

David Instone-Brewer's Sermon Notes – Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible
Slides 69-96

SLIDE 69 (After quotes from *Church*, p.15-16, 19-20.)

Once you start to see Jesus in his own culture, you hear him differently

- you start to listen to his words with the ears of the original hearers
- and you realise he isn't speaking to a 21stC believer but Jewish peasants and rabbis
- this sometimes means that his words will be difficult to understand
- even though they were very straightforward for his original audience
- for example his saying "Not one yod or tittle will pass from the Law"
- we have to explain to ourselves that the "Law" is the Torah, the Books of Moses
- and a yod is the smallest letter and a tittle is part of a letter in the Hebrew alphabet
- but to everyone standing there listening to Jesus, this was all obvious and plain

Now that we know how 1stC Jews thought and spoke, we can understand Jesus better

- I have found many minor places where we can understand Jesus better
- and I have found one very major place where our misunderstanding is huge
- Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage sounds completely different when you listen to him with the ears of a 1st C Jew
- so before I take you to Jesus' teaching, I have to teach you what a 1st C Jew knew
- and then you can listen to the words of Jesus and hear them as they were heard

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Jews relied on the OT to teach them God's Law. So what did God's Law say?

- they found 613 commandments in the OT, and five grounds for divorce
- the first commandment gave them the first ground for divorce - see Gen.1.28
- "Be fruitful and multiply"** - it is expressed as a command, so Jews obeyed it
- this meant that they regarded infertility as a ground for divorce
- it was a command which they tried to get round, but nevertheless a command
- Jesus specifically rejected this by saying that you could be a 'eunuch' for the kingdom (Mt.19.12)
- that is, you could remain single, because the command to have children was not for everyone
- so infertility is not a ground for divorce, though it is frequently a cause of much grief.

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The second ground for divorce they found is one which we do recognise: Immorality, in Deut.24.1

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found a cause of indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house..."

- the observant among you will notice that the sentence has not ended

- this is part of a case law - an actual occurrence with complicated circumstances
- it goes on to say that if this woman marries someone else, who also divorces her, and she comes back to her original husband, he may not marry her again.
- why? We don't know. It is described as an "abomination", so it is very bad
- but why is it worse to remarry your first husband than to marry a third?
- the best solution I know is that this was outlawing pimping your wife
- ie you divorce her, let her marry a customer for the night, then remarry her
- it is legal and common in some branches of Islam, but it was abominable to Moses

Perhaps that's what the original case referred to, and perhaps not. It matters little

- the important thing is the principle in it: It allowed divorce for a particular ground
- the ground is "a cause of indecency" which the Jews interpreted as "adultery"

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The last three grounds for divorce, the most important, were all found in one text Ex.21.10f: **If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.**

- OK, this doesn't make much sense the first time you read it.
- the context is talking about slaves, and about someone who marries a slave.
- these verses tell him how he should treat her if he later marries another wife
- polygamy was allowed in the OT so it wasn't wrong to marry another wife
- but these verses told him not to neglect his first wife now that he had another
- and, if he did neglect her, she had the right to a divorce and her freedom

This is revolutionary teaching in the Ancient Near East - treating slaves with dignity

- when the Jews came to apply this, they made various deductions, which I agree with
- they said: if a slave wife has these rights, then a free wife must also have these rights
- and if a wife has these rights, then a husband must also have these rights
- this kind of deduction is normal in OT law, which often gives only an example
- the Law says: Do not muzzle the ox, but let it eat the grain it threshes (Deut.25.4)
- Jews said: if this is the right of an ox, it is also the right of any farm worker
- and the NT uses this same method to argue that ministers should be paid (1Co.9.9)
- so I agree that this text gives these same rights to all husbands and wives
- and if they don't get them, they have the right to divorce and freedom

What does this law say a husband should give to a wife, and wife to a husband?

- "food", "clothing" and "marital rights"
- what would a lawyer make of this? It all sounds too vague
- and that's exactly the conclusion of the Pharisees - the Jewish lawyers
- they debated exactly how to define neglect of food and clothing and love
- they defined how much food and clothing preparation the wife had to do
- so that if she fell short of this, the husband could divorce her for neglect

“These are the kinds of labour which a woman performs for her husband: she grinds flour, bakes bread, does laundry, prepares meals, feeds her child, makes the bed, works in wool.” (Mishnah Ketuvah 5.5)

- they also defined how much money for food and clothing the husband had to give:
- **“he may not provide for her less than two qabs of wheat or four qabs of barley [per week].... And he gives her a bed, a cover and a mat. And he gives her a cap for her head, and a girdle for her loins, and shoes from one festival season to the next, and clothing worth fifty zuz from one year to the next. ” (Mishnah Ketuvah 5.8)**
- I did some calculations, and found what this minimum support actually entailed
- for a normal day labourer, the cost of his wife’s clothes was 1/7th of his income!
- and if a husband didn’t support his wife properly, she could get a divorce

Marriage was a contract in the Bible, and if you had to keep your side of the bargain

- both sides vowed to supply food, clothing and love, and to be faithful
- and if you didn’t keep your contract, the wronged partner could end the contract
- ie ask for a divorce, because marriage is a contract made before God (Prov.2.17)

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We used to think that only men could get a divorce, and women were helpless

- but now we know that it was normal for Jewish women to get a divorce
- in fact half of all the divorce certificates surviving from the 1st 2 centuries are written for wives divorcing their husbands.
- before you stow that away as a useful fact, let me admit this is a statistical trick
- because but actually only two divorce certificates have survived from that time
- and 50% of them, ie one, was written for a woman divorcing her husband

This certificate was such a surprise to the Jewish scholar who found it, that he hid it

- perhaps he didn’t want to confuse anyone with the facts
- it was eventually published with some changes to make it look as if a man wrote it
- I remember storming angrily into the coffee room at Tyndale House having just read this publication, and my boss said to me: Well, why don’t you write a reply?
- the same journal was happy to publish my article pointing out the changes and the correct translation, with other evidence that Jewish women divorced their husbands
- such as the rabbinic rule about how a woman should get a divorce certificate
- in theory, the rabbis said only a man can write it, and he has to write it voluntarily
- so the rabbis ruled that if a woman has sufficient grounds for a divorce, they will beat the man with sticks until he volunteers to write a divorce certificate! (m.Git.9.8)

The third area of neglect was a tough one. How often must you do your marital duty

- but the lawyers didn’t shirk from defining this too, even though it was complicated
- they defined how often men had to do their duty, though they didn’t do the same for women
- it appears that in the first century the men were the ones who had the headaches

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- they said that they regularity depended on their occupation:
- **“The sexual duty of which the Torah speaks [Ex.21:10]: those without work, every day; workers, twice a week; ass drivers, once a week; camel drivers, once in thirty days; sailors, once in six months - the words of R. Eliezer.”**
- this law made certain that no man remained unemployed for long!

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- the Pharisees gave themselves some special privileges:
- **“He who takes a vow not to have sexual relations with his wife - The School of Shammai say, For two weeks, and the School of Hillel say, For one week. Disciples go forth for Torah study without consent for 30 days. Workers go for one week. ”**
(Mishnah Ketuvah 5.6)

Before we move on, just note two things from this small section

- I don't mean the fact that the Pharisees legislated a big concession for themselves
- that's the privilege of lawmakers the world over
- like the UK Advertising Standards Authority requirement that all adverts should be decent, honest and truthful
- for some reason, the lawmakers decided this does not apply to political advertising
- no, the significant thing here is that the Schools of Hillel and Shammai disagreed
- they were the two main groups of Pharisees before 70AD, and often disagreed
- this means this originates before AD 70 when the Shammaites all but disappeared
- but notice that both groups agreed with the ground for divorce in Ex.21.10
- they were merely debating about the details of how to apply it

Secondly, notice that this ruling is something which Paul commented on

- he said couples shouldn't deprive each other sexually except by mutual agreement
- and then only for a short time - see 1Cor.7.3-5
- it looks like Paul too based his teaching on these rights in Ex.21.10f
- but he disagreed with the interpretation by both schools of Pharisees

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Let's put that to one side, because we want to look at Jesus in particular

- in order to understand his teaching we need to look at another Pharisee debate
- because the Hillelite Pharisees invented a new ground for divorce - a 6th ground
- and this one became the most popular and important ground for divorce
- during the 1st C it became so popular that it replaced all other grounds for divorce
- actually, they probably didn't invent it, but they found the Scriptural proof for it
- they found it in the phrase “a cause of indecency” in Deut.24.1

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The Hillelites said: lets look carefully at the ground for divorce in Deut.24.1

- “a cause of indecency” means divorce for adultery. We all agree with that
- but, the word “indecency” by itself is enough to tell us it means adultery

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- which leaves the word “cause” - what does that mean?
- it must be another ground for divorce. For what? For “a cause”
- for what kind of cause? For “any cause” because it simply says “a cause”
- so they invented a new type of divorce called the “Any Cause” divorce
- using this, a man could divorce his wife for anything, even for a burnt meal

Actually, the wives liked this law too, because it didn’t require any court case

- you didn’t need to prove neglect or any other embarrassing details in public
- and unless the wife had been unfaithful, she would get her marriage dowry back
- this was often enough to live on, or it would help her get a new husband
- Joseph wanted to use it to divorce Mary “quietly” ie without a public hearing (Mt.1.19)

Even though it was theoretically possible to get divorced for the normal biblical grounds of adultery, or neglect or infertility, everyone would opt for “Any Cause”

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- this new “Any Cause” divorce was popular with everyone except the Shammaites
- they said: the phrase “a cause of indecency” means nothing except adultery
- it doesn’t mean “adultery” and “any cause” - you should read it like a simple phrase

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The actual debate is recorded like this: in Sifré Deut.269 (see also m.Git.9.10)

The School of Shammai says: A man should not divorce his wife except for indecency found in her, since it says: "For he found in her an indecency cause" [Deut.24.1].

And the School of Hillel says: Even if she spoiled his dish, since it says: "[Any] cause" [Deut.24.1].

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Now we come to Jesus, when these two groups of Pharisees came to ask his opinion

- they asked him: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause? (Mt.19.4)
- now, if you were listening to their question as a 1st C Jew, what would you hear?
- in other words are they asking: Is it lawful ... to divorce for any cause?
- or are they asking Jesus: Is it lawful... to divorce for ‘Any Cause’?
- ie are they asking: Are there any grounds for which it is lawful to get divorced?
- or are they asking: Does the new “Any Cause” divorce agree with the Law?

The big divorce debate of the day was not whether divorce was allowed or not

- everyone agreed that it was allowed - after all, the Law of Moses says so
- the big debate was about the “Any Cause” divorce which everyone loved
- except the Shammaites who said Dt.24.1 referred to nothing except indecency”
- you might say the Shammaite slogan was: “nothing except indecency”
- so when we look at the Pharisee’s debate with Jesus, we can hear it properly
- they ask him: Is it lawful to divorce for “Any Cause” - the Hillelite phrase
- and Jesus answers with the Shammaite slogan: “nothing except indecency”
- (his Greek word porneia has the same vague meaning as the Hebrew ervah)

Does that make Jesus a Shammaite? No, it means he took one side not the other

- there were only two sides one could take in this debate
- either you can get two grounds for divorce from the phrase “a cause of indecency”
- or you can’t, so that the phrase refers to “nothing except indecency”
- Jesus, like me, and most interpreters, said it should be read as a single phrase

Now lets look at the whole debate with Jesus, and unpack the abbreviated account

- it is highly abbreviated, because papyrus is expensive, and who wants it verbatim?

Question about divorce: (Matt.19.3)

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking: “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for ‘Any Cause?’”

- they ask Jesus what he thinks about the new Hillelite form of “Any Cause” divorce

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Digression about marriage: (Matt.19.4-6)

(4) He answered, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning *made them male and female* [Gen.1.27], (5) and said, ‘*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?* [Gen.2.24] (6) So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

- Jesus is more interested in talking about marriage than divorce.
- if they had a properly high view of marriage, most divorces would never happen
- in most things the Jews had it right, but in two matters they got things wrong
- first, he disagreed with polygamy, and gave scriptural proof of monogamy
- second, marriage wasn’t just a human contract, but God is involved and joins them
- therefore, no-one should break that contract by breaking the marriage vows

The important thing is to see what Jesus does not say.

- Jesus doesn’t say: “No one can put asunder”, but “No one should put asunder”
- it is an imperative, which can mean “I order you not to”, or “you should not” or even “I implore you not to”, but it can never mean “you are not able to”.
- Jesus does not say that breaking a marriage contract is impossible, but it is wrong

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Pharisees go back to divorce: Moses commanded it! (Matt.19.7-9)

(7) They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

(8) He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

- the Pharisees say: divorce is OK, because Moses even commands it for adultery
- Jesus said: No, Moses allowed it for adultery, and not just normal adultery
- only when it is “hardness of heart” - ie repeated unrepentant breaking of vows

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Jesus finally answers: The 'Any Cause' divorce is invalid, so remarriage is adultery:

(9) And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for indecency, and marries another, commits adultery.

- Jesus finally gets back to the question: What about the ‘Any Cause’ divorce?
- Jesus sides with Shammaites who said Dt.24.1 refers to “nothing except indecency”
- this implies that ‘Any Cause’ divorces are human inventions, and therefore invalid
- so anyone who has an ‘Any Cause’ divorce isn’t really divorced, but still married
- so if they remarried after an ‘Any Cause’ divorce, they are committing adultery

As far as we know, virtually all divorces in Jesus’ day were ‘Any Cause’ divorces

- so Jesus’ conclusion meant, in effect, that every remarried Jew was an adulterer!
- if someone was writing this up for a newspaper, what would the headline be?
- “Jesus teaches on divorce”? “Pharisees’ question answered”? Too boring!
- the newspaper would have the startling news: “Remarriage is adultery! says Jesus”
- this isn’t strictly accurate, because a few marriages were based on biblical grounds
- but as a headline, and as the most startling conclusion, this is Jesus’ key point

So this is how Matthew and Luke summarise Jesus’ teaching in one sentence

- in Mt.5.32 and even shorter in Lk.16.18: if you remarry you commit adultery
- Mark has a shorter version than Matthew by omitting the slogans of both sides
- the Shammaite slogan “nothing except indecency” and Hillelite “for ‘Any Cause’”
- so the question is simply: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife”
- this was probably the original form of the question, which Matthew enlarges for us
- it is rather like the question: Is it lawful for a 16-year old to drink?
- Well, is it? No? Well, in that case, the 16-year old will be dead within a week!
- you heard me ask “Is it lawful for a 16-year old to drink alcoholic beverages?”
- but that would be pedantic because we all know there is a debate about alcohol
- and everyone would understand Mark’s question concerned ‘Any Cause’
- because otherwise his question was as nonsensical as a 16-year old not drinking
- of course it’s lawful to divorce your wife - divorce is written in the Law of Moses
- so everyone reading Mark knew that it concerned the ‘Any Cause’ divorce.

What did Jesus say about the other truly biblical grounds for divorce?

- he rejected divorce for infertility based on the command to marry and multiply

- because just after this debate in Matthew he says it is OK to remain unmarried
- what about divorce for neglect of food, clothing and love, which all Jews accepted
- what does Jesus say about that? Nothing!
- and what did Jesus say about remarriage after valid biblical divorces? Nothing!
- but we will find that Paul does talk about these things - in the second half.

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INTERACTION

Imagine you are writing this up as a BBC journalist

- your subeditor says you can have a headline of 10 words or less
- and your total report (incl. headline) may not be longer than 30 words.
- how would you summarise Jesus' teaching on marriage & divorce
- what would you pick out as most significant for our society?
- what can you get away with summarising, and what do you need to explain?

Part2: Remarriage

Before we look at remarriage, we need to look a little more at divorce

- up to now we have only heard Jesus warn us against divorce
- because the Pharisees asked him about the unbiblical 'Any Cause' divorce
- Jesus rejected this completely, but what about the biblical grounds for divorce?
- Jesus allowed divorce for adultery, because he cited the Shammaite slogan
- that the Deut.24.1 phrase "a cause of indecency" means "nothing except indecency"
- he was asked about this, because Dt.24.1 was the basis of Any Cause' divorces
- but what about the verse he wasn't asked about: What about Ex.21.10f?

Ex.21.10f allowed divorce for neglect of food, clothing and love

- this seems like an obscure verse to us, but it was central to Jewish thinking
- and it is central to NT teaching about marriage - especially marriage vows
- these three grounds for divorce became the basis of Jewish marriage vows

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- here are the vows from a marriage certificate of the time:

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I will [feed you] and [clothe] you and I will bring you (into my house) by means of your ketubah, and I owe you 400 denarii ...together with the due amount of your food and your clothes and your bed. [Papyrus Yadin 10, AD 126]

- this is based almost exactly on Ex.21.10f, but it doesn't sound very grand

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- in time, the wording became a little more formal and ceremonial, eg:
- **“I undertake to esteem, honour, nourish, provide for, and clothe”**.
- (10th C Geniza marriage certificate, Friedman #8, cf. #13,16,18,19)

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- we can already find that kind of development in the NT, in Eph.5
- Christ is portrayed as the perfect bridegroom who promises to **“love...nourish and cherish”** (Eph.5.28f) - ie love, feed and clothe
- (“nourish” is a word used for feeding a loved one, and “cherish” is literally “keep warm” ie to clothe warmly)

The saddest place we find these vows listed is in Ezekiel 16, talking about Israel

- this lists the ways in which Israel broke all her vows when married to God (v16ff)
- he says she committed adultery with the gods on the high places
- she took the cloth God had given her and used it to clothe the idols
- she took the fine food God had given her and served it as offerings to the idols
- she repeatedly broke all three vows, to feed, clothe and love, with stubborn unrepentance

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Actually, Jesus referred to this when the Pharisees said Moses commanded divorce

- they thought you HAD to divorce someone who committed adultery
- Jesus said that Moses ALLOWED it, but only in cases of “hard-heartedness”
- “hard-heartedness” (Gk cardioskleroma) is a Bible word not used in normal Greek
- it was only used in the Septuagint, so he must be referring to a verse in the OT
- the Pharisees would have recognised it, because they knew their Bible very well
- the only verse using this word in the context of marriage or divorce is Jer.4.4
- Israel is described as breaking her marriage vows to God with hard-heartedness
- and Jeremiah talks about God’s divorce from Israel because of this stubborn sin
- Jer.3.8: **“for all the adulteries of that faithless one Israel, I sent her away with a divorce certificate”**

Here is a shocking fact - God is a divorcee. He divorced Israel, his bride

- she repeatedly and hard-heartedly (ie stubbornly) broke her marriage vows
- the prophets record how God forgave her many times, and tried to get her to repent
- and they record how she carried on sinning till there was nothing left but divorce
- this has huge implications. This implies that divorce itself is not the sin.
- God says in Malachi 4 “I hate sin” - mirroring the experience of all divorcees.
- When Jesus said no-one should break a marriage asunder, what did he mean?
- did he mean no-one should break their marriage vows which cause a divorce?
- or did he mean that no-one should enact the legal process of a divorce?
- was Jesus condemning the unfaithful or abusive partner who causes the divorce?

- or was he condemning the wronged partner who says: I can't take any more!
- the partner who concludes, like God did, that their partner will never stop sinning
- so the marriage, which is a sham, should be publicly exposed as such and ended

I conclude that "No-one should break it asunder" refers to breaking marriage vows.

- if your partner repeatedly and unrepentantly breaks their marriage vows the Law of Moses permits you to divorce that partner
- this law is not abrogated by Jesus. He affirmed it saying Moses permitted it.
- he doesn't say: but I say differently.
- he reaffirmed the plain meaning of Moses law in Deut.24.1, that it referred to nothing except indecency.

What about remarriage? Read the small print. Read a divorce certificate

- a Jewish divorce certificate says: "You are now free to marry anyone you wish"
- there's lots more in most divorce certificates, but these are the only necessary words

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- let me show you the divorce certificate of Joseph and Mary, found at Masada
- I don't think it is THE Joseph and Mary - it is from AD 72. They would be too old
- anyway, both Joseph and Mary are very common names

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- this says: "you are free on your part to go and become the wife of any Jewish man that you wish. And this is to be for you from me a writ of divorce and a get of release."

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- notice that it adds the word "Jewish" to the legal phrase "you are free to marry..."
- do you recognise this phrase? You should - it is quoted in the NT, in 1Cor.7.39

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"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whoever she wishes, only in the Lord."

- Paul has made the same kind of addition found in this typical divorce certificate
- but instead of saying she should only marry a Jew, he says "only in the Lord".

We read this in the opposite way to how a 1st C Jew would read this

- listen to this, and try and think of it like a 1st C would
- remember, that a Jewish widow who has no son has to marry her brother in law
- this is the law of the Levirate marriage which many Jews tried to find ways round
- when a 1st C Jew read this, he saw that Paul was negating this law
- 1 Cor.7:39 **A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.**
- she doesn't have to marry her brother-in-law, but whoever she wishes, just like a divorcee.

How does Paul manage to argue this? He doesn't invent his ethics from nowhere

- and he doesn't claim to be a prophet, speaking God's thoughts for him
- he quotes the OT, or gives reasoned arguments, or quotes Jesus traditions,
- what does he do here? He quotes the rights of a divorcee to marry who she wishes
- he argues, in effect, that if a divorcee has these rights, then surely a widow does.
- so she can have a son by her brother-in-law, but only if she wishes to.
- this is wonderful news for a widow - but look what it implies
- Paul is arguing for the right of the widow from the right of a divorcee
- he is accepting that a divorcee has this right, and transferring it to a widow.
- ie Paul assumes that every divorcee has the right to marry whoever they wish

How can this be? Surely Paul says that you can only remarry if your spouse dies?

- does he actually say that? What he says is that she IS free to remarry if he dies
- he doesn't say someone is ONLY free to remarry when a spouse dies.
- there is a similar passage in Rom.7 which says something very similar
- "if she lives with another man while her husband lives, she is an adulteress"
- and "if her husband dies, she is released" (Rom.7.3, 2)
- the context is all-important here, but I don't have time to go into it
- I'll just point out what it doesn't say. It doesn't say: "while her ex-husband lives..."
- it doesn't say anything about a divorced woman, but a married woman

Ok, Ok, you are saying, but what about the "one flesh" relationship

- when you marry you become "one flesh" and only death can break that bond
- who says? I hear many preachers say that, but not the NT
- the NT warns about not becoming "one flesh" with a prostitute (1Cor.6.16)
- is this an everlasting relationship? If so, this rules out any future marriage.
- but Paul never forbids marriage to those who have visited a prostitute
- if so, he would probably have to warn every Roman convert not to marry
- the "one flesh" phrase indicated the very strong link created by sexual intimacy
- it does not indicate that an eternal link has been made between those people

Let me admit that Paul is almost silent about whether or not one can remarry

- we are having to work hard to infer his teaching from hints here and there
- why? Presumably he thought it wasn't needed very often or they knew already
- divorce was very common, so presumably they already knew what was allowed
- what they knew was that Jews commanded remarriage in many circumstances
- especially if you didn't have children from your previous marriage
- and Roman law commanded that citizens remarry after bereavement or divorce
- or you faced prosecution by any responsible citizen who gained half your property
- if Paul had taught divorcees not to remarry, they would probably have obeyed him
- but he'd need to teach it very carefully, because it would result in more persecution
- so why is Paul so vague?
- presumably because they already knew what to do

- they followed the wording of Jewish divorce certificates, like Paul quoted:
 - it told a divorcee “you are free to marry any one you wish”
- Unless - and this was a very big important exception in Paul and Jesus
- unless you were divorced with an ‘Any Cause’ divorce - ie a no-fault divorce
 - in Corinth this was the same as the Roman divorce-by-separation
 - a Roman could simply walk out of a marriage, and that ended it. Divorce complete.
 - you either walk out, or throw out your spouse, depending on who owns the house
 - some believers in Corinth were divorcing their non-believing spouses in this way
 - Paul said: No, Jesus said you must not do this:

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1Cor.7.10f: To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

- a believer who did this must attempt to reverse the divorce by being reconciled
- they must not remarry because this would make reconciliation impossible
- how long must they attempt this reconciliation? Paul doesn’t say.
- but presumably they may not remarry for as long as reconciliation is at all possible.

A no-fault divorce is not a valid divorce because there are no biblical grounds

- Jesus condemned the ‘Any Cause’ divorce and Paul condemned the Roman divorce-by-separation.
- you can only remarry after a valid divorce based on biblical grounds
- ie on the grounds of broken marriage vows, to be faithful, and not neglect food, clothing or love.
- by the way, it hardly needs saying that abuse is an extreme case of neglect.

But what if you have been divorced against your will with a no-fault divorce?

- we have seen Paul told a believer who did this to reverse it, or attempt to do so
- and no doubt Paul would like to tell unbelievers who do this to reverse it too
- but of course they won’t listen to Paul, because they don’t recognise his authority
- (many believers today don’t listen to Paul either, so they are in the same category)
- what does Paul say to the person who has been abandoned and divorced in this way?
- he says: “You are no longer bound, because God has called you to peace” (v.15)

This is the last inscrutable phrase we will look at today. And it is really quite simple

- simple if you read it like a 1st C believer, but inscrutable if you don’t
- first, what are you free to do? Free to not live with them? or free to divorce them?
- in Roman law, if they have walked out, you are already separated and divorced
- there’s no need for any paperwork or court appearance. It is final, finished, complete.
- So it isn’t freedom to live separately or to divorce. All that has already happened whether you want it or not. You have no freedom in those matters at all.

- so what are you free to do? A 1st C reader remembers what divorce certificates say
- “You are free to marry whoever you wish”

Paul is saying that a no-fault divorce, in this situation, is like a true valid divorce

- even though no biblical grounds have been cited, they have the same freedom
- why? Presumably because the person has been abandoned by their partner
- they are suffering neglect of food, clothing and love by being abandoned
- so although no grounds were cited, they still exist. So the divorcee is free
- free to remarry.

SLIDE 96

A quick summary:

Jesus and Paul affirmed the OT law of marriage and divorce based on 4 vows:

The vows are: Faithfulness, and support with food, clothing and love.

Marriage should be life-long, and repented broken vows should be forgiven

But divorce is allowed if they stubbornly and unrepentantly carry on breaking vows

And remarriage is allowed after a divorce based on these biblical grounds.

That’s what the NT says when read by a 1st C reader.

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