

The Marriage Bond and Covenant

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. (1 Cor. 7:15)

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an ordinance instituted by God at creation (Gen. 2:24). In this ordinance, a man is to leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. It is also a covenant which is supposed to reflect the covenant relation Christ has with His Church (Mal. 2:14; Eph. 5: 22-33). Ordained by God from the beginning, reflecting Christ's relation with the Church, the marriage bond is ideally to be permanent, reflecting Christ's eternal and unchanging love for His Bride.¹

Problems however arise because of our human sin, in which husbands and wives hurt each other and sin against each other, sometimes grievously. The question then becomes what do the Scriptures say concerning the actions of divorce and remarriage that attend the real life realities of marital breakdowns. Just because the ideal is a lifelong union of husband and wife, does it necessarily mean that divorce and subsequent remarriage is off-limits for Christians? Are there any circumstances in which a Christian may legitimately seek to divorce or be divorced, and then remarry, without sinning?²

The biblical argument for and against divorce and/or remarriage is often focused on exegesis of a couple of key texts, namely Genesis 2:24, Deuteronomy 24:1-3, Malachi 2:10-16, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:3-12, Mark 10:1-2, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 7.³ Alongside the biblical arguments from these texts lies the systematic theological argument that marriage between

¹ That the permanence of marriage is the ideal intended by God is admitted by all parties to the debate over divorce and remarriage. See for example J. Carl Laney, "No Divorce & No Remarriage," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. Wayne House (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 16; William A. Heth, "Divorce, but No Remarriage," in *idem*, 73; Thomas R. Edgar, "Response to No Divorce & No Remarriage," in *idem*, 63; Larry Richards, "Divorce & Remarriage under a Variety of Circumstances," in *idem*, 242

² The main positions are: No divorce and remarriage, Divorce no remarriage, Divorce and remarriage for adultery and desertion, and Divorce and remarriage for various reasons (House, *Divorce and Remarriage*). No-fault divorce is a view that no Christian claiming to follow the Scriptures takes.

³ Thomas R. Edgar, "Divorce & Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion," in *ibid.*, 153

man and woman images Christ's relationship with His church, based upon passages like Ephesians 5:22-33. Opponents of any form of divorce and remarriage typically work with such an analogy in mind, implicitly or explicitly, thus arguing that the marriage bond is unbreakable.⁴ Those in the PRCA (Protestant Reformed Churches of America) tradition have developed one of the most sophisticated arguments using this analogy to argue for their no remarriage position. David Engelsma, following the founding theologian of the PRCA, Herman Hoeksema, has stated that "an unbreakable bond of marriage follows from the unbreakable covenant because marriage is the earthly picture of the covenant [of grace]."⁵

In this paper, I look at the issue of divorce and remarriage from the foundational question of the nature of the marriage bond, looking primarily on the systematic theological level at the analogy between marriage and Christ's relation to His people, and secondarily and briefly at a few biblical texts that have implications for the nature of the marital bond. I contend that the marriage bond is intended to be permanent, but it is breakable. If the marriage bond is breakable, then divorce and remarriage in some form is legitimate. If, however, the marriage bond is not breakable, then divorce and remarriage in any form should be seen as sin.⁶ I show that the analogy of marriage to the relation of Christ to His people is to be seen as an analogical not a univocal relation, that the New Covenant promises are not a simple abrogation of the Old Covenant sanctions, that the visible/ invisible church distinction is

⁴ E.g. J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1981), 25; David J. Engelsma, *Better to Marry* (Grand Rapids MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1983), 43. Others like Gordon Wenham and the earlier William Heth argued for the permanence of the marriage bond through a particular way of interpreting the saying of Jesus that "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mark 10:2-9 = Matt. 19:3-8)" [Gordon J. Wenham & William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 13]

⁵ David J. Engelsma, "A History of the Church's Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage," *PRTJ* 27, no. 1 (Nov 1993) : 6

⁶ While disputes about the key texts continue, it is clear that the underlying dispute is not about whether God and Christ sanction divorce and remarriage, but rather whether the marriage bond is breakable. As Thomas Edgar wrote in response to J. Carl Laney's view, "if we begin with this alleged 'inherent nature' of marriage as indissoluble, and exegete all the verses in conformity with that concept, then the outcome can only be one way" (Edgar, "Response to No Divorce & No Remarriage," in House, ed., 66). In other words, the indissolubility of the marriage bond seems to function as *a priori* for those opposing the legitimacy of some form of divorce and remarriage. It may here be objected that Scripture in Mark 10:2-9 (Mt. 19:3-8) states that "God intends marriage to be an indissoluble union" (Wenham & Heth, 13), but here the authors commit a lapse of reasoning in reading a prohibition as an indicative of inability.

necessary to understanding God's relation with Old Testament Israel, and thus that God's bill of divorce of Israel in Jeremiah 3:8 is indeed a true divorce with the breaking of the covenant bond. Having looked at the nature of the relationship between God and His people, I state what Romans 7:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 7 teach concerning the nature of the marital bond, and then look at the idea of adultery as mentioned in the exception clause in the Matthean passages (Mt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12).⁷

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

In Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 7 Section 1, God as the Sovereign Creator high above Man is at a distance so great that that He must condescend to Man by means of covenant in order for Man to have Him as their blessedness and reward.⁸ Throughout Scripture, the motif of covenant is the "architectonic structure" that "holds together the structure of biblical faith and practice."⁹ In the history of redemption, God relates to people by means of covenant, progressing from the covenant with Adam, to the covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel, the covenant with David and finally the covenant with the Church.¹⁰ Of God's covenants with Man, His redemptive covenants are the covenants with Abraham, Israel and the Church, which together are the manifestation of the redemptive covenant commonly called the Covenant of Grace.¹¹

The Mosaic Covenant, or God's covenant with the nation and people of Israel, functions as the backdrop for God's action of divorce of Israel in the Old Covenant era. In Jeremiah 3:8, God is said to have send Israel away with a bill of divorce (כְּסֵפֶר בְּרִיתָהּ) for her idolatries, for her sins which are

⁷ Due to space constraints, I look only at these 2 texts briefly, and touch slightly on the Matthean exclusion. For a fuller look at those and other passages, see the paper by Zachery Wyse on the same topic.

⁸ Westminster Confession of Faith 7.1, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Vol. 3; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1877, 1905, 1919), 616

⁹ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 13

¹⁰ On the Covenant with Adam, see Hosea 6:7 and Bryon G. Curtis, "Hosea 6:7 and Covenant-Breaking like/at Adam," in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko & David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 170-209

¹¹ Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3, in Schaff, 617; Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenant Between God and Man* (Vol. 1; Kingsburg, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 163-5

portrayed as adulteries and playing the whore.¹² The prophet Hosea graphically portrays God's grace to Israel and Israel's idolatry with his own marriage to Gomer the prostitute (Hos. 1: 2). In both of these passages however, there is a subsequent pronouncement of reconciliation and a return of Israel to be God's people once more (Jer. 3: 11- 4:4; Hos. 1:10- 2:1), with Hosea enacting God's taking back of Israel to be His people in his redemption of Gomer to be his wife again (Hos. 3:1-5). The case is then made that just as God's divorce of Israel did not entail breaking His covenant bond with Israel, so likewise the marriage bond between husband and wife is not broken in a "divorce."¹³

The first thing that must be mentioned is that any analogy that Scripture uses is meant to be an analogical, not a univocal, representation of the truth. In other words, the analogy of God's relation to His people to the marriage relation has only as much similarity as Scripture claims for it, nothing more and nothing less. As ectypal revelation, one cannot stretch the analogy beyond what Scripture claims for it, as shown by the extreme example of reading the analogy to be teaching that the husband is to like God to his wife and to be obeyed in everything, just as God is God to His Church and thus requires absolute obedience.¹⁴ Therefore, one cannot read God's unbreakable relation with His people in the Covenant of Grace as necessarily implying that marriage is unbreakable. One has to see from the text in its redemptive historical context the exact point the analogy is striving to portray, not read into the text every aspect of identity one perceives between the two.

Next, it must be seen that the Mosaic administration is a unique administration of the Covenant of Grace, which has a republication of the principle of the Covenant of Works within it.¹⁵ Thus, while

¹² It is noted here in passing that the phrase is almost identical to the phrase in Deuteronomy 24: 1 which speaks of Moses' rule concerning divorce in the Mosaic economy (סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת)

¹³ The argument from analogy from Jeremiah 3 for the no remarriage position has been made by David Engelsma in David J. Engelsma, "A Brief Study of Jeremiah 3 on Divorce," *PRTJ* 39 no. 2 (Apr 2006): 2-16

¹⁴ For the Reformed understanding of "analogy," or rather the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge, see Willem J. van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought," *WTJ* 64 (2002): 319-35

¹⁵ See Estelle et al, *The Law is Not of Faith*. Also see Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenant Between God and Man* (Vol. 2; Kingsburg, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 183-6; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic*

materially it partakes of the Covenant of Grace, yet formally there is a works element in it, and thus in its form it partakes of the Covenant of Works.¹⁶

Since God's covenant with Israel is of this unique Mosaic administration, there is a sense in which the Mosaic administration cannot be simply identified with the Covenant of Grace, and God's interaction with Israel cannot likewise be simply identified as God's interaction with His elect people. Rather, the works principle meant that the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant do depend in some sense upon the obedience of the Israelites fulfilling its conditions. It should come as no surprise then that God divorces Israel because of her persistent unfaithfulness to Him as mentioned in passages such as Jeremiah 3:6-10.

NEW COVENANT BLESSINGS AND OLD COVENANT SANCTIONS

The Old Covenant sanctions are the sanctions of the Mosaic Covenant expressed in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, and summarized in Deuteronomy 27:26a — “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”¹⁷ Disobedience incurs the wrath of God, and it is this wrath in its finality that is expressed in God's divorce of Israel, a divorce that has its ultimate fulfillment in the final rejection of theocratic Israel after the crucifixion of Christ (Mt. 21:33-44). In this divorce, God says of national Israel, “Not my people” (Hos. 1:9). The note of rejection resounds in the text, the undoing of the covenant bond between God and His covenant people.

Yet the stated breaking of the covenant bond is followed in the biblical text by promises of restoration. Engelsma argues from those promises of restoration that the covenantal bond between God and Israel was not actually broken, as God continues to want her, Israel. As he wrote:

Theology (Vol. 2; George Musgrave Giger, trans.; James T. Dennison, Jr., ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 234

¹⁶ There are a number of different ways of explaining the republication thesis (Estelle et al., 11-3). I chose this manner of explaining it as the best generic way of explaining how the two principles interact within the Mosaic covenant, while acknowledging the Mosaic Covenant as being a true administration of the Covenant of Grace (c.f. Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5, in Schaff, 617-8)

¹⁷ Deut. 27:26a ESV

...the passage clearly teaches that, although God divorced Israel, He maintained the marriage with His wife. The divorce temporarily suspended the fellowship—the life together—of the union, but it did not abrogate the bond of union itself. ... God’s divorce of Israel was only a “separation of bed and board,” not a “dissolving of the bond.” God did not renounce His love for His wife, did not renege on His marital vow to her, and did not give up His will to have her in the communion of the marriage.¹⁸

Arguing from the fact that God “did not put His own adulterous, idolatrous wife to death,” whereas adultery under the Mosaic economy requires the death of the adulterer, Engelsma claims that “God was still married to divorced Israel.”¹⁹ Therefore, while the notice of divorce was given to Israel, God’s “divorce” was not actually a real divorce and it did not break His marriage to Israel.

It is very important to note in response that the Old Covenant sanctions partook of the principle of works inherent within the Mosaic Covenant. The promises of restoration on the other hand do not belong to the Mosaic Covenant but to the New Covenant, which after all follows after the blessings and curses of the Old Covenant and is thus separate from it (Deut. 30:1-2). This New Covenant is not the same covenant as the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai (Jer. 31:31-4). Rather, it partakes of the same essence as the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant of promise that the advent of the Mosaic Covenant did not abrogate (Gal. 3:17).²⁰

In light of the bicovenantal structure of Scripture, the Old Covenant sanctions against Israel do indeed break the covenantal bond of God with theocratic Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. Indeed, the fact that the covenantal bond of the Old Covenant is forever broken and will never again be restored is seen in the historical sacking of Jerusalem both in 586 BC under the Babylonians and in AD 70 under the Romans (Mt. 21: 41-4; 23:38; 24:2). Theocratic Israel did indeed suffer the death penalty for adulterers! The New Covenant blessings do not mitigate the sanctions of the Old Covenant, but rather function separate from and parallel to it. The promises of restoration in New Covenant blessing

¹⁸ Engelsma, “Jeremiah 3,” 7-8

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8. Also, David J. Engelsma, “A History of the Church’s Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” *PRTJ* 28 no. 2 (April 1995) : 34

²⁰ See Horton, 35-50, wherein the two types of covenants are differentiated as that between a suzerain treaty of law and the royal grant of grace.

passages like Jer. 3: 12-23 did not apply to theocratic Israel but rather it applied to the elect within Israel, those whose hearts God will have circumcised and whose lives He will have saved. This ties in with the visible/ invisible church distinction which is critical for understanding how the covenant sanctions and promises of restoration work out in the lives of individuals.

THE VISIBLE/ INVISIBLE CHURCH DISTINCTION

The Visible/ Invisible Church distinction differentiates between “the body of Christ as known to God in eternity and [the body of Christ] as known to us now as a mixed assembly.”²¹ This distinction is coined by our acknowledgment of the fact that not everyone who claims to be a Christian in the church is truly a Christian believing in Christ. As the Apostle John wrote, there was (and there will continue to be) some who came out from us who were not actually of us (1 Jn. 2:19). The Visible Church consists of all who visibly profess Christ, while the invisible Church consists of all who actually believe in Christ.

This distinction is vital to help us understand how the principle of grace and the principle of works played out in the lives of individuals within theocratic Israel, and thus how the Old Covenant sanctions and New Covenant promises of restoration were applied in the Old Covenant era. In that era of theocratic Israel, national Israel was the visible Church, which was under the principle of works in the Mosaic Covenant. The Old Covenant sanctions fell upon national Israel and God divorced the visible Church of national Israel, a divorce which is final. Yet, within the visible church of theocratic Israel there were the elect people of God, the invisible church. It is to this remnant that the New Covenant promises of restoration were directed.

Engelsma’s case for the indissolubility of the marriage bond therefore falls apart since the bill of divorce God gave was to theocratic Israel, the visible church of that era. The promises of restoration

²¹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 852. See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 564, in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996)

were however given to a different group altogether, which is the remnant, the invisible church. The bill of divorce to theocratic Israel was final, and there would be no repeat of the Mosaic economy with its sanctions as it is now abrogated; that covenant bond is now broken. There is no such thing as God being still married to divorced Israel, a phrase which is an oxymoron!²² God's covenant with divorced Israel is no more, totally broken. God is done with national Israel, and he has returned to His original plan, the Abrahamic covenant.

As an aside, it must be noted here that the reason behind Engelsma's defence of the no remarriage position is his erroneous view of the covenants. Engelsma is a monocovenantalist who rejects the biblical teaching concerning the Covenant of Works.²³ He thus has no category for any form of works principle and sees the idea of any form of conditionality as inserting a principle of salvation by works into soteriology. Thus, any mention of works and conditionality is seen as integrating and contaminating the one gracious covenant with works, thus pelagianizing the Covenant of Grace.²⁴

The bill of divorce that God gave to national Israel therefore did in fact break the covenant bond God had with Israel under the Old Covenant. God can divorce a visible church, as Christ warned the

²² The idea that one can be "divorced" but such a "divorce" is merely from bed and board (*a mensa et thoro*), but it is not a real divorce, is a game in semantics. As John Murray states, "to provide for and sanction permanent separation while the marriage tie remains inviolate is something that is alien to the whole tenor of Scripture teaching in regard to the obligations that inhere in and are inseparable from the marital bond." [John Murray, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1961), 43]

²³ Engelsma defines "the covenant of God" as "the relationship of friendship between the triune God and his chosen people in Jesus Christ" and "it is not a treaty ... nor... a promise." [David J. Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 4, 6]. Also David J. Engelsma, "The Covenant of Creation with Adam," *PRTJ* 40 no 1 (Nov 2006): 3-42

²⁴ Engelsma, *Covenant of God*, 142-7. The PRCA position on the covenant as it is contrasted with the Federal Vision makes it clear that they are two opposite poles of the same error, with the Federal Vision constituting Monocovenantal Legalism and the PRCA Monocovenantal Antinomianism. Without a distinct category for a separate works covenant, Engelsma sees any mention of "works" or "merit" as compromising the Gospel of Justification by Faith Alone, reading his lack of a distinct category of works covenant into the traditional Reformed position, and then charging the promotion of the Covenant of Works as being an assault on the Gospel. However, the true assault on the Gospel comes from the monocovenantalist position, since if law and Gospel are not distinct, and there is only one covenant, then both Law and Gospel must necessarily subsist within the one covenant. In the resulting mosaic, a decision must be made to make either Law or Gospel primary. The Federal Vision makes Law in the sense of faithfulness (which they interpret as *fiducia*) primary [*A Joint Federal Vision Profession*, 6. http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf (accessed May 9th 2013)], while Engelsma and the PRCA make Gospel primary. One wonders whether there is any sense in the PRCA scheme in which the Law can function in the Church as a real warning passage to her members, something which has only real teeth when professing members of the Visible Church could very well fall from faith.

churches in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelations (Rev. 2-3), but God never breaks covenant with those in the invisible church. Breakages of covenant bonds do happen. As marriage is analogous to God's covenant dealings with His people, it can be said that an actual breaking of the covenant bond does happen in divorce, not a mere separation "from bed and board"—a faux divorce.

ROMANS 7 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 7 ON THE MARRIAGE BOND

Romans 7: 1-6 uses an analogy to marriage to make a theological point, while 1 Corinthians 7 deals with practical issues concerning the married state with which the Corinthian church was struggling. In Romans 7:1-6, the Apostle Paul appeals to the permanence of marriage until death of a spouse as an analogy of how the law is binding upon us as long as we are alive to the Law. The analogy works only if marriage is seen as a bond lasting until death, just as the state of being under law lasts until one dies to the Law.

The passage of Romans 7:1-6 therefore seems to require a view of the permanence of the marriage bond until the death of one of the spouses.²⁵ However, here is where the intent of the analogy must be taken into account, i.e. that the text itself is not speaking to issues and complications in any marriage relation. Rather, the marriage bond spoken of here is the original ideal of what the marriage bond is meant to be. The prohibition that men should not tear apart what God has joined together (Mt. 19:3-8, Mark 10:2-9) expresses God's intent for marriage, an imperative not an indicative, God's revealed will not His sovereign will. If, as others have argued, adultery and desertion constitutes treating the other party as if they were dead, that would easily fit the analogy the apostle Paul uses in this text between the marriage bond and the believer's relation to the Law.²⁶ Charges of such a solution

²⁵ Thus Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 83-4

²⁶ C.f. Westminster Confession of Faith 24.5, in Schaff, 656; R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, repr. 1972), 409-10

as being “legal fiction” perpetuating a “fictional death” are strange coming from the pens of Protestant theologians who supposedly do accept the “legal fiction” of justification by faith alone.²⁷

The appeal to 1 Corinthians 7 does give various guidelines in considering various marriage issues. The passage deals with whether Christian marriages should be dissolved, whether mixed marriages should be dissolved and whether unmarried engaged couples should be married, all in light of the reality of the eschatological age that has now come.

As pertaining to permanence of the marriage bond, verses 10 to 15 are normally appealed to, while verse 39 is another possible proof-text. Verse 39 should be addressed in the same manner as Romans 7:1-6, i.e. as expressing God’s intent for the marriage bond. Verses 10 to 14 in context state that separation without cause does not break the marriage bond (1 Cor. 7:10-11), and the fact that the spouse is an unbeliever does not break the marriage bond (1 Cor. 7:12-14). In verse 15 however, Paul tersely commanded the believing spouse not to pursue the relationship but allow the unbelieving spouse to leave if he intends to leave, the command being a decisive break upon which the “believer is not under any obligation to pursue the deserting spouse and is freed from all marital debts and duties.”²⁸

From these two passages, it is seen that the marriage bond is intended to continue until death, but it might not do so, with one reason for the breaking of the marital bond given in 1 Corinthians 7:15 in the case of desertion.

ADULTERY AND IDOLATRY IN THE COVENANT

²⁷ E.g. Wehnam & Heth, 84; David J. Engelsma, “A History of the Church’s Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: 2. The Reformed Tradition,” *PRTJ* 27 no 2 (April 1994): 19. Furthermore, the context of being dead to the Law in the entire book of Romans is a legal concept, not a relational concept

²⁸ Murray, 68. Much is made in this passage of the distinction between the Greek words δουλόω and δέω (Engelsma, *Better*, 83-5; Wenham & Heth, 141-3). While the two are indeed distinct Greek words, to make such a sharp distinction in meaning runs contrary to the meanings of these words. After all, a person X that is enslaved to person Y is under necessity to do whatever person Y commands him to do. Likewise, if someone is under necessity to sin, that person is in bondage to sin (Rom. 6:17).

Perhaps the text most controverted on the issue of divorce and remarriage is the Matthean texts that contain the exception clause (Mt. 5:31-32; 9: 3-12).²⁹ Assuming the plain reading and traditional rendering of the text, why is adultery such a serious sin so that it function as the second legitimate reason that allows for divorce and remarriage?

If marriage is a one flesh union, then the adulterous act is a physical rupture of the one flesh relation. Therefore, it penetrates into the very essence of the marriage bond and breaks it. The Scriptures thus use the image of adultery as being analogous to idolatry against God. Idolatry against God, akin to adultery, breaks the relationship with a holy God, and this analogy is graphically expressed and acted out in Hosea 1-3.

In allowing for divorce and remarriage following adultery, our Lord was only recognizing the reality of the rupture of the marriage bond made by the act of adultery. Just as idolatry breaks the relation between God and His people, so likewise adultery ruptures the marriage bond between husband and wife. Divorce thus only makes clear what in reality the relation between husband and wife has become. This of course does not mean that divorce must necessarily follow upon adultery, as couples can still forgive each other and work to heal the bond, but adultery is a legitimate reason for divorce, because the bond has already been ruptured.³⁰

²⁹ Since the passages are found in Scripture, they are authentic. If one claims to hold to full inerrancy of Scripture, then any argument that claims the Matthean exception clause does not apply because of its absence in the Markan and Lukan parallel texts are illegitimate, as well as attempts to prioritize the account in the parallel texts over the Matthean reading (c.f. Wenham & Heth, 113-7, 190-7).

Space will not permit going into the various issues regarding interpretation of the text. Briefly, opponents of divorce and remarriage controvert the rendering of “divorce,” *πορνεία* as adultery, and/ or they make the exception clause applicable to divorce but not remarriage (Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 65-78; Wenham & Heth, 113-35; Engelsma, *Better*, 68-70). Wenham and Heth argues for the exception clause to be applicable only to and qualifies only the first action of “divorce” (Wenham & Heth, 118), contrary to John Murray who argues that it applies to the entire conjunction (Murray, 41). The fact is that even if it applies only to the first clause it does not mean that remarriage is prohibited, for the text did not say that remarriage constitutes adultery, but that the one who BOTH divorces not for *πορνεία*, AND remarries, that commits adultery [Phillip H. Wiebe, “Jesus’ Divorce Exception,” *JETS* 32, no 3 (Sept 1989): 327-33].

³⁰ Here, Jesus’ teaching on divorce is stricter than the teachings of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, not because He prohibited divorce and/or remarriage (contra Laney, 77; Wenham & Heth, 129), but because Jesus merely permits divorce while Shammai mandates it [William A. Heth, “Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind has Changed,” *SBJT* 6, no 1 (2002), 11;

CONCLUSION

The marriage covenant is meant to be a lifetime bond between husband and wife. It is however breakable. Just like Israel's harlotry broke the Mosaic covenantal relationship she had with God so that God hands her a certificate of divorce (Jer. 3:8), so likewise breaches in the marriage relationship between husband and wife (like desertion and adultery) break the marital bond, and therefore divorce and remarriage is allowable after the breakdown of that bond.

Nevertheless, divorce and remarriage, which entail the breaking of the marriage covenant that was intended to be life-long, is a tragedy in a fallen world.³¹ God hates divorce (Mal. 2:10-16). Ideally, the whole issue of divorce and remarriage should not have to even come up for discussion.

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world. Even the godliest of saints can suffer from the pain of having her spouse cheat on her. It is wrong on so many levels to assume that in every marital breakdown, both parties are guilty.³² While not condoning sin, the last thing we should do is to impose our extra-biblical opinions on those who have to make the heart-rending decision to divorce, and then later when they chose to remarry we condemn them. The Gospel is good news to sinners who repent, not a law to club those who remarry as if they had performed the unpardonable sin.³³ While holding firm to the biblical aversion to divorce, let us not multiply laws to condemn those who stumble, but rather exhibit the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of this fallen world.

Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Vol. 22; The New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 294].

³¹ The high number of divorces and remarriages deplored by those against divorce and remarriage (Engelsma, "History 2. Reformed Tradition," 20; Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 12) may be a bit too high to stick it to Christians [Adelle M. Banks, "Research disputes 'facts' on Christian divorces," *Christian Century* (Apr 2011): 17]. Even if the figures are that high, it is extremely simplistic to infer that the Protestant doctrine concerning divorce and remarriage is to blame, as such commits the logical fallacy of using correlation to prove causation, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

³² Laney, *The Divorce Myth*, 118

³³ I wonder how the PRCA for example would deal with someone who divorces and remarries. Will they hound the couple and place them under discipline until they divorce so that the divorcee could continue to work towards being reconciled to his first spouse? Where is the grace of God towards sinners in a broken world? The irony is that those who conflate law and Gospel into one covenant tend to be legalistic in certain aspects and antinomian in other aspects, where those who violate the group's taboos are shunned while acceptable vices are winked at.

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