

# ONE SCRIPTURALLY DEFENSIBLE VIEW ON 1 TIMOTHY 3:2 No Divorce in His Background

## INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 1930, members of IFCA International have held differing views regarding the Scriptural qualifications for church and ministry leaders. Each of these IFCA members has been committed to Biblical truth and practice, but their understanding of how to apply the directives of the Word of God have differed. This difference has especially been apparent in regard to divorce and its effect upon qualification for local church leadership and its implication for individual membership in IFCA International.

All members of IFCA International would agree that the qualifications for leadership in the church are clearly established in 1 Timothy 3:2-9 and Titus 1:5-9:

*A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence; (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2-9)*

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as commanded you-- if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (Titus 1:5-9)*

However, not all members of IFCA International agree how to interpret these passages. The goal of this paper is to present and support the view that according to Paul's teaching on the qualifications for local church leaders, the spiritual leaders of a local church cannot include men with divorce in their background and men in this category should not be eligible for IFCA International individual membership.

IFCA International members rightly determine their convictions on qualifications for local church leaders not from what the majority believe or from tradition, but from what the Bible teaches. How does the Bible present Paul's teaching regarding divorce and local church leadership?

## IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD ORDER OF 1 TIMOTHY 3:2

Of the three Greek words, the adjective *mias* ("one") comes first and therefore has greatest emphasis. It cannot be equivalent to an indefinite article in this situation, and must highlight a contrast between one wife and two or more wives.

The whole phrase *mias gynaikos* ("one wife") precedes the third word *anēr* ("husband") and also receives greater emphasis. *Mias gynaikos* is in the genitive case. The type of genitive is crucial in determining the

meaning of the three-word expression. Often a descriptive genitive has been suggested, but the descriptive genitive is the least emphatic of all the uses of the genitive case. Since Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave “one wife” special emphasis in the word order, a genitive of description is not probable. A genitive of possession is in much better accord with the emphasis of the word order: “a husband belonging to one wife and one wife only.

### **MISCELLANEOUS RELATED MATTERS**

In the 1 Timothy 5:9, a passage regarding widows, use of a similar expression indicates that 1 Timothy 3:2 has ramifications in regard to a person’s past as well as his present. What he is now—i.e., “a one-woman kind of a man”—is not the sole consideration. As the 1 Timothy 5:9 passage shows, past performance is the prominent consideration. What he has been in the past deserves most attention.

In general, 1 Timothy has a favorable view of marriage. Thus, any explanation that forbids a marriage union based on biblical grounds is not probable.

Ability to exercise self-control probably figures into the meaning of 1 Timothy 3:2. Otherwise, this qualification for eldership would be no higher than what every Christian should fulfill. This qualification must be higher than normal Christian virtues. Else, it is useless to list it. A distinction must exist between the forgiveness of past sins and the effect of those sins on a person’s suitability to be a leader.

Reputation among both Christians and non-Christians is a factor in qualifying for eldership. That includes his marital history.

### **CONSIDERING THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Paul evangelized Ephesus about thirteen years before 1 Timothy was written (A.D. 52-65). According to Acts 20:17, 28, elders were active in the church at least as early as A.D. 57, and probably earlier. First Timothy 3:1-7 must therefore tell Timothy how to replace those who have died and/or to make additions to the office where the church has grown. The probability is high that most of these candidates for overseership had a marital history in heathendom that was less than desirable for Christians in general, much less for Christian leaders. The carry-over of some of the immoral practices of heathendom is reflected in an A.D. 60 epistle addressed to Asia, the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capital (Eph. 5:3, 25ff). Upon becoming Christians, some in the Ephesian church had not radically changed their behavior in marital-related areas.

The expression in 1 Tim. 3:2 cannot deal primarily with simultaneous polygamy, which was not practiced even among the heathen at that time. It must, then, deal with successive polygamy of the various types as were common in that day: remarriage after divorce, concubinage, and sexual relations with any besides “the one wife and only one” whose possession the husband was.

In light of the heathen background of all the men in the Ephesian church, the “husband belonging to one wife and one wife only” qualification must pertain only to the time span after the elder-candidate’s conversion. Otherwise, few if any of the Ephesians could have qualified. Apparently, at the writing of Ephesians five years earlier (A.D. 60), some needed the admonition regarding fornication and marriage, but some did not because they had cleaned up their own lives after becoming Christians. This qualification for leadership would thus single out such as composed this latter group as those whose behavior as Christians would present a good “image” of the church’s stand on moral issues. Since coming to Christ they had been free from sexual impurity and had not exchanged wives, but were still the possession of the wife they had upon being converted.

No restriction is placed on a man who at conversion has never been married. He may take a wife after conversion. If a leader's wife dies, he is not restricted from taking another wife.

### **CONCLUSION**

Sometimes IFCA International members represent their interpretation of Paul's teaching as the only Scripturally defensible view. Other views are often dismissed as based on tradition or accommodation to people. This presentation seeks to establish that there is solid biblical and exegetical basis for interpreting that there can be no divorce in the background of any local church elder. This paper presents through the "one wife man" requirement that God seems to have prohibited service as an elder to those whose lives and reputations include an ex-wife. We do not know why He stipulated this limitation. But it is a view that can be defended.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Almost all of this paper was written by IFCA International member Robert L. Thomas (Professor of New Testament, The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, CA).

# ONE SCRIPTURALLY DEFENSIBLE VIEW ON 1 TIMOTHY 3:2 Only Refers to Post-Salvation Qualities

## INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning in 1930, members of IFCA International have held differing views regarding the Scriptural qualifications for church and ministry leaders. Each of these IFCA members has been committed to Biblical truth and practice, but their understanding of how to apply the directives of the Word of God have differed. This difference has especially been apparent in regard to divorce and its effect upon qualification for local church leadership and its implication for individual membership in IFCA International.

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However, not all members of IFCA International agree how to interpret these passages. The goal of this paper is to present and support the view that according to Paul's teaching on the qualifications for local church leaders, the spiritual leaders of a local church can include men with divorce in their background if it occurred before their salvation and men in this category should be eligible for IFCA International individual membership.

IFCA International members rightly determine their convictions on qualifications for local church leaders not from what the majority believe or from tradition, but from what the Bible teaches. How does the Bible present Paul's teaching regarding divorce and local church leadership?

A careful study and understanding of these verses indicates the present nature of the qualifications, rather than a past or pre-conversion application of them. A consideration of this text indicates that:

## ARGUMENT FROM GREEK GRAMMAR

The Greek phrase *mias aunaiikos anēr* (and its slightly varied forms) can be translated "one woman man"

as easily as “husband of one wife.” The prominent place Paul gives to *mias* in the construction indicates that it should be so translated. The emphasis is on “one” rather than on the terms denoting the persons. The same type of construction is used of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9; there it clearly speaks of marital fidelity rather than the number of marriages.

If Paul desired to disqualify someone who had been divorced from consideration for church leadership, he would have used one of many Greek constructions to clearly indicate that desire. He could have said “must never have been married,” or “must never have been divorced,” or could have simply added a Perfect tense verb to say “having had only one wife.”

### **ARGUMENT FROM THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE**

Context is a most determinate factor in any interpretation, because words take their meaning from the way they are used in relation to other words. The context of this requirement for church leadership contains only references to present moral character and capability, and none to past events or life. Any reference to the latter would be out of place in this list, including divorce in a man’s pre-salvation past.

### **ARGUMENT FROM THE HISTORICAL SETTING**

The translation “husband of one wife” would only make sense if it were prohibiting polygamy. Scripture would not use that terminology to refer to previous marriage. Even those men who have been remarried have only one wife at the present time, because their previous partners are not their wives anymore - nor would they be called the husbands of those other women. Even though God hates divorce, He does consider it as an actual breaking of the marriage bond. In Deuteronomy 24 God refers to a woman who divorced her husband and remarried, as becoming “the wife of another man” (v.2) and her first husband is called her “former husband” (v.4). It is clear that divorced people are not “still married in God’s eyes,” as some will say. Certainly Paul would not speak of a man being a “husband” to someone to whom he is no longer married.

Given the cultural situation in the Greek cities, it is difficult to see how Titus could have appointed a plurality of elders in every city, if Scripture had eliminated anyone who had been divorced before they were converted. One historical study indicates that the average number of marriages for a man in Corinth was six! It is quite probable that most of the candidates for elders and deacons in the early Gentile churches had divorce in their re-salvation past. The declaration of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:11 demonstrates the grace of God in this regard:

*And such were some of you. But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

### **MISCELLANEOUS ARGUMENTS**

Interpreting “husband of one wife” to refer to a man’s marital status and history would eliminate the important standard of sexual fidelity from the leadership requirements. Many men have been married to only one woman, but have been “womanizers”, that is not sexually pure one-woman men.

If we interpret “husband of one wife” to refer to a man’s marital status and history, then there would be a valid textual case for the idea that an elder or deacon cannot be single, nor remarried after the death of his first and only spouse. Neither of these two views would be acceptable to many in IFCA International.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is especially important in cases where there has been a divorce in a man’s past, that there be a period of careful observation to clearly evidence that his present marriage is characterized by pure devotion and sacrificial love, prior to assuming a leadership position. Of course, this is equally true in regard to the present status of each leadership requirement.

Sometimes IFCA International members represent their interpretation of Paul's teaching as the only Scripturally defensible view. Other views are often dismissed as based on tradition or accommodation to people. This presentation seeks to establish that there is solid biblical and exegetical basis for interpreting that the determining factor in what a man can or cannot do in church and ministry leadership is based upon his life and qualifications following salvation, and not upon what sins he committed before conversion.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Almost all of this paper was written by the elders of IFCA International member church Valley Bible Church of Sumner, WA and adapted by IFCA International past President Roy Sprague.

# **ONE SCRIPTURALLY DEFENSIBLE VIEW ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: The Betrothal View**

## **INTRODUCTION**

IFCA International has never included a statement on divorce or remarriage in its doctrinal statement. It has admitted men into its fellowship who hold differing views concerning Jesus' teaching on the subject. However, for decades the IFCA Bylaws have restricted individual membership in IFCA International from anyone divorced. Good men committed to the centrality and inerrancy of Scripture hold differing views on biblical grounds for divorce which they deem to be true to the Bible. The Erasmian view (first set forth by Erasmus in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, also called the traditional Protestant view), became the majority view among the Reformers and was included in the 1648 Westminster Confession. This traditional view probably remains the majority view among American evangelicals and is held by many in IFCA International. This paper represents those in IFCA International who hold the view that the exception Jesus taught in Matthew makes allowance for divorce following unfaithfulness during the betrothal period preceding consummation of marriage.

The goal of this paper is to present and support what is known as the betrothal view of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage. IFCA International members rightly determine their convictions on marriage and divorce, not from what the majority believe or from tradition, but from what the Bible teaches. How does the Bible present Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage?

## **BACKGROUND: MARRIAGE AS A COVENANT**

Before investigating the concept of betrothal another concept is important to establish. That is the concept of marriage as a covenant.

Marriage is sacred and God's hatred of divorce is associated with the nature of marriage itself as a covenantal relationship (Malachi 2:14). God personified His faithfulness to His covenant through the earthly depiction of faithfulness by Hosea to his adulterous wife Gomer (Hosea 3:1). Also the sanctity of marriage to God is depicted in the illustration of the church in the New Testament. The marital relationship is identified as having direct correlation to the covenantal relationship of redemption between Jesus Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-32). Thus treachery to the covenant of marriage brings severe and negative implications to the integrity of God's illustration of the covenant of redemption.

## **THE PERTINENT NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS**

Five NT texts contain all we know of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage: Matt 5:31-32, 19:3-12, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, and 1 Cor 7:10-11. Each text will be examined and observations noted.

### **LUKE 16:18**

Luke records only one occurrence of Jesus teaching on divorce and remarriage. It reads, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery." Two observations may be noted. First, Jesus states that every remarriage after divorce constitutes the sin of adultery. The only way this could be possible is if the original marriage, even though legally terminated, was still intact in God's eyes. Second, there are no exceptions mentioned and the wording used is one of an absolute statement (everyone – pas), not a general rule. Even some who believe that Luke is presenting a basic principle for other reasons admit that in this particular

verse, “Jesus’ words are put in absolute terms” (Bock, 1996:1357). Luke presents Jesus’ teaching as condemning all remarriage after divorce without exception.

### **MARK 10:2-12**

Mark narrates a confrontation between Jesus and a group of Pharisees, the same event described in Matthew 19:3-12. In v. 2 the Pharisees come to Jesus asking if “it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife?” Jesus then asks them what Moses taught on the matter and they responded by referring to Deut 24:1-4. To this answer, Jesus responds that Moses spoke those words because of Israel’s “hardness of heart.” He then concludes, after quoting Gen 1:27 and 2:24, that “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” After this confrontation, Jesus is in a house with the disciples, who are questioning him further concerning this matter. He says to them “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.” Two observations may be noted. First, as in Luke, every remarriage after divorce is called adultery. Second, this passage describes the same encounter as described in Matt 19, and is of similar length and detail, yet it does not include the exception clause. Furthermore, there is nothing inherent in the text of Mark that indicates that this is a general statement, rather than an absolute statement. Edwards rightly says “According to the plain sense of [Mark] 10:1-12, Jesus does not allow grounds for divorce” (2002:305).

### **1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11**

The discussion of 1 Corinthians 7 is limited to vv. 10-11 because these are the only verses in which Paul claims to be teaching what the Lord taught. In v. 10, Paul says “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord...” Then in v. 12, he says “But to the rest I say, not the Lord...” The most probable meaning of these phrases is stated well by Fee saying “he [Paul] remembers that Jesus himself spoke to this question, so he appeals to his authority...In vv. 12-16, on the other hand, where the issue lies outside the province of Jesus’ own life setting, it is Paul who speaks, not the Lord” (1987:291). The teaching itself that Paul attributes to Jesus is “that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” The exact origin of Paul’s teaching is not as important as the fact that divorce with remarriage was considered by Paul to be disobedience to Jesus’ commands. As with Mark and Luke, there is no exception mentioned and nothing inherent in these verses to indicate that they are a general principle and not an absolute statement.

### **MATTHEW 5:31-32**

In the context of the sermon on the mount (Matt 5-7), Jesus takes 5:17-48 to contrast the teaching of the law by the Scribes and Pharisees with His own higher standards for entering the kingdom of God. In vv. 31-32, He shows this contrast when it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage. Concerning His higher standard, Jesus says, “but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” While this passage along with Mark, Luke and Paul, condemns divorce with remarriage as adultery, it does add one exception: “the reason of unchastity (*logou porneias*).”

### **MATTHEW 19:3-12**

Here Matthew is describing the same incident as Mark 10:2-12 and is quite similar in length and subject matter aside from a few differences in narrative detail. The main difference is the insertion of the short phrase “except for immorality” (*epi me porneia*) which qualifies the statement that divorce with remarriage equals adultery. This exception clause (also in Matt 5:32) has been at the center of the debate on divorce and remarriage in the NT. Matthew’s use of the Greek term *porneia*, coupled with the absence of an exception clause elsewhere, has caused a divergence of opinion among evangelical scholars. Some

argue that this clause refers to an incestuous marriage (e.g. Laney and Ryrie). Others believe that the exception clause allows divorce but not remarriage (e.g. Wenham). Still others contend that Jesus was only laying out a general principle or using hyperbole and that divorce and remarriage are both acceptable for a variety of reasons (e.g. Richards). Others (e.g. Piper and Boice) hold that the exception allowed by Jesus pertains to betrothal.

### **INTERPRETING THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE AS BETROTHAL**

According to the betrothal view, Jesus taught that divorce after a consummated marriage with a subsequent remarriage is always sin without exception. This is the unified presentation given by Mark, Luke, and Paul. However, there was a cultural practice among the Jews (betrothal) at the time of the writing of Matthew's Gospel which required Jesus to state the exception clause in his discourse with the Pharisees and required Matthew to record it. Therefore when the Pharisees came to Jesus in Matt 19 and asked if it was lawful for an *aner* (man/husband) to *apolyo* (divorce) his *gyne* (woman/wife), to the Jewish reader at that time, there would have been two different situations to which that question would simultaneously refer: a betrothed couple legally ending their betrothal, or a married couple legally ending their marriage. Jesus' answer is that divorce and remarriage is sin, except when that divorce takes place because of *porneia*, which in this context is referring to sexual immorality committed during the betrothal period. The same question (if it is lawful for an *aner* to *apolyo* his *gyne*) posed to gentile audiences (the readers of Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians) would have only referred to one situation: a married couple ending their marriage. Therefore the exception clause was left out of the other gospel writings and Paul's summation of Jesus' teaching because it simply did not concern those to whom they were written. In order to support the betrothal view, four lines of evidence will be presented: the Jewish practice of betrothal, the context of Matthew's Gospel, the meaning of *porneia*, and the analogy of Scripture.

### **JEWISH AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PRACTICE OF BETROTHAL**

A betrothal in Jewish society during the time of Christ was not just a promise of an engagement as known today. Rather, "when the agreement [betrothal] had been entered into, it was definite and binding upon both groom and bride, who were considered as man and wife in all legal and religious aspects, except that of actual cohabitation (The Jewish Encyclopedia)." Gower adds, "The betrothal could be broken only by a legal transaction (in effect, a divorce) (2005:62)." Jewish, secular and Christian scholars going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century all describe this Jewish and ancient Near Eastern practice of betrothal in similar ways.

While betrothal and marriage share like legal status, they are distinct. First, a betrothed couple did not live together (and hence did not have sexual union), even though they were legally husband and wife. Second, a betrothal always preceded the marriage ceremony. Betrothal helped to confirm the bride's chastity. Marriage involved sexual fulfillment (1 Cor 7:3-5), while betrothal emphasized purity, preparation, and patience. If a woman under the Mosaic Law was unfaithful during the betrothal period, she was to be stoned (Deut 22:13-21).

### **CONTEXT OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL**

It is generally acknowledged that Matthew was writing primarily to a Jewish audience. Since the practice of betrothal would have been pertinent to a discussion of divorce among Palestinian Jews, Matthew chose to include the exception clause while the other gospel writers omitted it.

Another consideration concerning the context of Matthew's Gospel is the Joseph and Mary narrative. While Luke contains some aspects of this narrative, Matthew alone includes details pertinent to the discussion of divorce and remarriage. First, Joseph is called Mary's husband (*aner*) even though they are only betrothed. Second, upon finding out that Mary was pregnant, Joseph seeks to divorce (*apolyo*) Mary quietly rather than publicly. Finally, the reason for divorcing Mary quietly was to avoid disgracing Mary and due to Joseph being a "righteous man." Significantly, Joseph is called a "righteous man" even though

he was looking to divorce (*apolyo*) his wife (*gyne*). This statement would certainly lead Matthew to include the exception clause, for without it, a blatant contradiction would exist in his gospel. If Matthew had omitted the exception clause, he would be disagreeing with Jesus himself, by calling Joseph “righteous” for doing something that Jesus calls sin (if the exception clause were not present). Therefore the intended Jewish audience as well as the particulars about Mary and Joseph unique to him gave Matthew reason for including this exception clause.

### MEANING OF *Porneia*

Determining the meaning of the Greek term *porneia* is central to interpreting Matthew. Both the lexical range of meanings as well as the likely meaning in the context of Matthew 5 and 19 are significant elements of this word study. Liddell and Scott, the standard Classical Greek lexicon, gives the following meanings for *porneia*: prostitution, fornication, unchastity, idolatry, prostitute, prostitute herself, be or become a prostitute, fornicate, practice idolatry, harlot, prostitute, of or for harlots (1940:1450). The dominant meaning centers around prostitution. The range focuses either on literal prostitution or figurative prostitution (i.e. idolatry). BDAG, the standard Koine Greek lexicon, gives the following meanings for *porneia*: prostitution, unchastity, fornication, to engage in illicit sex, to fornicate, to whore, prostitute, whore, fornicator (2000:854). While the dominant meaning still centers around prostitution, the range of NT usage broadens to include incest (1 Cor 5:1), premarital unfaithfulness (John 8:41), and even homosexuality (Jude 7). Commenting on this shift, Moulton and Milligan claim that *porneia* “originally meant ‘prostitution,’ but came to be applied to unlawful sexual intercourse generally (2004:529).” The standard Patristic Greek lexicon gives these meanings for *porneia*: fornication, unchastity, sexual impurity, illicit intercourse, prostitution, linked with adultery but distinct therefrom, illicit intercourse committed by married people, marriages contracted without permission by those who are not of free condition, illicit union with heathens, polygamy, unchastity, lewdness, and idolatry (Lampe, 1961:1121-22). By the time of the church fathers, usage of *porneia* widened considerably, ranging from the classical definition of prostitution, to almost any type of sexual sin.

Since many hold the view, that in the context of Matthew 19 “the most natural way to interpret *porneia* is with the meaning ‘adultery’” (Edgar, 1990:162), the relationship of *porneia* to *moicheia* must also be examined. There is not one clear example of *porneia* meaning adultery in either Classical or Koine Greek (cf. the unpublished paper by Wommack and Harton entitled “Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage – The Betrothal View Revisited” for an examination of the evidence for this conclusion). Isaksson asserts “we cannot get away from the fact that the distinction between what was to be regarded as [*porneia*] and what was to be regarded as [*moicheia*] was very strictly maintained in pre-Christian Jewish literature and in the NT (Isaksson, 1965:134).”

Another weakness of the view that adultery is included in *porneia* is manifest in the multiple occurrences in which *porneia* is used in the same verse as a distinct and separate sin from *moicheia*. Matthew himself distinguishes between *porneia* and *moicheia* in 15:19. Mark likewise distinguishes them in 7:21, which is synoptically parallel to Matt 15:19. Also, 1 Cor 6:9 and Heb 13:4 distinguish between fornicators (*pornos*) and adulterers (*moichos*). Hebrews 13:4 is particularly interesting since it is in a context of honoring marriage that the two terms are separated. The author could very well be distinguishing between sexual sins committed before marriage and after marriage (Lane, 1991:516-17). Sexual sins before marriage show disregard by not keeping oneself pure for marriage (as was the expectation at the time of the NT) and sexual sins while in a marriage show disregard by treating vows and commitments lightly.

Therefore looking at all the evidence concerning *porneia* leads to the conclusion that no clear example of *porneia* as adultery can be found, and that there are multiple occurrences which show a distinction, not similarity between the two. Yet, it is not enough to argue for what *porneia* does not mean. Therefore the task of constructing a positive argument for the definition of *porneia* in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 as betrothal

unfaithfulness will now be taken up. However, the burden of proof must first be clarified. All that is required is that a reasonable case be made for this meaning of *porneia* in the context of Matt 5:32 and 19:9. It is not necessary that betrothal unfaithfulness be the dominant meaning of *porneia*. All that must be shown is that the original readers of Matthew, especially the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking in 19:9, would have understood *porneia* to refer to premarital unfaithfulness in the contexts of Matthew 5 and 19. This will be shown by four lines of argumentation.

First, Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience who would have naturally thought of the two situations involving a divorce. Second, Matthew is the only gospel that contains the account of Mary and Joseph which illustrates *porneia* as premarital unchastity. It is true that the word *porneia* does not occur in this narrative account. However in John 8:41, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being born of *porneia*.

Third, the context of Matt 5:32 is one of a righteous standard that is supposed to surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20). If divorce of a consummated marriage on the grounds of some form of sexual immorality on the part of the wife, were the intended meaning, then Matt 5:32 would not fit its context. One of the main Jewish schools of thought (Shammai) taught that unfaithfulness on the part of the wife was the only acceptable grounds for divorce. While sexual sin on the part of the wife does not fit the context of this passage, sexual sin on the part of the betrothed would. For then Jesus would be teaching that once a marriage is consummated, there are never any grounds for divorce, a teaching that definitely surpasses the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Fourth and finally, the context of Matt 19 is one of legal matters concerning divorce, specifically relating to the sexual sin of a *gyne* (wife). There is also a heavy concentration on what Moses taught concerning the matter, which is found in Deut 24:1-4 and also in Deut 22:13-30. The only occurrence of *porneia* in these two passages is in 22:21 which identifies *ekporneuo*, the verbal form of *porneia*, as a woman who has been unfaithful during the betrothal period. Therefore it is likely that the readers of Matthew and the Pharisees to whom this phrase was spoken, would think not of adultery on the part of a wife, but of unfaithfulness on the part of a betrothed woman. Furthermore, this fourth point, along with the preceding three do in fact meet the burden of proof. The most likely meaning in the context of Matt 5:32 and 19:9 for *porneia* is betrothal unfaithfulness, not adultery or any other sexual sin on the part of a wife in a consummated marriage.

### **ANALOGY OF SCRIPTURE**

The final support for the betrothal view to be presented is the analogy of Scripture. The analogy of Scripture (also known as the analogy of faith) is a key tool in exegesis which guards against a battle of proof-texts. It states that “doctrines should not be built upon a single passage but rather should summarize all that Scripture says on that topic (Osborne, 1991:11). Bernard Ramm adds, “the interpretations of specific passages must not contradict the total teaching of scripture on a point” (1970:107). Any conclusion reached on a subject must agree with all of the passages that concern the subject.

As noted in the beginning there are five different passages written by four different authors that are relevant to Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage. Mark, Luke, and Paul all agree that, according to Jesus, divorce with subsequent remarriage is sin. The two occurrences in Matthew’s Gospel (5:32, 19:9) also agree with Mark, Luke, and Paul, except for the addition of an exception clause. One may account for this difference in one of three ways. First, Mark, Luke, and Paul left out an implicit statement in their writings that Matthew decided to make explicit. Second, there is a blatant contradiction and either Matthew was mistaken or Mark, Luke, and Paul were mistaken. Third, the exception clause is somehow only applicable to Matthew’s audience and yet does not violate the teaching of Mark, Luke, and Paul. The first option changes the meaning of Mark, Luke and Paul by making an unproven assumption. The second option is only tenable to those who deny the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The third option is

strongest. Because of the practice of betrothal among the Jews during the time of the New Testament, only the Jews would have two situations requiring divorce (betrothal, consummated marriage), whereas gentiles would only have one (consummated marriage). Therefore Matthew includes the exception for betrothal unfaithfulness, while agreeing with the rest of the New Testament (Mark, Luke, Paul) that divorce of a consummated marriage with subsequent remarriage is adultery.

### CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

This paper set out to examine and understand Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage. The key texts were observed, and a presentation of evidence was presented for the view that betrothal was the context of Jesus' use of the exception clause in Matthew 19:3-9. Sometimes IFCA International members represent their interpretation of Jesus' teaching as the only Scripturally defensible view. Other views are often dismissed as based on tradition or accommodation to people. This presentation seeks to establish that there is solid biblical and exegetical basis for interpreting biblical grounds for divorce as allowance for divorce for sexual unfaithfulness during the betrothal period. This amounts to a high view of divorce and remarriage. Since betrothal is no longer practiced, the exception no longer applies. This interpretation leads its proponents to a "no remarriage following divorce" position as taught in 1 Cor 7:10-11 and by the Lord Jesus.

Regardless of personal view on the biblical grounds for divorce, Christian workers and all believers must be part of God's salt and light for the sanctity and permanence of marriage. Great reform is needed in the institution of marriage, a reform that must begin with the return to God's standard. May IFCA International always hold God's standard for marriage and the family high.

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# **ONE SCRIPTURALLY DEFENSIBLE VIEW ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: There Are Biblical Grounds for Divorce**

## **INTRODUCTION**

IFCA International has never included a statement on divorce or remarriage in its doctrinal statement. It has admitted men into its fellowship who hold differing views concerning Jesus' teaching on the subject. However, for decades the IFCA Bylaws have restricted individual membership in IFCA International from anyone divorced. Good men committed to the centrality and inerrancy of Scripture hold differing views on biblical grounds for divorce which they deem to be true to the Bible. The Erasmian view (first set forth by Erasmus in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, also called the traditional Protestant view), became the majority view among the Reformers and was included in the 1648 Westminster Confession. This traditional view probably remains the majority view among American evangelicals and is held by many in IFCA International. This paper represents those in IFCA International who hold the view that the exception Jesus taught in Matthew makes allowance for divorce following unfaithfulness.

The goal of this paper is to present and support the view that according to Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage there are biblically allowable divorces. IFCA International members rightly determine their convictions on marriage and divorce, not from what the majority believe or from tradition, but from what the Bible teaches. How does the Bible present Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage?

## **BACKGROUND TO MATTHEW 19:3-9**

God hates divorce. He hates it because it always involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage that two partners have entered into before Him, and because it brings harmful consequences to those partners and their children (Mal. 2:14-16). Divorce in the Scripture is permitted only because of man's sin. Since divorce is only a concession to man's sin and is not part of God's original plan for marriage, all believers should hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there is no other recourse. With God's help a marriage can survive the worst sins.

In Matthew 19:3-9, Christ teaches clearly that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin that violates God's original purpose for the intimate unity and permanence of the marriage bond (Gen. 2:24). He taught that God's law allowed divorce only because of "hardness of heart" (Matt. 19:8). Legal divorce was a concession for the faithful partner due to the sexual sin or abandonment by the sinning partner, so that the faithful partner was no longer bound to the marriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12-15). Although Jesus did say that divorce is permitted in some situations, we must remember that His primary point in this discourse is to correct the Jews' idea that they could divorce one another "for any cause at all" (Matt. 19:3), and to show them the gravity of pursuing a sinful divorce. Therefore, the believer should never consider divorce except in specific circumstances (see next section), and even in those circumstances it should only be pursued reluctantly because there is no other recourse.

## **BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE**

The only New Testament grounds for divorce are sexual sin or desertion by an unbeliever. The first is found in Jesus' use of the Greek word *porneia* (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). This is a general term that encompasses sexual sin such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. When one partner violates the unity and intimacy of a marriage by sexual sin and forsakes his or her covenant obligation-the faithful partner is placed in an extremely difficult situation. After all means are exhausted to bring the sinning partner to repentance, the Bible permits release for the faithful partner through divorce (Matt. 5:32; 1 Cor. 7:15).

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where an unbelieving mate does not desire to live with his or her believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Because “God has called us to peace” (v. 15), divorce is allowed and may be preferable in such situations. When an unbeliever desires to leave, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce, perhaps because of lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid monetary obligations, then the believer is in an impossible situation of having legal and moral obligations that he or she cannot fulfill. Because “the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor. 7:15) and is therefore no longer obligated to remain married, the believer may file for divorce without fearing the displeasure of God.

### **THE QUESTION OF REMARRIAGE**

Remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner only when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In fact, the purpose for a biblical divorce is to make clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of “adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). This is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (1 Cor. 7: 10- 11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matt. 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Cor. 7:11). The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:12).

### **DISCIPLINE BY THE CHURCH FOR UNBIBLICAL GROUNDS**

Believers who pursue divorce on unbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. The one who obtains an unbiblical divorce and remarries is guilty of adultery since God did not permit the original divorce (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11-12). That person is subject to the steps of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. If a professing Christian violates the marriage covenant and refuses to repent during the process of church discipline, Scripture instructs that he or she should be put out of the church and treated as an unbeliever (v. 17). When the discipline results in such a reclassification of the disobedient spouse as an “outcast” or unbeliever, the faithful partner would be free to divorce according to the provision for divorce as in the case of an unbeliever departing, as stated in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Before such a divorce, however, reasonable time should be allowed for the possibility of the unfaithful spouse returning because of the discipline.

The leadership in the local church should also help single believers who have been divorced to understand their situation biblically, especially in cases where the appropriate application of biblical teaching does not seem clear. For example, the church leadership may at times need to decide whether one or both of the former partners could be legitimately considered “believers” at the time of their past divorce, because this will affect the application of biblical principles to their current situation (1 Cor. 7:17-24). Also, because people often transfer to or from other churches and many of those churches do not practice church discipline, it might be necessary for the leadership to decide whether a member’s estranged or former spouse should currently be considered a Christian or treated as an unbeliever because of continued disobedience. Again, in some cases this would affect the application of the biblical principles (1 Cor. 7:15; 2 Cor. 6:14).

## **THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE BEFORE SALVATION**

According to 1 Corinthians 7:20-27, there is nothing in salvation that demands a particular social or marital status. The Apostle Paul, therefore, instructs believers to recognize that God providentially allows the circumstances they find themselves in when they come to Christ. If they were called while married, then they are not required to seek a divorce (even though divorce may be permitted on biblical grounds). If they were called while divorced, and cannot be reconciled to their former spouse because that spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then they are free to either remain single or be remarried to another believer (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14).

## **THE QUESTION OF FORGIVENESS**

In cases where divorce took place on unbiblical grounds and the guilty partner later repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. A sign of true repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, which would involve a willingness to pursue reconciliation with his or her former spouse, if that is possible. If reconciliation is not possible, however, because the former spouse is an unbeliever or is remarried, then the forgiven believer could pursue another relationship under the careful guidance and counsel of church leadership.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on unbiblical grounds and remarried, he or she is guilty of the sin of adultery until that sin is confessed (Mark 10:11-12). God does forgive that sin immediately when repentance takes place, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate anything other than that. From that point on the believer should continue in his or her current marriage.

## **CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION**

This paper set out to examine and understand Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage. The key texts were observed, and a presentation of evidence was presented for the view that the Bible allows divorce in certain circumstances. Sometimes IFCA International members represent their interpretation of Jesus' teaching as the only Scripturally defensible view. Other views are often dismissed as based on tradition or accommodation to people. This presentation seeks to establish that there is solid biblical and exegetical basis for interpreting two biblical grounds for allowable divorce: for sexual unfaithfulness and for desertion by an unbeliever. This amounts to a high view of divorce and remarriage.

Regardless of personal view on the biblical grounds for divorce, Christian workers and all believers must be part of God's salt and light for the sanctity and permanence of marriage. Great reform is needed in the institution of marriage, a reform that must begin with the return to God's standard. May IFCA International always hold God's standard for marriage and the family high.

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