earlier.

On the surface, Matthew 19:9 appears to offer a clearly stated exception which permits both divorce and remarriage: if one divorces his/her spouse for reason of marital infidelity then he/she is free to remarry.

Obviously, the choice of one of the two views listed above will determine a person's approach to the subject of divorce and remarriage. The "exception clause" demands closer scrutiny.

**Much attention has been directed to the syntax of this verse.**

Those who hold to the first view<28> argue that all this verse says is that anyone who divorces his wife, even for the acceptable reason of marital unfaithfulness, and subsequently marries another commits adultery. Their exegesis of these words would see the exception clause as relating grammatically only to the clause which speaks of divorce.

Those who support the second view<29> argue that, grammatically, the exception clause must be interpreted as relating to both divorce and remarriage. Philip Wiebe, a professor of philosophy at Trinity Western University provides a highly technical but compelling analysis of the syntax-<30>

The syntax of Matthew 19:9 is different from the other statements by Jesus in Matthew 5; Mark 10; and Luke 16. Although Wiebe's syntactical analysis is too lengthy and complicated to reproduce here, several points can be made. The structure of Jesus' statement in Matthew 19 necessarily leads to a reading of the passage in which the exception clause is understood as relating to both divorce and remarriage.

"Except" clauses, by definition, form two separate propositions or statements of truth. The two propositions can be illustrated with reference to the passage under review as follows:

First proposition: If a man divorces his wife, and the ground for the divorce is not his wife's marital unfaithfulness, and the man marries another, then he commits adultery.

Second proposition: If a man divorces his wife, and the ground for the divorce is his wife's marital unfaithfulness, and the man marries another, then he does not commit adultery.

An analysis of the two propositions above shows there are four clauses in each proposition. The first three clauses form the premise which is then completed by the final clause. The first three clauses define the person and the nature of the action of the fourth clause. This kind of logic may be applied to Matthew 19:9 in the following manner:

Clause four: a person commits adultery

<28>e.g. William A. Heth, J. Carl Laney, and G. J. Wenham.

<29>e.g. Philip H. Wiebe, David Clyde Jones, and Craig S. Keener.

<30>Philip H. Wiebe, "Jesus' Divorce Exception," Journal of the Evangelical Society, 32:3, September, 1989, 327-33.

Clause one: a person divorces his wife

Clause two: a person whose wife was not guilty of marital unfaithfulness

Clause three: a person who marries again

Therefore, if a person gets a divorce, and the reason for the divorce was not because of marital unfaithfulness, and if that person marries again, then that person commits adultery. Conversely, if a person gets a divorce, and the reason for the divorce was the marital unfaithfulness of the spouse, and if that person marries again, then that person does not commit adultery.

A final important point is that there is only one subject in the sentence. The "anyone" subject who initiates the divorce action is also the subject of the verb "marries."<31> The conclusion to this line of reasoning is that adultery is only attributed to this "anyone" subject if remarriage occurred without marital unfaithfulness in the first marriage.

If the "exception clause" is interpreted in this sense the teaching of Jesus can be distilled to one principle: the "one flesh" relationship is so powerful that only marital unfaithfulness can sever the union of man and woman. Once it is severed, remarriage is possible since the previous "one flesh" relationship no longer exists. This would make sense of Jesus' command in Mark 10:9: "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."

The command to refrain from separating implies the ability to separate. Further, this helps understand the so-called "eunuch saying" of Matthew 19:10-12. The apostles, living in a culture which offered numerous and easy criteria for divorce, realized that Jesus was emphasizing the power of the marriage bond and that He was placing strict constraints on the practice of divorce. For the apostles, as for other men in that society, the thought of being forced to live with a woman of ill temper and mean spirit was too much to bear. Jesus, however, uses their comment as an opportunity to praise those who abstain from marriage for the kingdom's sake.

"Porneia." The key word in Matthew 19:9 is "porneia." Used in a variety of senses in Greek, this term served as a general

<31>See House, 157-59.

## 25

term for sexual immorality.<32> Jones makes explicit the range of meaning contained in this word: when used in reference to exchange of money for sexual intercourse it is prostitution; when it involves close relatives it is incest; when it involves members of the same sex it is homosexuality; and when it refers to a married person involved in intercourse outside of marriage, it is adultery.<33> The word, "adultery," as used in the KJV, does not convey the full breadth of meaning intended in "porneia." In Greek, the narrower idea of "adultery" is given its own term, "moichatai."

Some writers have claimed that Matthew 19:9 was intended only for those still in the betrothal or engagement period. This assertion is questionable for two reasons: first and most importantly, there is nothing in this passage which mandates the narrowing of meaning for "porneia." Unless specifically defined, "porneia" should be seen as referring to sexual sin in a general sense. Further, this statement by Christ cannot be interpreted in a vacuum. In the light of Christ's statements in Matthew 5, Mark 10, and Luke 16, the words of Matthew 19:9 must be understood in the light of the Creation ideal in Genesis 2, a context in which the highly developed Jewish cultural notion of "betrothal" was unknown.

Other writers affirm that the Matthews 19:9 statement refers only to incestuous, and therefore illegal marriages. Again, such an arbitrary understanding of "porneia" is not mandated by the text. Such a view is only possible through speculation which is not rooted in the text.

Pauline Epistles. Some writers find desertion as a cause for divorce in the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:15. They argue that the meaning of "bound" is the same in verses 15 and 39: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances" (v.15); "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives"(v.39). They would argue that as death breaks the one flesh relationship, so does desertion.

Laney, however, has noted that the verbs used in these verses are very different.<34> In verse 15, the verb is "dedoulotai" which has as its root meaning the idea of "to make someone a slave" or "to bring someone into bondage."<35> If the unbeliever deserts the believing spouse, the one left is given

<32>See Arndt and Gingrich, 699-700. <33>Jones, 31.

<34>Laney, 287-88.

<35>Arndt and Gingrich, 205; Laney, 287. 26

the mandate to rebuild his/her life and relinquish attempts to maintain the marriage "against the wishes of the unbelieving partner." However, freedom from previous obligations does not necessarily include the freedom to remarry.<36>

Further, "dedoulotai" does not have the same meaning as the verb found in verse 39, "dedetai." The root meaning of "dedetai" is "to tie" or "to bind," i.e., this term refers to the natural "untying" or dissolution of marriage at physical death. Therefore, the "unbinding" of divorce is different than the "unbinding" at the dissolution of marriage.

Laney's argument, in turn, is undermined, however, with the observation that Paul also uses "dedetai" in reference to divorce: "Are you married [bound -- dedetai]? Do not seek a divorce" (v.27). Thus, Paul may be using these terms interchangeably. Unfortunately, the matter is not as clear as exegetes on both sides would like it. Paul has chosen not to be consistent with his choice of terms. The most that can be said is that desertion may be included by Paul as a cause for dissolution of marriage in the language of 1 Corinthians 7. However, it is certainly not as clear as the Matthew 19 "exception clause." In light of the ambiguity of Paul's language, the basis for deciding whether to allow remarriage in such cases may shift to the social and pastoral implications inherent in such a decision.

#### Divorce Prior to Conversion

In view of the request by General Conference to provide possible constitutional amendments which would permit ministers to officiate at the marriages of people who were divorced prior to conversion, the Committee believed that it would be appropriate to offer the following comments for consideration. Marriage and subsequent divorce prior to conversion have been seen by some as exempt from the direct prohibition of divorce and remarriage as found in Scripture. The basis for this argument is two-fold: (1) the assertion that since the teaching in Scripture is directed primarily to the people of God (Jews in the Old Testament and Christians in the New, therefore Biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage is not intended primarily for the unsaved; (2) the crucial doctrine which holds that at conversion we are made "new creatures" (2 Corinthians 5:17), we are "born again" (John 3:3-8) and therefore forgiven and free of the past.

Our traditional understanding of sin and regeneration does not provide for the cancellation of all consequences from actions prior to conversion. To claim that moral teaching in Scripture is only intended for the people of God is to deny the sovereign Lordship of Christ, and makes a false distinction between

<36>Laney, 288.

"sacred" and "secular." Since Jesus is Lord of all life, all humans are responsible to choose the right course of action. Sinful choices are just that -- sinful choices. Whether or not an individual has chosen to accept Jesus as Saviour does not change the moral responsibility that the individual has at all points in life. At conversion there is forgiveness, justification, and a new birth but the consequences of past actions must still be borne.

The often-used example of the fifteen-year-old girl, pregnant and unmarried, is illustrative of the point. If she accepts Jesus as Saviour she is instantly forgiven, justified and reborn, but she is still pregnant; the consequences of her sin are still present. In similar fashion, the divorced individual is forgiven at conversion but not necessarily relieved from certain consequences of past actions.

Further, our understanding of regeneration is that we are resurrected, the old life of bondage to sin is gone and we are alive to God. Paul describes it in the powerful imagery of the "old man." <37> Our understanding of the "old man" has been that it refers to all that we were in Adam, both morally and judicially. At conversion we are no longer under condemnation and now we can begin to fight temptation on a consistent basis. Neither of these ideas provide a basis for ignoring the consequences of past sin.

### **PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS**

God created marriage; man created divorce. The pastor, the man or woman of God, has the responsibility to deal with both marriage and divorce in a manner which does not compromise God's ideal for marriage nor isolate sinful man in a broken marital state. The task is certainly not an easy one.

In reference to the topic of marriage and divorce, the pastor ministers to three groups of people: (1) the young and always single; (2) married couples; (3) divorced people who are single, remarried, or contemplating remarriage. As prejudicial as it may sound, the three groups are probably listed in order of priority. The rationale for priority is as straightforward as saying that prevention is better than remedy, and that remedy is better than restoration, and that restoration is a worthy objective.

Singles. The pastor's first concern is to help singles prepare for a meaningful and fruitful life serving God. For most, the preparation is intended to lead to marriage, the kind which God desires. Healthy marriages are the product of healthy individuals. A single person is whole in his/her relationship

<37>e.g. Romans 6, Colossians 3.

28

with God, relatives, friends, and acquaintances. To some God has given the gift of singleness, they best fulfill His will for their lives outside of marriage.

Through teaching, counselling, and modelling, the pastor and the church strives to help singles regard marriage as a commitment to a permanent relationship with another person. In this covenant relationship men and women separately and together serve God, minister to each other's needs, and have opportunity to bear and nurture children.

Married Couples. Married couples are experiencing pressures in the modern era which were unknown to their grandparents. Materialism, feminism, individualism, and permissiveness are a few of the major items on the list of things which may introduce strain on a marriage. The necessity, or supposed necessity, of two pay checks to take care of basic things like the house mortgage and education fees drive both spouses into the outside world. When they return to their home for the so-called "second shift" of work and responsibilities -- some of them very mundane and unglamorous -- there is the potential for failure and misunderstanding.

Pastors endeavor to offer the teachings of Scriptures to married couples who daily face current pressures. Couples are reminded that their marriage vows are sacred, that their love for one another finds its source in God, that they are equal, that their bodies are owned mutually, that forgiveness is a divine virtue, and that reconciliation is always to be desired. The clear message of Scripture is that divorce is not a solution to marital problems, but the admission of defeat.

Divorced. It has often been noted that "God hates divorce," but He loves divorced people. It is the business of the pastor to communicate that simple message. Christians who are divorced, or divorced and remarried, are eligible for membership in PAOC churches.

Divorce is not the unpardonable sin, but the consequences and ramifications of divorce are often so far reaching that it may appear as if there is no pardon. While the pastor certainly does not have the ability to undo the wrongs associated with a divorce, he does have a message which encourages the divorced person to address the experience of divorce from a spiritual perspective -° that usually means repentance and forgiveness. Hopefully, the divorced person can repent for his/her contribution to the reasons for divorce and forgive the former spouse (whether or not he/she deserves it).

To this point in our history, the pastor has had to explain to divorced people that he could not officiate at remarriage ceremonies involving divorced people whose former spouse was still living. He also had to inform divorced and remarried people that they were not eligible to hold the office of deacon

29

**in the local church or a ministerial credential with the Fellowship.**

**The position which the PAOC has taken is that the clearest Biblical statements on divorce and remarriage speak against both divorce, and divorce and remarriage. From a practical pastoral point of view, it seemed that ministry to singles as well as to married couples would be most effective if the pastor did not involve himself in the remarriage of divorced people.**

**To state it more directly, it has been deemed difficult for a pastor to convince young people that marriage is for life if at the same time he is participating in marriage ceremonies for**

**people who have been married previously. Similarly, it would be rather ineffective for a pastor to endeavor to persuade a couple in the midst of marital difficulties to persist in working out their problems. His message would be contradicted by his actions, if it were known that when the couple failed to solve their problems they could get a divorce and the pastor would remarry them to some one else. Obviously that is an overstatement, but the fact is that a pastor could be more effective in his ministry to the majority of his people, particularly the the young, by refraining, as painful as it may be, from providing a full range of services to some.**

**Any consideration of a change in the PAOC position on the subject of divorce and remarriage must consider the pastoral implications very carefully. The constituency will have to weigh the merits of our present position, stated above, against the suggestion that the high incidence of divorce in society is already providing a deterrent by acquainting the singles, many of whom are children of divorced couples, and married people with the pain of divorce.**

**We have been considering the relationship of the pastor with his congregation and his community. It is also important to note that the pastor has a horizontal relationship with other pastors in the area as well as the Fellowship in general. There is a certain kind of safety in being able to say, "This is the position and practice which we have agreed on together and which I am committed to support."**

**No doubt some pastors would rather make decisions for themselves, based upon individual situations, rather than be guided or restricted by the position of the whole group of**

ministers. **There is nothing inherently wrong with that desire except that it may cause difficulty for other ministers. It would be extremely unfortunate if people started shopping among our churches in urban centres to find a PAOC pastor who conformed to their personal preferences. Imagine, also, the difficulties if pastors were limited in their call from church to church based on their record of marrying or not marrying divorced people.**

**Traditionally, we have lived with a position where a pastor was not required to make a personal investigation of an individual's historical spiritual status. While a pastor may decline participation in a marriage ceremony based on his observations of the current spirituality and readiness of the person for marriage, he was guided in his decision as to whether or not it was possible for him to marry a person by the legal marital record of that person.**

**The position of the Fellowship has been very clear. We have said without hypocrisy: divorced and remarried people who have been born again are suitable candidates for membership in our churches; our pastors cannot participate in the remarriage of divorced people for reasons which have already been discussed. Some pastors have on occasion negotiated arrangements which have made the church facilities and outside ministers available to divorced people wishing to be remarried in the church. Such technicalities may meet the specifics of the Fellowship's position, but these arrangements open such pastors to a justifiable charge of hypocrisy when the spirit of the official position is considered.**

**It must be noted that one of the significant implications of any kind of change in our position will demand some particular information on the reason for divorce. It follows naturally that the more obvious the reason for divorce, the more consistently can the pastor relate to the policy of remarriage. To illustrate the point, it may be argued that it is relatively easy to conclude that a marriage has broken because of "marital unfaithfulness" if one of the spouses has remarried or is living common-in-law with a new partner; it is much more difficult to prove "desertion" or "incompatibility".**

**It would seem expedient to debate the issue prayerfully at General Conference and for every one to participate only in marriages which would qualify according to standards defined in the General Constitution and By-Laws. This stance might mean that some pastors would limit themselves by not participating in marriage ceremonies under certain conditions, even though they may not have personal views which would restrict them. It would be clearly understood, however, that a pastor would never be obliged to participate in a marriage ceremony which contravened his own understanding of Scripture or conscience.**

**As concerned as we may be about the prevailing social situation which bludgeons us with the subject of divorce and remarriage, we must not be moved to make decisions which will deface the standards instituted by God. At the same time we must not be so close-minded that we fail to recognize that some practices related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the Scriptures were short of God's ideal, but not so short that God was prepared to disqualify anyone who failed to live up to the standard of Genesis 2.**

### **31**

The same kind of argument relates to the role of the pastor. Nothing should be allowed to compromise the pastor's role as the messenger of God. The Lord called His servants to address evil people in an evil world. We must be certain that if they turn us off, they do so because they find the Christ of our message unacceptable -- and never because they object to our particular set of rules. We should not be surprised to discover that the Scriptures are true and flexible -- they speak to every person in every situation.

Traditionally, conservative Christians who accept the inspiration of Scripture have spent most of their energies studying the Scriptures grammatically. We have endeavored to discover what the original Biblical languages are saying. When a text has been regarded as obscure or elusive we have quite properly sought the commentary of clearer verses on similar topics to help us understand the hard text. Such a methodology has been helpful and effective.

We have not always been as diligent practicing the so-called historical method. It is this method which offers new insights of interpretation. As we discover more about the culture and the people to whom, and for whom, the Scriptures were first written, we understand more clearly what the Scriptures meant to them and what they mean to our own generation. There is no suggestion that the Truth of God's Word is incomplete or that it ever changes. It is possible, however, that freshly examined Scripture can speak practically and powerfully to every group of people in every age.

There is no more fundamental human relationship than that between a male and a female. God has clearly given His perfect model of what He has designed the relationship to be. But when sin injured the model, God demonstrated His mercy by showing His willingness to deal with His creatures in the midst of their imperfect relationships, whether it be the patriarchs and their many wives or the kings and their mistresses. Even in the lineage of Jesus, Rahab the prostitute and Bathsheba the other man's wife take their honoured places.

In this hour, the church must fulfill its roles as salt and light for a mixed-up world. God has a record of being able to respond to the hardness of men's hearts and working His will among them in spite of their imperfect relationships. We must adopt positions which will allow us to most effectively confront the lost with the gospel. Evangelism overrides all other considerations.

#### CURRENT DEFINITIONS:

Based upon information presently available in the Constitution and general observation of our practices and understanding, the Committee believes that the following definitions adequately express the views of the Fellowship:

#### 32

##### Marriage

Marriage is a provision of God whereby a man and a woman enter into a life-long relationship through a marriage ceremony, which is recognized by the church and legally sanctioned by the state. Marriage establishes a "one flesh" relationship, which goes beyond a physical union, and is more than either a temporary relationship of convenience intended to provide personal pleasure, or a contract which binds two people together in as legal partnership.

Marriage establishes an emotional and spiritual oneness, which enables both partners to respond to the spiritual, physical, and social needs of the other. It provides the Biblical context for the procreation of children.

Marriage is to be an exclusive relationship that is maintained in purity. It is intended by God to be a permanent relationship. It is a witness to the world of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

##### Divorce

Divorce, in our society, is the termination of a marriage through a legal process authorized by the state. Divorce, in the view of the church, is restricted to reasons specified by Scripture. The weight of the Biblical record is negative and the explicit statement is made, "God hates divorce."

Divorce is more than an action of the courts which breaks the legal contract between the partners in a marriage. It is also the fracture of a unique human relationship between a male and a female. Divorce has profound consequences for the children.

Divorce is evidence of the sinful nature expressed in human failure.

##### Remarriage

Remarriage is the union, legally sanctioned by the state, of a man and woman, one or both of whom have been previously married. It is regarded as acceptable by the Scripture in the event of the death of the former spouse.

## CONCLUSION

The Committee has responded to the requirements of the General Conference resolution of 1990 in providing

- (1) the amendments to the Constitution as requested (to be mailed 60 days prior to General Conference);
- (2) this present report which contains a study of the Biblical, social, and pastoral implications of divorce and remarriage, and definitions of marriage, divorce,

33

and remarriage.

Differing views on this issue of divorce and remarriage exist within the Fellowship. Undoubtedly, the current position will be debated with a view to reaffirming it or adjusting it. The Committee unanimously reiterates its reservation regarding the basis of the requested amendments. It respectfully suggests that the following resolution would provide the General Conference with a better vehicle to express its will on the subject of divorce and remarriage.

Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED, That ministers may officiate at the marriage of a couple, one or both of whom has been married previously with the former spouse still living, where the following three conditions exist:

1. all reasonable efforts at reconciliation with the former partner have been exhausted;
2. a legal divorce has been obtained;
3. the sexual immorality of the former partner has been established or one of the partners has remarried.

and be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That:

- (a) If the concept of the remarriage of a divorced person, whose former spouse is still living, is contrary to a minister's conscience, the minister is not under any obligation to officiate at such a marriage, and (b) If a minister desires assistance in dealing with a request of a marriage involving a divorced person, the minister may appeal to a committee of three who shall be appointed by the respective district executive.

If the above resolution were to be adopted by General Conference, the previous working definitions of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage would change as follows:

## ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS

### Marriage

Marriage is a provision of God whereby a man and a woman enter into a life-long relationship through a marriage ceremony, which is recognized by the church and legally sanctioned by the state. Marriage establishes a "one flesh" relationship, which goes beyond a physical union, and is more than either a temporary relationship of convenience intended to provide personal pleasure, or a contract which binds two people together in as legal partnership.

34

**Marriage establishes an emotional and spiritual oneness, which enables both partners to respond to the spiritual, physical, and social needs of the other. It provides the Biblical context for the procreation of children.**



**Marriage is to be an exclusive relationship that is maintained in purity. It is intended by God to be a permanent relationship. It is a witness to the world of the relationship between Christ and His Church.**

**Marriage can only be broken by "porneia" or marital unfaithfulness involving adultery, homosexuality, incest, or sexual abuse. While the Scriptures give evidence that the marriage vow and "one flesh" union are broken by such acts, and therefore does recognize the breaking of the marriage relationship, the Scriptures do recommend that the most desirable option would be reconciliation.**

#### Divorce

**Divorce, in our society, is the termination of a marriage through a legal process authorized by the state. While the Church recognizes this legal process as an appropriate means to facilitate the permanent separation of spouses, the Church restricts the idea of divorce, in the sense of dissolution of marriage, to reasons specified by the Scriptures.**

**The weight of the Biblical record is negative and the explicit statement is made, "God hates divorce." Jesus gives one explicit cause for divorce, the dissolution of marriage: "porneia" or marital unfaithfulness.**

**Divorce is more than an action of the courts which breaks the legal contract between the partners in a marriage. It is also the fracture of a unique human relationship between a male and a female. Divorce has profound consequences for the children.**

**Divorce is evidence of the sinful nature expressed in human failure.**

#### Remarriage

**Remarriage is the union, legally sanctioned by the state, of a man and woman, one or both of whom have been previously married. It is regarded as acceptable by the Scriptures in the event of the death of the former spouse. It is also regarded as acceptable for the non-offending party when "porneia" has been the cause of the dissolution of the previous marriage. If the spouse of a previous marriage has remarried or become involved sexually with another person, the other spouse will be considered free to remarry.**

#### APPENDIX 1

Submissions in the form of theses, statements, sermons, studies, and tapes were received from:

E. R. Anderson	R. D. Hill	D. J. Pennoyer
D. A. Blakney	D. Laity	K. T. Quinn
D. E. Boodle	C. W. Lynn	W. Raccah
M. Brandebura	M. MacKay	D. V. Rathnam
R. M. Burnett	M. A. McIntyre	B. Rozniak
H. J. Cantelon	B. McKinnon	J. Thompson
M. Davis	J. J. McNeil	H. W. Trauter
E. E. Harris	J. Mestat	L. W. Vath

Two anonymous submissions were also received. The pastoral staff of one church met with the Chairman to express their views.

#### APPENDIX 2

Ambert, Anne-Marie, "Marital Dissolution: Structure and Ideological Changes." Families: Changing Trends in Canada. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1990.

Adams, Jay E. et al. "Are Divorce and Remarriage Ever Permissible?" Fundamentalist Journal. June, 1984. 17-19.

. Marriage Divorce & Remarriage in the Bible. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

Arndt, W. F., and F. W. Gingrich. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. London: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Canada Year Book 1990. Published by the Minister of Regional . Industrial Expansion, 1989.

Dobson, Edward. "Divorce in the Old Testament." Fundamentalist Journal. October, 1985. 39-41.

Duty, Guy. Divorce and Remarriage. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1967.

Ewald, George R. Jesus and Divorce: A Biblical Guide for Ministry to Divorced Persons. Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1991.

Fee, Gordon. 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus. New International Biblical Commentary 13. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988.

36

Gingrich, Virgil, and Fred Gingrich. "Divorce and Remarriage as it Relates to Licensed and Ordained Ministers in The Missionary Church of Canada." Unpublished manuscript, n.d.

House, Wayne, ed. Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

Herron, Robert, Jr. "Mark's Jesus On Divorce -- Mark 10:1-12 Reconsidered." Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 25:3, September, 1982. 273-281.

Heth, W. A. and G. J. Wenham. Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.

Holwerda, David E. "Jesus On Divorce: An Assessment Of A New Proposal." Calvin Theological Journal. 22:14, April, 1987. 114-120.

Jones, David Clyde. "Malachi On Divorce." Presbyterion. 15:16-22.

"The Westminster Confession On Divorce And Remarriage." Presbyterian. 16:17-39.

Keener, Craig S. . And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.

Rohlenberger, John, ed. The Expanded Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984.

Laney, J. Carl. "Paul and the Permanency of Marriage in 1 Cor. 7." Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 25:3, September, 1982. 283-294.

. The Divorce Myth: A Biblical Examination of Divorce and Remarriage. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1981.

Nicoll, W. Robertson, ed. The Expositor's Greek Testament. New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.

Peters, John F. "Divorce and Remarriage." Marriage and the Family in Canada. Scarborough, On.: Princeton-Hall Canada Inc., 1989.

Plekker, Robert J. Divorce & the Christian: What the Bible Teaches. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980.

Posterski, Don. Context. Mississauga, On.: MARC Canada, Sept. 1991.

- Racah, William. "Against But For: Jesus' View on Remarriage In Light Of The Biblical, Extra-Biblical, and Rabbinic Literature On Divorce and Remarriage." An unpublished Master of Arts thesis, 1980.
- Steele, Paul E. and Charles C Ryrie. Meant to Last: A Christian View of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983.
- Stein, Robert H. "Is It Lawful For A Man To Divorce His Wife?" Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 22:2, 115-121.
- Thayer, Joseph H. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1958.
- The Canadian Global Almanac 1992. Toronto: Global Press, 1992.
- The Mishnah. Herbert Danby, translator and editor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Wenham, G. J. "Gospel Definitions of Adultery and Women's Rights." Evangelical Review of Theology. April, 1985. 131-155.
- Wiebe, Philip H. "Jesus' Divorce Exception." Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 32:3, September, 1989. 327-333.

February 1992