

Divorce in the epistles

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[0 : 00] Well, I do thank you for your patience in working through this material with me. I think it's something we've been doing together. There's a lot to take on and I'm conscious I'm still thinking some of these things through my own mind.

I couldn't sleep too well last night, so in the middle of the night I put on a podcast of my last sermon on this. And I was off to sleep within minutes.

So I'm not going to go over absolutely everything that was said before, but we looked at divorce in the law of Moses and we saw that.

Before the fall is the original pattern. One woman, therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

And it seems to me that there's lots of implications of that, but they're not spelled out fully until we come to the Lord Jesus. And certainly in the law, the legislation of the Old Testament, as we've seen, it falls short of fully expressing what that original pattern was.

[1 : 27] We looked at the Old Covenant, in other words, the law of Moses, and we saw that the legislation there is adapted to a mixed group of people that in New Testament terms, he would say are born again and not born again.

And Jesus refers back and says it was for people with hard hearts. Legislation designed for conditions of unregenerate sinners, which is really like our type of society.

So if we were looking, if the purpose of our studies was to say what would be, let's suppose we were all members of parliament, or all lawyers, and we were saying what would be a good sort of legislation for the sort of society that we have, what would be fair and helpful and tend to the general good of society, I think we'd be looking at the Old Covenant and saying, well, how did God tackle that particular issue when he was making legislation for an unregenerate group of people, or largely unregenerate group of people?

So please be clear that there's a distinction between what Jesus would say, if you're a Christian, this is how you should behave, that's one thing, and if you are trying to make rules that would work helpfully in society, that would be a different thing.

And the rules for society would be more like what God said in the law there, that's what I think about that. In the Old Testament, divorce is considered abnormal, something has always gone wrong when there's divorce, and in that sense it's a bit like being a widow, deaf, that's something that's gone wrong.

[3 : 24] In the Old Testament, divorce is sometimes justifiable, and at other times it's blameworthy. Culpable means that you could say to somebody, you know, you are wrong to do that, that was wrong.

And at other times, divorce is culpable and sinful, but it is true that under the Old Testament, it was possible to be divorced and to remarry, and it was not counted in itself as sin.

I mean, you might have lost your temper in the way, and that was a sin, and all sorts of things like that, but the provision was made that people could divorce and remarry under the law of Moses.

So that was that. And we looked at divorce in the teaching of Jesus. And I was trying to point out, and I think I will continue to try to point out, that in the teaching of Jesus, Jesus is saying, I'm speaking about Christians.

I'm speaking about a group of people who, in the nature of it, don't have hard hearts, because they've all got new hearts. That's what happens in the New Covenant. I take away the stony heart and give you a warm, responsive heart.

[4 : 45] And therefore, I'm expecting higher things from you. We've moved from the law of Moses' situation to the kingdom situation.

So in the law, we were talking about divorce being permitted, not commanded. It was because of hardness of heart to lessen the effects of human sinfulness, perhaps giving protection and liberty to a woman and things like that.

But Jesus returns to and clarifies the original pattern before the fall. And of course, that's what redemption does. Redemption takes the things that have been spoiled and says, now through the gospel, these things are being recreated and regenerated.

So the image of God that was there in Adam and then was spoiled is being recreated in the Christian. And relationships that were there in the beginning and then got spoiled are being recreated amongst Christians.

And this is certainly the case in terms of marriage. There is a main thrust to Jesus' teaching. And it's indisputably the main thrust that marriage is meant to be for life.

[6 : 08] In this divorce is not allowable. And should Christians divorce and remarry, that brings them into the sin of adultery.

And that's the main thrust. So I think I've got this in my notes somewhere else. But for young people who are setting out on marriage, they are not to think, oh, well, this is a sort of experiment.

And if it doesn't go well, I can always jack it in. And, you know, the Lord will understand. And I can find somebody else. For a Christian, that is not an acceptable attitude.

A Christian person goes into marriage saying, before God, I intend with every ounce of my being to make this work.

And even if it's really difficult, because actually people are difficult. Particularly when you're with them 24-7. Not that I know anything about that, of course.

[7 : 09] But there are difficulties in being close to other people. And for the Christian, this is a commitment to working that through. And saying, I will work it through.

If our marriage needs working out, we will work at it. So that's the main thrust of Jesus' teaching.

And he makes one exception, which he repeats pretty much the same way twice.

So his main thrust is, you don't divorce. If you were to divorce and remarry, that would be adultery.

And he says, except for the case of pornea.

Which, roughly speaking, you would say is unfaithfulness. So I put it there with all the Greek. I just cut and pasted it from my computer.

But I say to you that whoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, or pornea, causes her to commit adultery.

[8 : 16] And whoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery. So I think he has got a main thought there. And he is saying, with one exception, that exception of pornea, unfaithfulness.

And we have the same thing in Matthew 19. So that was Matthew 5. Matthew 19. Shall we look at this?

Because it's not very clear from the screen, is it? So Matthew 19, verse 6. It would be helpful to have it in front of us. So this is in response to a question from the Pharisees.

And Jesus says, haven't you read at the beginning, the creator made them male and female. And for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. And that's where he goes. And I've got the translation of that.

[9 : 35] What God has joined together, what God has paired, let man not put asunder. And the word for putting asunder is coridzo, to separate. And we shall see several examples of coridzo being used.

It's not exactly in the same tense and mood, but it is the same word. I'm sorry, I've got myself in a bit of a pickle there.

I don't think Jesus is saying it is impossible to unjoin.

I think he's saying don't do it. What God has joined together, don't take apart. I nearly thought of an example of this.

Perhaps you could think of an example. If there was, suppose you had some kids around in the house and you had spent a long time laying the table neatly and they came and took all the knives and forks and started playing drums with them, you would say, I've put that all straight.

[10 : 46] I've set that all up. Don't take it all to pieces. I think that what's being said here is of that form. Now, why did I put that?

I think I was pointing out that there are two words used there. There's this coridzo word, to put asunder, and he goes on to say, whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery, and that is the word, NIV translates it, divorce.

So I think I was trying to remind us that we don't have a specific word, divorce, in the New Testament like we do in English.

It's a technical and legal word. We have words, there are two words for sending away and one word for bringing. So the coridzo word says to bring, and the apolio word at the bottom there is to send away.

And the apolio word is here. It's word number 630, her who is put away, and where else is it? Whoever shall put away his wife.

[12:02] That's the apolio word. So I just repeat that. The one flesh that Jesus is talking about, it certainly relates to sexual union, but it must mean more than that.

It's not meant to be broken, apart from by death. There is a command not to break it. It's not saying that you can't do it. It's just saying you shouldn't do it.

That's my reading of that that we looked at in the past. So now we're going to, that was really revision. So now we're going to look at 1 Corinthians 8.

And there were two questions that came up last time. And you asked, Catherine asked, if on that interpretation of Matthew, if there was adultery, if there was unfaithfulness, and two believers parted, this is the hypothetical situation, would it be within what Jesus said for them to remarry?

I think you asked that question. And I think it was asked in terms of the innocent party. And as far as I can get to grips with what's being said there, if that's the correct interpretation, which I think it is, I think both of them could remarry.

[13:25] I don't think it actually says anything about, I think what it says is that the relationship has been broken. And my understanding of that is that they are then free to remarry both of them.

So I didn't answer the question at the time because I hadn't thought about it, but insofar as I thought about it, that would be the answer. And Lorna, who was sitting over there, commented about an abusive relationship.

And I didn't answer that because I didn't have the right head on to answer that. And I think what I would say is that the situation between people who are genuinely Christians is one thing.

And if there was violence and abuse going on, it would bring in a whole lot of other issues like church discipline and whether you could really call that person a believer.

So that would be one answer to the question. And the other answer to the question was, all that we've been looking at is to do, well, what we're looking at in the teaching of Jesus is in the kingdom. It's for believers.

[14:39] So the question of what you would do in wider society if people enter relationships which are abusive is really another question. It would be like going back to the old covenant and saying, given the prevalence, given the sort of attitudes that we have, how could you protect people?

What sort of provisions should you make? And things like that. So that was an answer to Lorna's question, which I couldn't give last time. Right, I think you need to use the microphone.

But don't floor me too much because I'll be... Well, maybe you can answer it next time. No, I can always say I don't know. It's about the Matthew thing. Why does... You said it used the word for porneia, meaning sort of general sexual immorality.

Yeah. Why do you think he didn't specifically use the word adultery? Because surely sexual immorality within marriage is adultery. Well, I can say I don't know the answer to that question. I think it's a different range of meanings.

So it could mean... Porneia could mean other illicit forms of sex, like having sex with animals or having sex with people who were...

[15:51] like incest. So it isn't just adultery. It's a wider range of meaning. And I haven't read the chapter, which might have educated me further on that.

So I'm going to say I don't know. Yeah, could we have the mic over there? Well, it doesn't necessarily record for people who'd like to be put to sleep.

If you just said that you've come to the conclusion that people could then remarry... Yeah. How could anyone marry the person that was the adulterer or the adulteress?

Because then they would be committing adultery, wouldn't they, if they married somebody that had been... that they'd divorced and then remarried, they'd be committing adultery?

So they couldn't really remarry. So you've got two believers. Yeah. And let's say the bloke is in such a low spiritual condition and in such a pickle that he goes off and sleeps with another woman.

[16:59] And then, subsequently, the wife divorces him. Says, I'm not... You've broken that covenant and I'm going to take that as divorce.

And the man is now no longer married to that woman. So you're saying, what would be the situation about him marrying this other woman?

Or indeed, of him marrying a third woman who might be a believer who comes on the scene later?

Okay. Well, it's the right pickle, isn't it? I mean, there's nothing particularly good about that situation in any shape or form.

I think the principle would be, let's take the way I spelt it out. So, there's believers, they've got real problems in their marriage and they can't sort them out.

And, let's say, the bloke gets in a spiritual dive, goes off and does all sorts of things he shouldn't do, including having sex with somebody who's not his wife. She divorces him.

[18:08] He then begins to come back to the Lord. He realises that he's done wrong, finds a Christian woman, another Christian woman, and they get married.

And that's a completely new... That's what I would say. And the reason I spelled it out is because one of my friends did exactly that. Much as it's an appalling, terrible, sad situation, in my own heart, I wouldn't say he shouldn't have remarried.

That's what I'm saying. Right. I'm conscious that it's getting a little bit dim in here. Would anybody like any lights on? Or are you... Yeah. Yeah. What did I say?

And it's probably seven. Yeah. Seven is right what I meant. Yeah. One Corinthians seven. Okay.

Let's... So, this is the new study.

So, let me do something about the context. It's very messy. And one of the things about these situations is that as a church begins to get more involved and generally the gospel begins to bite in a society that needs the gospel.

[19:31] These situations are going to crop up more and more. And it was a messy pagan society. One Corinthians six, nine, he says, don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders or thieves or greedy or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And that's what some of you were. So, you've got a church made up of people who some of them used to be sexually immoral. They used to be idolaters. They used to be adulterers.

They used to be male prostitutes. They used to be homosexual offenders. Thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers. So, that was one Corinthians six, verse nine and that just says what a messed up situation they were.

But the gospel is equal to that. Now, I didn't read the, well, I have read the chapter on Roman marriage and divorce but I'm afraid I didn't really grasp it.

[20:38] All I can say is that the context that they were working in, if we think our marriage laws are off beam, that's nothing compared with what Roman marriage laws are like.

I was totally confused by them. It seemed to me as if the marriage laws were very, very flimsy and my understanding there was, the state wasn't that interested or didn't have that much grasp of marriage.

You know, you couldn't go to a registry office because they didn't do things like that. So, marriage laws are very flimsy and divorces were very easy.

And in Roman society, men could get rid of their wives and wives sometimes did the same thing to their men and it was to do with inheritance laws anyway.

So, Paul has a real task in dealing with people who've come from that situation. I think also in terms of context, he has the issue that people had an anti-material philosophy.

[21:51] In other words, matter, stuff like this, so it's he tapping various pieces of inanimate material. Material, there was a philosophy which said, well, what you do with that doesn't matter.

It's irrelevant. So, people like that would have said, well, sex is what you do with matter, with your body. It doesn't matter, really, where all the different parts of your body happen to be.

It's completely irrelevant spiritually. And then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 16, don't you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her body?

But he said the two will become one flesh. And he's saying, it does matter, your body does matter. And so some of the people thought, well, it doesn't because we're spiritual. spiritual. And there's another thing that I think was going on, of a sort of the opposite era, that people were saying, well, if you're a spiritual person, then you don't use your, sexual activity, for example, is unspiritual.

[22 : 59] So it's like becoming a monk, or the same era prevails in Roman Catholicism to do with the priests, doesn't it? That they're not allowed to marry because it's presumably more spiritual not to do that.

And this is what Paul is touching on in chapter 7, verse 1. For the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. Well, yes and no is what he's going to say. There's a clearer example of it in 1 Timothy 4, 3, where he quotes somebody who says, 1 Timothy 4, verse 3, these false teachers forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth, for everything God created is good.

So, this is part of the context, I think, that some of the people are saying, we're married, but to be spiritual, we're going to not have sex together, and because it pollutes us to do so.

And I think also, there is something going on, again, a sort of super spiritual philosophy, which says, now I'm a Christian, everything changes, normal life is gone.

[24 : 29] So, if you had it nowadays, you'd find somebody who's at university becomes a Christian, and they'd say, I'm going to leave university and leave my studies because everything's changed.

And here, I think there are people who are saying, you know, we're married, but now we've become Christians, we're going to separate, because that's a spiritual thing to do. And there's quite a bit about remaining and not suddenly jumping out of the situation that you're in.

So, chapter 7, verse 8, says, to the unmarried and the widows, I say, it is good for them to stay unmarried, to remain unmarried. Verse 11, this person must remain unmarried.

Verse 11, verse 20, verse 20, each one should remain in the situation he was in when God called him.

And verse 24, brothers, each man as responsible to God should remain in the situation God called him to. So, that seems to be going on as well. Also, in terms of context, there are many Corinthian issues where Paul is trying to say something quite subtle, to say, yes, but, or to say, there are many general principles, but I'm not going to give you a dogmatic rule for everybody.

[25 : 51] And he says that, for example, in 7, verse 7, he says, I wish all men were as I am, so I'd recommend the single state, but, each man has his own gift from God.

One person, the right thing is this, another person, the right thing is that. So, he's trying to say these quite subtle things, and the other thing I wanted to mention about the text was it quite often, you might have noticed this, it says, men, da, da, da, da, da, woman, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, man, da, da, da, da, woman, and it just repeats he is here addressing believers, and he says, to the unmarried and the widows I say it is good for them to stay unmarried as I am, but if they cannot control themselves they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

So, notice this is not a word from the Lord himself, Jesus didn't teach on this particular subject as such, but this is to the, I've written it out again, therefore to the unmarried and widows it is good if they abide or remain as I am.

So, here's a situation where change is not necessarily called for, but if they cannot contain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn. So, this is verses 8 and 9. The control word, which authorised version says contain, is to have the inner power to manage in the unmarried state.

Some people, some people that's not particularly a problem, some people it's what God has called them to, for other people God hasn't called them to that. This word unmarried is interesting, it's agamos, gamos, gamos is married and a puts at the front of it, negates it, so not married.

[28 : 02] And I wonder what sort of people he's referring to, this is me wondering, unmarried, does it mean people who have never been married, or does he mean people who have suffered under the Roman divorce situation and are demarried.

They've had their married status removed from them by process of divorce. And I think there's a considerable possibility that he's referring to people who are demarried, he puts alongside widows doesn't he, and these are people who, as he says, might well be very uncomfortable being, continuing to be single, hence the idea of burning with frustration.

But anyway, I don't think we can say conclusively anything on that, but we notice the word agamos, unmarried or demarried. Let's look at verse 10.

Now, to the married I give this command. So now he's speaking to believers who are married to each other, and I presume who are married to them, so I don't think this is necessarily always the case, but who were married as believers.

He's talking about kingdom situation. He's quoting what the Lord Jesus says, and that was a kingdom situation.

[29 : 39] People are Christians. So he says, verse 10, to the married I give this command, not I but the Lord. It's an interesting case. He's not saying you didn't have to believe the bit I said before.

He's saying I said that with my authority as an apostle, but what I'm about to say, there are actually quotable words from Jesus, and that's what I'm going on here.

So it is the Lord who says this. It's a word from the Lord. And what the word is, is this, a wife must not depart from her husband.

A wife must not depart from her husband. That's word 5563, which is the word korydzo, to separate asunder. Let the wife, so let's read it again.

A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and a husband must not divorce his wife.

[30 : 53] So a couple of interesting features. It's, this time it's woman, da-da-da-da-da, man, da-da-da-da-da. The woman bit uses the korydzo word, and the man bit uses ascending away word.

That little word there, afiemi. And he says that if she depart, let her remain unmarried, agamos, which presumably in this case means demarried.

and what, so what do we say about this situation here? So it's a very interesting text, isn't it?

So it's two believers, we have a word from the Lord on this. The straightforward teaching is the same, obviously the same as Jesus, that there is not to be a divorce.

You stick together. And Jesus made an exception in the case of pornea, didn't he? Now what I've said is in the case of pornea, it is possible to divorce and remarry.

[32 : 18] And this text says, makes a situation where there is to be something followed by not marrying.

So the question is how you harmonise what Paul is saying and what Jesus said. And there are two schools of thought on this and I'll show you both of them.

And if only I hadn't read about this other school of thought during the week, I would be really confident because I had one idea in mind. Well this number A, letter A, is the view that would be held by Andrew Cornes who is the vicar of Crobra, who is the chairman of the Sussex Gospel Partnership and has written a well-known book on this.

And he would take the view that divorce is possible but no remarriage. And that's not the view that I've taken because I've taken the view that if there's divorce, remarriage is possible.

but he takes a different view. The Lord said there's no divorce except for pornea and Andrew Cornes would say what Jesus meant was he wasn't giving an exception to the whole thing about divorce and remarriage, he was only giving an exception for divorce.

[33 : 45] So on the Andrew Cornes view what Jesus had said was you can divorce but you can't remarry because you're still married to the person in God's eyes you're still married.

So what does that mean that Paul was saying? Well Paul must have then according to Andrew Cornes have been referring to the situation if there had been pornea and Paul is saying you shouldn't divorce but if there's pornea that's what we're talking about under this view then there can be divorce but you should not remarry.

The only alternative being to be reconciled to your partner. So it's not clear cut that Andrew Cornes is right and here's a couple of reasons.

Number one I think Jesus taught that in that extreme case of pornea there could be divorce and there could be remarriage because he made an exception to his general teaching.

It's one thing. And if Andrew Cornes was right that the person couldn't remarry because they're still married in the eyes of God why does Paul say they should remain verse 11 unmarried agamos because surely he should if Paul was going to say she should remain married because in the eyes of God she's still married.

[35 : 36] That's a question. And my third query is that surely this introduces a new state to Jesus' teaching so we don't just have married and divorced.

We now have married divorced and able to remarry and divorced and not able to be remarried which is different to any sort of divorced we've ever had so far.

So that's the Andrew Cornes view. I'm sorry to be confusing about this but it just is a vexed question. Here's the Stephen Clark view which was the one that I was working from before which says if you're divorced the old relationship sadly regrettably maybe even all sorts of heartaches is gone and you are now free to remarry.

So working through the same text again. the Lord had said no divorce except for pornea where remarriage is allowable. So Paul is now talking about not the pornea situation but a different situation where a couple can't get on.

They can't manage to live together. They know each other so much they can't seem to work it out. And he says in that state so reading it is verse 11 so if the wife must separate from her husband she must what we would call separation I suppose and she can divorce and separate asunder but remain unmarried and not remarry or else reconciliation to her husband.

[37 : 40] So it's a difficult one. I think what he's saying is that if believers can't live together and can't be reconciled let them live as being demarried but be celibate single people.

It's a vexed question. I have to say that it doesn't very often crop up so let's not lose all our sleep over this because it's a rare occurrence.

So I'm going to move on from that and I'm going to go to verses 10 to 14. And this is a different situation again. So to the rest verse do I mean verse 10?

Yeah no verse 12 sorry verse 12 to the rest I say I say this I not the Lord so he's now addressing a situation that Jesus didn't explicitly touch on and it's not surprising because Jesus was speaking over there in Israel in the Jewish society and Paul's over here in Corinth with all sorts of things that cropping up that never would have occurred in the time of Jesus so he's speaking to the rest and this situation or these situations are for a mixed marriage so maybe I'm just thinking out loud now so maybe a pagan couple one gets converted or maybe it was a Christian couple and one falls away but you end up with a believer married to an unbeliever and this is what he says if a brother has a wife who is unbelieving and she's pleased to dwell with him let him not send her away that's the brother same thing now with a woman and if the woman has a husband that believes not and if he be pleased to live with her let her not send him away

I think it's send him away in both cases what's it say in the NIV divorce divorce in both cases and there's a little bit of reasoning! because these people might be thinking now I've become a Christian this is making me unclean being in the same bed and in the same house with this person who's not a believer and Paul says no please don't think that because you're not contaminating yourself by being married to this person and that's why he says the unbelieving!

[40 : 28] husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband else were your children unclean but now are they holy he's not saying that they've been saved he's not saying that they've been made born again by just being married to somebody what he's saying is they don't contaminate you in that sense they're holy and your children who are unbelievers we presume keeping your children doesn't contaminate you because they too in that same sense are holy so the unbelieving partner doesn't contaminate the believer I mean if you slept with a prostitute that would be a contaminating thing but being married to somebody who's an unbeliever isn't a contaminating thing in the same way but he says if the let's see what it says here but if the unbeliever departs let him do so so the word there is keridso so if the unbeliever says

I'm totally fed up with you going off to your prayer meetings and wanting to read your bible I'm not having a bible in the same house that I'm in and I'm not spending any more time with somebody who won't stay with me each evening wants to go to a prayer meeting that's it I'm off and what Paul is saying is if that's the case if the unbeliever won't amicably live with you and they keridso they separate asunder don't feel that it's your job to at all costs keep them if that's really what they want to do let them do it and he says a brother or a sister is not bound is not bound in such circumstances God has called us to peace the interpreters differ on this but I think what he's saying is there is a binding together in a marriage but if the unbeliever it isn't the believer that's the driving force of this but the unbeliever says no

I'm really not having you like this and they depart and they could perhaps depart without actually moving an inch but in their the way that they relate to the believer there's no marriage there and the

unbeliever has departed and he's saying the brother or sister is not bound in such cases the believer is not necessarily to feel that they must stay and try and make it work at all costs when the other person's decided they're not going to make it work under any circumstances at all but God has called us to peace and I think what he's saying is that God hasn't called us to live in situations where we're constantly undermined constantly got at constantly attacked in our home life in that sense

I'm making that up as I go along it's always dangerous to do that because you can be misunderstood but I think that's what he says when we're calling us to peace and then this question about saving your husband or saving your wife is it a positive or a negative is he saying you may save them so stick with it or you may not save them you don't know you're going to save them so don't feel that you have to stick to it at all costs because it may not be God's will for their salvation through you sticking with them and you're making your life such a misery and they've departed you're not bound to stay I mean you may choose to do so but you're not bound to do so and that binding word is there in 727 no idea why it's there in 727 and it's there in 739 a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives that's a different context in that but he's saying the believer is not bound so all these texts are quite difficult and they're fraught with how things work out in individual people's lives so

I'll just try and do some conclusions number one two believers getting married are to reckon if they're believers were to teach them and they're to understand it is till death us do part and therefore there's a commitment to working through their difficulties together full stop a believer and an unbeliever are to reckon on staying together but may not be as simple as that certainly the believer is not to try and push the other person out if the unbeliever will not stay agreeably in the marriage the believer is not to attempt unduly to make the other stay and this sort of fits the situation that Lorna was talking about let's suppose a believer is married to a husband who is cruel abusive gets drunk violent personally I would say that person has left the marriage and is not willing to live agreeably with the believer and in that sense if the believer the marriage has already been left and if the believer is not the believer is there is a limit to what you would expect the believer to do to try and keep the marriage together let's put it that way

[46 : 54] I also flag up the importance of church discipline because this designation of believer and unbeliever now becomes very important doesn't it and in church discipline the church has the right to say to somebody you say you're a member of our church but we believe you're abusing your children and beating up your wife and you've been warned about this and you're still doing it by the authority of Jesus Christ we're going to excommunicate you we're going to cast you out of the church and we're not going to treat you as a believer and that changes the situation of how we regard this partner doesn't it so that's an important thing too again these things happen rarely but it is an important thing third point as it says here about reconciliation there's a great value in reconciliation that the situation that was there in verse 13 remaining unmarried or being reconciled to the husband

I just point out the great value in that as Christians we've been reconciled we've been forgiven for our completely unacceptable behaviour to God we've been forgiven for our obnoxious responses to God we've been reconciled and so it's not a million miles from a Christian to say well if that's what God's done for me maybe I can seek reconciliation with this other person and this is a sort of half formed thought where we are now what we were in the past doesn't necessarily bind us as to where we are now because you know what he was saying with these people you were adulterers you were male prostitute maybe you were married and divorced you were gamos and I've got so you're in a different situation now and this wisdom that Paul has to offer to those as we've seen full stop just a couple of issues really not questions exactly a couple of comments

I think one always has to read 1 Corinthians 7 in the sense which suggests in verse 26 because of the present crisis I think it was written in a crisis situation possibly because they'd had the mad Caligula as emperor then Claudius had taken over as emperor who was reasonably sane at least but had nevertheless thrown all the Jews out of Rome which must have caused separations in families and meant there was a risk that if an unbeliever stayed with a believer that he would lose all his property confiscated or something and then of course around this time we don't know it's before or after and the news had got there yet but of course Claudius was assassinated by his wife to put Nero on the throne who was going to be even worse so I do think there's when you're reading 1

Corinthians 7 in all sorts of ways what it says about marriage and they may be happy if they remain unmarried and so on you need to read that into what was a very unstable political situation and some of these things about that may be a part of the understanding of that that an unbeliever may have his property seized or something if he's contaminated with being with a Christian believer or something that was one thing the other thing when Andrew Corns talked about his view which he does of course at the training course he said people had said to him is divorce an unforgivable sin then and I thought at the time I said this to him I think that's the wrong question the question is is adultery an unforgivable sin and I guess kind of that's what you were hinting at because yes you were this and I mean Jesus we don't know exactly what advice

Jesus unfortunately we don't know exactly what advice Jesus gave to the woman at the well but he certainly didn't say oh you must go back to your first husband or anything like that presumably he said you should regularise the situation with the man you're with now that was presumably what he was implying and I think if one takes that very rigid line well the Andrew Corn's line if you like you're almost denying that grace the whole point of grace is it puts right things that cannot be put right so yes in a sense the marriage cannot be broken and should not be broken and yet grace is able to put things right that in a sense cannot possibly be put right and I think one needs to bear this idea of grace in mind when one talks about this and to say that perhaps you've got you do sometimes have to ask the question what is workable now what can be put right now you might say that ideally and I'm sure that's right that people should be reconciled if that's possible but if people have moved on and this was all 20 years ago and perhaps you have had a relationship with somebody else it doesn't really make sense to say you should be reconciled with your first husband or wife and I think there needs to be a certain amount of room for the application of grace and say let's put something right that's right now and in a sense put aside what's gone wrong in the past although you can't always completely do that of course thank you for that

[53 : 12] Steve I think there's a lot of good sense in that and I do feel that I don't think I managed to get the texts to say this it was not already supposed to get texts to say something you want them to say but I think there is a strong undercurrent in Corinthians that people come from all sorts of messy backgrounds and it didn't disqualify them from living a stable happy Christian life in the situation they were now in and just how you get there I suppose needs all sorts of wisdom but I wouldn't want anybody listening to this to think that the ethics of the New Testament means that they've blown it so badly that they can never be a proper Christian anymore and they can never lift their faces to the Lord anymore or anything like that because that must surely have got us into the wrong position so thank you very much for that

Ben my thoughts are a bit muddled on this I'm still working through the issues I agree there is forgiveness of sin complete forgiveness but there are also consequences of sin and the fact that one has been forgiven for a particular sin doesn't mean that one can go on and continue as though nothing had happened if I go and rob a bank this evening or tomorrow then I'll be put in prison and I have to live with that although God may forgive me for that and I think there's a danger that we make marriage such a casual thing I've sinned but God will forgive!

me so it don't matter so I'm free to do what I want this idea that somehow it's about my happiness my gratification that's more important and I think there are consequences for sin and I think the person who has committed adultery there is forgiveness but there also needs to be understanding that I've sinned in a very serious way and a person should be very circumspect and very cautious about going into marriage again because it's such an important thing I agree with all of that I think what I would disagree with is that if you were saying that the thrust of the teaching that we've looked at or the interpretation we've looked at was to make anybody think that marriage was an easy and light and trivial thing to enter into we had a church member who had a very sordid perhaps sordid is slightly too colourful a word but a very colourful background let's put it like that and she she was married to an unbeliever no she she as an unbeliever married an unbeliever she became converted and so this raised all sorts of issues

I've completely forgotten why I started saying this but I'll just finish the thought it raised all sorts of issues for her and just in terms of the psychology of it when I first met her I wasn't quite convinced that she was suitably penitent about all the things in her background but I quickly realised that she was absolutely flattened by all the things that had happened in the past and she just put a brave face on it and she very nobly re-engaged with her husband from whom she'd been estranged and even now is living happily with him he's a fully paid up Marxist she's a fully paid up Christian and

they have a way of living together which honours both of those and he tries to convert her and she tries to convert him and they're both used to that but yeah

I think what I was trying to say was that there is a way of living as a Christian knowing that you've made all sorts of mistakes in the past and not trivialising it and say it didn't matter but not being perpetually under the cosh the past is the past I made a mistake I was completely out of order I put I told the Lord that umpteen times he knows that I'm forgiven by him this is the situation that I'm in I'm going to press on as much as grace will help me to do the best I can in the situation that I'm in and look to the Lord to bless me in that that's the sort of thing she would have said I agree just for the record I wasn't suggesting you were trivialising marriage but people do and you see that I've known people who had very messy situations they've just gone back completely to somebody else they don't seem to care at all it's almost like well

[58 : 12] I've had this messy thing but God wants me to be happy God will forgive me I respect your view and I believe that as well I don't know where it is in the Bible but I know there is somewhere where it says don't use grace as a means of continually sinning or something like that sorry shall we sin that grace may abound yes I think yes and so you know a Christian true believer wouldn't see or shouldn't see a sin being forgiven by God just another excuse to go out and do the same sin knowing that God will because there's a point where God will act you know he lets you get on with it doesn't he if you continue to sin well

I mean there's a yes and a no isn't there many of us have besetting sins in the sense that it's something in our character that we keep on having to deal with you know let's say for example somebody loses their temper they might find they have to keep on coming back to that so in that sense I'm not saying that kind I'm saying deliberately going out and knowing that God will forgive once I ask for forgiveness he's going to forgive me it shows that we haven't really understood grace it's the sort of action that somebody would only do which implies they not only have they not understood grace but they haven't really understood being a Christian can I say if I understand it rightly the real issue here is not really whether or not God is going to forgive somebody because I think we all agree that's the case but whether or not somebody who's been divorced can be remarried as far as I can understand that's the real issue isn't it whether or not a divorced person can remarry not whether or not they'll be forgiven by the

Lord but whether or not they can remarry whether as an item of discipleship in good conscience they could remarry that's the question yeah I mean I think that is the issue but I think there's also the issue that you know if you find yourself as not one of these people who can live happily in an unmarried state which is precisely what Paul's talking about in 1 Corinthians 7 you're always tempted to immorality would it not be better in that circumstance to remarry even if that was not to the person you were originally married to I think that was the point I'm trying to make yeah and you see I'm suggesting that that may well be what's in Paul's mind in verse 8 to the unmarried and widows I say it's good for them to stay unmarried but if they can't control themselves they should marry because Agamos is a word which can cover people who've been divorced so the suggestion is not dogmatically proved but the suggestion is actually the thing that Paul is addressing in those verses and say so if we try and unwind this because

I'm trying to get my head around this as well it's more complicated than I thought it was but if we try and unwind this what we're saying is somewhere we've now brought into the equation that a divorced person can't remarry now where did we get that from because it's not in the old testament because a divorced person could remarry that's what divorced meant and it's not in the culture because in the culture that of the new testament being at the time of Jesus or subsequently divorced meant you could remarry the place where it comes from is a particular interpretation of those sayings of Jesus where he makes the exception and is it warranted to read that out of those texts because once you've got it into your head you start reading it into all the other texts But is it right to have that in our head because I think Jesus said you don't divorce you don't remarry because to main thought that's his thesis with an exception except in the case of adultery in which case divorce is sad but possible and remarriage is a possibility so that's sorry

I'm just sort of commenting on your question without answering it I'm saying that divorce means that you can remarry that's the meaning of divorced and so if I wind back to my friend whose story I referred to I think he would say I made terrible you know I've really hurt a lot of people and made a terrible mess but the Lord has made it possible for me to remarry and you know it's it's not the original ideal I don't know quite how you put that it's not how it ought to have been but at least I can

