

# CHURCH.

# LESSON 41

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| <b>1</b> | PRAYER |
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**Group leader.** Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

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| <b>2</b> | SHARING (20 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[QUIET TIMES]</i><br/>1 JOHN 1 - 3</span> |
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**Take turns** and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (1 John 1 to 3).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

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| <b>3</b> | MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[CHRISTIAN PARENTS]</i><br/>(5) PROVERBS 13:24</span> |
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**Review** two by two.

(5) Love through discipline. Proverbs 13:24. He who spares the rod (Hebrew: shebet), hates his son, but he who loves him, is careful to discipline (punish, reproof) (Hebrew: musar) him.

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| <b>4</b> | TEACHING (85 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[CHURCH RESTORING MINISTRY]</i><br/>DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE</span> |
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**Introduce.** This teaching is about divorce and remarriage. We will discover what the Bible teaches about divorce. We will study the words "adultery" and "sexual immorality" and consider the possibility of remarriage for a person who is divorced.

God says, "I hate divorce (sending away) and I hate a man's covering himself with violence" (Malachi 2:16). God regards divorce as an act of violence against the marriage partner and he hates it. Jesus Christ taught, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness (sexual or spiritual immorality) (Greek: porneia), and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11-12).

Therefore, due to the sinfulness and brokenness of people, the God of the Bible allows divorce only in three cases:

- physical reasons: sexual immorality and violence (Matthew 19:8-9).
- spiritual reasons: spiritual idolatry (adultery or false religion) (Matthew 19:8-9).
- social reasons: spiritual incompatibility (no harmony due to the fact that one partner is a non-Christian) (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). The disharmony is due to one person not being a Christian.

## A. THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCERNING DIVORCE

The Old Testament condemned divorce, but nevertheless permitted divorce under certain circumstances.

### 1. The civil law of the nation-state of Israel.

**Read** Deuteronomy 22:13-19,28-29; 24:1-4; Matthew 19:8.

**Discover and discuss.** What were some of the common laws of the nation-state of Israel with respect to sexual immorality and divorce?

**Notes.** These laws in Deuteronomy were part of the common or customary law in Israel and also of the common law of the nations surrounding Israel. But the way these laws were incorporated into the civil law of the nation-state of Israel and recorded in the Old Testament shows that they were purified from their heathen elements and that they more precisely or more correctly described *the laws that should govern the social relationships in Israel as the people of God.*

Although during the Old Testament period, *men* in the whole world had a greater freedom to act than *women*, and generally divorced their wives "for any and every reason" (Matthew 19:3), these common civil laws of Israel curbed the freedom of the Israelites.

(1) Forbidden to divorce.

In Deuteronomy 22 a husband who falsely accused his wife that she was not a virgin when they married had to pay a high fine and was forbidden to divorce her.

And a man, who raped an unmarried girl, also had to pay a high fine, was forced to marry her and was forbidden to divorce her.

(2) Forbidden to remarry.

Likewise, in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, a man who divorced his wife was forbidden to remarry her if she had been married a second time to another man. The reason for this prohibition to remarry her could not be her *ceremonial defilement*, because that lasted only till the evening (Leviticus 15:18). She was not continually unclean, because another man was certainly allowed to marry her. The reason for this prohibition to remarry was *ethical defilement*: the first husband's act would be detestable in the eyes of God and bring sin upon the land. God regarded such an act as violating the holiness of the biblical marriage relationship.

According to Jesus, Moses did not agree with divorce, but permitted divorce in order to regulate an evil practice that already existed in Israel. Deuteronomy 24:1-4, taken as a unit, certainly discouraged divorce.

## 2. The traditional interpretations of this civil law by the Jews in the time of Jesus.

**Read** Deuteronomy 24:1.

The common law of Israel stipulated that a man could divorce his wife when “he finds something indecent about her”.

**Question.** What was the meaning of “something indecent” (Hebrew: *erwath dabar*) in the Old Testament?

**Teach.** Deuteronomy 24:1,4 says, “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds *something indecent* about her, and he *writes her a certificate of divorce*, gives it to her and sends her from his house ..., then he is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.”

The scribes and Pharisees in Israel were always debating the possible reasons for divorce. They based their opinions on the opinions of men (rabbi's) who lived long before them. The two major schools among the Jews had widely different opinions about the meaning of the words “something indecent”.

(1) The school of Hillel (50 B.C. – 10 A.D.).

According to the school of Hillel, the meaning of “something indecent” was *anything repulsive for the husband or anything that displeases the husband* (Matthew 19:3). This school allowed divorce for almost any reason. If the wife had a small physical deformity or she was ugly and he regarded another woman as more beautiful, he could divorce her. This school allowed divorce for the flimsiest reasons. For example, the husband could reject his wife if she accidentally served him food that had been slightly burned. Or he could divorce her if she talked so loud at home that the neighbours could hear her, etc.

(2) The school of Shammai (50 B.C. – 30 A.D.).

According to the school of Shammai, the meaning of “something indecent” was limited to *moral perversion, sensuality, unchastity and adultery*. *Sensuality* is giving yourself over to the senses only and not to the intellect or spirit and being self-indulgent in regard to sexual enjoyment. *Unchastity* is losing your virginity before marriage. *Adultery* is sexual intercourse with another person than your marriage-partner. Jesus basically agreed with the school of Shammai.

## 3. The correct explanation of this civil law.

**Discover and discuss.** Which reason does the Old Testament allow for divorce in the common civil law recorded by Moses?

(1) Divorce was not permitted for any flimsy reason and also not for adultery.

**Read** Deuteronomy 22:20-27. The words “something indecent” could first of all *not refer to adultery*, because the adulterer had to be killed (Leviticus 20:10) and not simply divorced. Some interpreters think that the phrase refers to some sickness, like skin rashes or a physical handicap. But the phrase most probably refers something more serious than the flimsy reasons of the school of Hillel and something less grave than adultery.

(2) Divorce was permitted for “a report of nakedness”.

**Read** Deuteronomy 24:1. Because the literal meaning of the words “something indecent” is “a report of nakedness”, the best meaning is probably *a matter of indecent, offensive or repulsive sexual behaviour*, like being lustful, sexual indecent and obscene behaviour, not abstaining from unlawful sexual immoral behaviour.

The conclusion is that the Old Testament permitted divorce for the reason of finding any kind of indecent behaviour related to nakedness or sex. The meaning is therefore close to the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, except that Jesus spoke of the indecent sexual behaviour of not only the woman, but also of the man!

## 4. The teaching of the prophet Malachi concerning marriage and divorce.

**Read** Malachi 2:10-16.

**Discover and discuss.** According to the prophet Malachi, how does God regard marriage and divorce?

**Notes.** Divorce is certainly not to be considered *normal* in the Old Testament. God hates divorce! He not only condemned the immoral behaviour of *certain wives*, he also condemned the immoral behaviour of *certain husbands* in Israel.

(1) Unlawful marriage.

Some unmarried men in Israel were breaking the covenant with God by marrying women who believed in foreign gods (thus: unbelievers, non-Christians). Thus they desecrated “the sanctuary”, which is not a reference to “the temple building”, but to “Israel as God’s holy people”, “God’s holy community (Church)” (cf. Ephesians 2:19-22)!

The punishment of these compromisers was that their male descendants were socially and religiously excluded from participating as citizens of Israel. They were not allowed to act as spokesmen or witnesses in business deals and legal procedures, and they were excluded from bringing sacrifices in the temple.

(2) Unlawful divorce.

Some married men (husbands) in Israel were breaking the marriage covenant with their wives by rejecting or divorcing their wives. When a man and a woman married in the Bible, they stood in the presence of God as “the Witness” and God made them one (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-6). God is also “the Witness” when the husband deals treacherously with his wife and divorces her. God calls the wife “the wife of your youth”, “your companion, partner and friend” and “the wife of your covenant” (verse 14).

By calling marriage *a covenant* (Hebrew: berit), the prophet Malachi declares *marriage to be a holy and inviolable institution of God* (Malachi 2:14). “Israel” was the name of the community of people that God had separated for himself in this world. The God of the Bible created both the man and the woman as “flesh (body) and spirit”, because he was seeking “godly seed or offspring” (Hebrew: zera elohim), that is, his purpose was to build a holy people of God in the world, a community of believers in the God of the Bible in the world (Malachi 2:15). God warned that whoever treated his wife with unfaithfulness by rejecting or divorcing her, violated God’s purpose with regard to marriage, family and his community (people and Church) in this world. God hates divorce. God calls divorce *a crime of violence* (Hebrew: chamas) as serious as the crime of unjust murder (Malachi 2:16)!

(3) God hates divorce, but is merciful towards those who repent.

God hates divorce just as he hates lies and wicked schemes (Proverbs 6:16-19). Although God hates divorce, he reckons with the reality of a fallen mankind and a broken world. God is merciful to a repentant adulterer, that is, to *a man or woman, who is guilty of divorce, yet afterwards repents*. Note how David commits adultery (2 Samuel 11) and how he repents (Psalm 51:1-17). Also note how God forgives him, yet makes him bear the consequences of his adultery (2 Samuel 12:13-14). And God is compassionate towards “the desolate woman”, meaning, the woman who was previously guilty of divorce, but afterwards repented and clung to God (cf. Isaiah 54:1; 49:19-21).

## B. THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST CONCERNING DIVORCE

### 1. How Jesus regards marriage and divorce.

**Read** Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

**Discover and discuss.** What is the difference between the approach of the Jews and the approach of Jesus to the matter of marriage and divorce?

**Notes.**

(1) Not the Jewish divorce procedure, but God’s marriage ordinance is important.

Because of the lax of morals during the time Jesus lived on earth, the Jewish scribes and Pharisees were pre-occupied with *the method of divorce* rather than with *the marriage ordinance* of God. They argued that when a person divorces his wife and sends her away, he should at least give her a proper certificate of divorce. They thought that a piece of paper like a legal divorce document could dissolve the marriage covenant or marriage bond in God’s eyes! They were wrong! God hates divorce and he will punish adulterous husbands and wives. The approach of Jesus was not to teach the procedure of divorce<sup>1</sup>, but rather to emphasise the marriage ordinance of God! The teaching of Jesus Christ concerning divorce is certainly no break with God’s marriage ordinance. The scribes and Pharisees occupied themselves with *the exceptions to marriage*, but Jesus Christ emphasised *the principle rule of remaining married*.

Jesus Christ reiterated God’s marriage ordinance, which God instituted at the creation (Genesis 2:24). God *commanded* a man to leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife and become one flesh with her. This is not merely an historical description of what generally takes place between a man and a woman when they marry, but it is an authoritative command of God about what should take place between a man and a woman when they marry. God’s ordinance is valid for all time and in all cultures of the world!

By bringing Eve to Adam, God gave the woman in marriage to the husband. By commanding the husband to leave his parents and to cleave to his wife, God puts the man (and the woman) directly under his own authority. God makes the woman responsible not to leave her husband and he makes the man responsible to continue to cleave to his wife. God

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to divorce agents!

makes them both responsible to be one in spirit and in body. The woman must realise that God gave her away in marriage and the man must realise that God commands him to take her and cleave to her in marriage for his whole life.

(2) Breaking the marriage bond by unlawful divorce or by outside interference is adultery.

Therefore, Jesus clearly taught that at the creation God did not permit divorce. He commanded, “What God has joined together, man may not separate (a prohibition in the present continuous tense and active voice)” (Matthew 19:6)! Marriage in the Bible means nothing less than that God joins a man and woman together into a unity for their whole life! Divorce in the Bible does not provide a backdoor of escape from marriage! If the husband or the wife breaks this marriage bond or if another person outside their marriage relationship interferes and causes their marriage bond to break up, then that person is guilty of adultery. On the one hand, the guilty person sins against God, because he or she disobeys God and breaks God’s marriage covenant. And on the other hand, the guilty person does a very great sin against his marriage partner, because he or she causes much damage and hurt! Jesus calls the guilty person “an adulterer”. And according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, an unrepentant adulterer will not inherit the kingdom of God!

## 2. Legitimate reasons for divorce.

**Read** Matthew 19:9; Matthew 5:31-32.

**Discover and discuss.** According to Jesus Christ, which reason does God allow for divorce?

**Notes.** Also in the New Testament, God in Jesus Christ reckons with the reality of a fallen mankind and a broken world. Although Jesus Christ condemns adultery (cf. Matthew 15:18-19), he gives no command to a Christian that he or she must divorce from his or her adulterous partner! Above all, Jesus desires an adulterer to repent of his sin (Luke 7:36-50; John 4:16-18,29), to convert and to continue with the marriage (Matthew 19:6).

But in some situations the guilty person (the adulterer) does not repent or does not want to convert. Instead, he or she continues with his or her sexual immorality, spiritual (religious) immorality or violent actions. He or she may even leave his or her marriage partner and start a durable relationship with someone to whom he or she is not married (which is called “living together”). In such situations Jesus *permits* a Christian (the innocent person) to divorce the adulterer (the guilty person).

Jesus permits a Christian to divorce only in the case of “marital unfaithfulness”. In Matthew 19:9 he teaches, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness* (Greek: porneia) and marries another woman commits adultery (against his first wife) (Greek: moichaó).” In Matthew 5:31-32 he teaches, “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, causes her to become an adulteress<sup>2</sup>, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” Thus, Jesus permits a Christian to divorce only in the case of marital unfaithfulness.

## 3. The meaning of “marital unfaithfulness” (porneia) and “adultery” (moicheia).

**Question.** What is the meaning of “marital unfaithfulness”?

**Teach.**

(1) Physically the word “porneia” means every form of unlawful sex related acts in the Bible.

**Read** Leviticus 18:1-6,20,22-23; Leviticus 20:10,13,15,17,23,26; Deuteronomy 23:17-18.

Sexual immorality (Greek: porneia) includes every form of sex related acts that God regards as unlawful. This includes unlawful sexual *desires* (Matthew 5:27-30; 2 Peter 2:14,18), unlawful sexual *thoughts* (Job 31:1; Proverbs 6:25) and unlawful sexual *words* (Ephesians 5:3-5). This includes all kinds of unlawful sexual *behaviour*, like pornography, masturbation, petting (touching the body with a view to stimulate the sexual desire in a person one is not married to) (Proverbs 5:15-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8), premarital sex (Deuteronomy 22:21,23-24; Hebrews 13:4), prostitution (Proverbs 5:7-13), incest (Leviticus 18:6), adultery (Leviticus 18:20), homosexuality (Leviticus 18:20; Romans 1:21-27), bestiality (Leviticus 18:23), paedophilia, rape (Deuteronomy 22:25), etc.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 6:10-11.

We cannot say that “God gives people to one another, also in a homo relationship”, because God will not do anything he himself has forbidden in the Bible! *It is people who give themselves in a homo or lesbian relationship! God gives two people of the opposite sex to one another: “the Christian marriage” is thus only when God binds one Christian man and one Christian woman to each other* (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:1-12; Ephesians 5:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). *God warns* that “people who (regardless their natural inclination or orientation) carry on doing (submitting themselves to) things that are forbidden, will not inherit the kingdom of God (Greek dictionary<sup>3</sup>): sexual immoral<sup>4</sup>, adulterers<sup>5</sup>, male prostitutes<sup>6</sup>, homosexual offenders<sup>7</sup> ... (NIV)”. Some Christians were that before, but were washed, sanctified, justified. That is what God desires: conversion and sanctification.

<sup>2</sup> Greek: poiei autén moicheuthénai (infinitive, aorist, passive)

<sup>3</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich

<sup>4</sup> pornoi “someone practising sexual immorality”

<sup>5</sup> moichoi “adulterers”

<sup>6</sup> malakoi “men or boys who allow themselves to be misused in the area of homosexuality”

<sup>7</sup> arsenokoitai “male homosexuals, pederasts, sodomites”

**Read** Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11-12; Hebrews 13:4.

Sexual immorality includes all kinds of sex related acts before one is married, particularly fornication, which is the act of sexual intercourse before the marriage relationship. And it includes all illicit clandestine relationships with the opposite sex after one is married, particularly adultery (Greek: moicheia) (which is the act of sexual intercourse with anyone who is not one's marriage-partner (spouse). In short, the Bible forbids sexual intercourse with anyone except one's marriage-partner (of the opposite sex)! Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the sexually immoral (Greek: pornos) and the adulterer (Greek: moichos)".

The difference between adultery and sexual immorality is the following: "Adultery" (Greek: moicheia) is only one aspect of "sexual immorality" (Greek: porneia) and refers to all kinds of sexual behaviour that breaks the sacred marriage bond. Adultery is every form of sex with the husband or wife of another person. Adultery is the unlawful interference with another person's marriage, every form of flirting with another person's wife or being a flirt and trying to seduce another person's husband. Adultery is the sexual act with another married person or with someone outside one's own marriage. Adultery is being the guilty partner of a divorce. Adultery is being married to more than one wife at the same time (polygamy) or being married to more than one husband at the same time (polyandry). And adultery is having a mistress or concubine. Thus, while the word "sexual immorality" especially refers to all forms of sex related acts before a person's marriage, the word "adultery" especially refers to all forms of sex related acts outside a person's marriage.

Of course, the natural sexual desire is in itself not sinful. It is a God-given desire, but it must be controlled within the boundaries that God ordained.

However, due to the fall of man into sin, also the sexual desire has degenerated into a lustful desire (2 Peter 2:14,18; 1 Peter 2:11). Although sexual desires, petting and the sexual act are not sinful inside the marriage relationship, they are sinful before and outside the marriage relationship, because as such they become activities that miss God's purpose and usually cause people to sin (James 4:17; Matthew 18:7-9).

(2) Spiritually the word "porneia" means every form of unlawful religious related acts.

**Read** Jeremiah 3:6-10; Ezekiel 16:1-63; 23:1-49.

#### **Teach.**

Adultery (Greek: moicheia) includes every form of religious related acts that God regards as unlawful. This includes every form of religion besides what is revealed in the Bible. Spiritual immorality or unlawful religion begins with apostasy from the God who revealed himself in the Bible. All religions besides the worship of the God who revealed himself in the prophets of the Old Testament and in Jesus Christ are religious immorality. All worship or merely veneration of idols (images of gods as Buddha or Nataraja, the Hindu god of the dance) is religious immorality. Religious immorality includes temple prostitution, every form of occultism, every false teaching that opposes what the Bible teaches and every act of violence in the name of religion, like divorce (Malachi 2:14-16), slashing themselves with swords (Leviticus 19:27-28; 1 Kings 18:28) or religious extremism as terrorism. God intended Christian marriage to be a proclamation and picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Thus violence in marriage is spiritually immoral! Violence that causes a marriage to break up must be regarded as "adultery", as unfaithfulness to one's marriage partner. That is why violence within a religion (religious extremism and terrorism) is spiritually immoral! People become like the god they worship (Psalm 115:8). Thus, religious extremists who lie, rape and kill only show that the god they worship is a liar, a rapist and murderer (cf. John 8:44)!

It was idolatry and religious unfaithfulness towards God that caused God to first punish Israel (the northern kingdom) and afterwards Judah (the southern kingdom) with exile to foreign countries (Assyria and Babylon).

(3) Conclusion about the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning marital unfaithfulness.

**Read** Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8.

"Marital unfaithfulness" involves sexual immorality and religious immorality.

- Sexual immorality includes every form of indecent and unlawful sexual behaviour.
- Religious immorality includes every form of idolatry, occultism, false religious teachings (teaching or believing false teachings) and acts of violence within marriage or religion (for example, the spread of religion by means of threats and the sword).

If a Christian's marriage-partner commits sexual immorality or religious immorality, the innocent partner is not commanded, but is permitted to divorce the guilty partner. God hates divorce, but he is also compassionate and cannot allow a situation in which the innocent partner is dragged down into sexual immorality, spiritual immorality or inhuman violence. Based on these meanings of the word "marital unfaithfulness", Jesus Christ allows a Christian to divorce, when his or her marriage-partner is guilty of sexual immorality or of religious immorality.

The conclusion is that the Bible very clearly teaches that the only lawful sex is with one's one and only marriage partner (of the opposite sex) and then only after one is married. The Bible warns that God will judge the sexual immoral and the adulterer!

Likewise, the only lawful religion in the world is the worship of the God who revealed himself in the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 43:10-11) and confirmed by the New Testament apostles (Acts 4:12).

#### 4. When divorce causes a wife to become “an adulteress”.

**Read** Matthew 5:32a.

**Question.** What do the words “he causes her to become an adulteress” mean?

**Teach.**

(1) Translation of Matthew 5:32.

The original phrase “to become an adulteress” (Greek: poiei autén moicheuthénai) (indicative mood, present tense, active voice + infinitive mood, aorist tense, passive voice) is written in the passive voice of the verb. Matthew 5:32 should therefore be translated as follows: “Anyone who sends away (divorces) his wife, apart from the matter of marital unfaithfulness, causes her to suffer adultery (or causes her to become exposed to committing adultery). And anyone who marries the woman that is sent away (that is divorced), commits adultery.”<sup>8</sup>

(2) Not the procedure of divorce, but the reason for divorce is important.

We must distinguish between “divorce” (Greek: apolusai) and “adultery” (Greek: moicheia), that is, between sending the woman away and committing a sexual act with someone who is not legally one’s marriage partner. The Jews in the days of Jesus only thought of the correct divorce procedure and not of the marriage ordinance or marriage regulations of God! They argued that once a husband had sent his wife away with a letter of divorce, then the marriage bond was dissolved and he was free to marry another wife (and go to bed with her). Jesus rejected the divorce procedure of the Jews and reinstated the inviolability of the marriage ordinance of God!

(3) The innocent partner suffers under the adultery of the guilty partner and becomes vulnerable because she is tempted to quickly begin another relationship. (Jesus also calls this “adultery” in Matthew).

If the wife does not commit an act of marital unfaithfulness, but her husband nevertheless sends her away or divorces her for whatever other reason, then this act would make the husband the guilty partner (an adulterer) and the wife the innocent partner of the divorce! She would suffer in the sin of adultery that her husband commits, feel rejected and lonely and the object of misunderstanding, lack of sympathy and ridicule by other people.

But she would also get exposed to committing adultery herself by having an affair, by starting to live together with another man or by contracting a subsequent marriage. She may break off the marriage bond from her side and rush into a second marriage with another man before the proper authorities (for example, the congregation) have dealt appropriately with the case. Under such circumstances, not only her husband is guilty, but also she becomes guilty of committing adultery. Jesus does not acknowledge the first husband’s rejection of her (by simply giving her a letter of divorce) as a lawful divorce, because there was no marital unfaithfulness involved. Jesus also does not acknowledge the wife’s marriage to the second husband (without the legal verdict of the proper authorities) as a lawful marriage, because there had not been a lawful divorce. Nevertheless, the man must bear the chief responsibility and chief guilt if she in her deserted state should immediately yield to the temptation of becoming married to someone else. By sending her away, he no longer protected her from an affair, etc. He is most guilty, because he brought her into a situation where she also committed adultery.

(4) Not just a husband, but also a wife may divorce for lawful reasons.

The passage in Matthew 5:31-32 is based on *the husband*. Jesus is speaking to the typical Jewish setting in which it was customary only for the husbands to divorce their wives illegally by simply giving them a letter of divorce. Jesus is teaching what the husband may legally do when his wife commits an act of marital unfaithfulness and he teaches what the husband may not do if she does not commit any act of marital unfaithfulness.

However, Jesus does not teach what *the wife* may do or should do when her husband commits an act of marital unfaithfulness. Matthew writes primarily to the Jews, among whom the rejection of a wife by her husband for flimsy reasons was well known. But in Mark 10:11-12, Mark writes to the non-Jews (Gentiles) and in his Gospel it is clear that whatever Jesus says about husbands, he also says about wives.

- To husbands: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her” (Greek: moichatai epi autén) (indicative mood, present tense, middle voice) (by breaking the relationship and rushing into another relationship)
- To wives: “And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery” (Greek: moichatai) (indicative mood, present tense, middle voice) (by breaking the relationship and rushing into the next relationship).

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, Arndt Gingrich: Of the women (Matthew 5:32a) (Greek: poiei autén moicheuthénai) (infinitive, aorist tense, medium or passive voice): “causes her to commit adultery (if she contracts a new marriage)”.  
Of the man (Matthew 5:32b) (Greek: indicative, present tense, medium): “commits adultery when he marries a divorced woman”.

Therefore, whatever Matthew teaches about the husband is equally valid for the wife! And therefore, the wife is also permitted to legally divorce her husband when *he* commits an act of marital unfaithfulness.

#### 5. When remarriage becomes "adultery".

**Read** Matthew 5:32b.

**Question.** What do the words "anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" mean?

**Teach.**

(1) Jesus regards an overhasty remarriage after an unlawful divorce as adultery.

When Jesus says, "Anyone who marries the unlawfully divorced woman commits adultery" (Greek: moichatai), he does not mean that she may *never* marry again. If that were the meaning, then Jesus would punish the innocent person for the sin of the guilty person. In Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus is speaking from the context of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and in that passage it is clear that the innocent wife, who had been unlawfully deserted (divorced) by her husband, may eventually and legally marry again.

When a guilty husband divorces his innocent wife, other men should give her enough time and opportunity so that her guilty husband may correct his error and get reconciled to her. Another man may not rush in to marry the innocent, but deserted woman. If he does, he gets involved in an unlawful divorce and thus in adultery with a woman whom he should not have married so hastily. Matthew 5:32b means that another man may *not immediately* rush in to marry her and she may *not immediately* yield to the temptation to marry this man. The reason is that the guilty first husband, who sent her away for an unlawful reason, may still repent and must be given time and an opportunity to correct his sin of adultery or unlawful divorce and to get reconciled to his former wife. Jesus does not specify how much time. He did not elaborate this point any further.

(2) Jesus did not teach everything about divorce and remarriage.

The fact that this whole passage is based on what *the husband or the other man* may or may not do, and not what *the wife* may or may not do, shows that Jesus had not intended to teach everything with respect to divorce and remarriage in this Bible passage. What Jesus did was to counteract the looseness of morals prevalent amongst the Jews in his day. He particularly counteracted the ease with which Jewish men tended to send their wives away (divorced them). He discouraged divorce, refuted the Jewish misinterpretation of the Old Testament law, reaffirmed the true meaning of the law (Matthew 5:17-18), censured the guilty party, defended the innocent party and throughout it all upheld the sacredness and inviolability of the marriage bond as ordained by God (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-6)!

In another Bible passage (1 Corinthians 7) the apostle Paul elaborated the point of marriage and divorce further.

### C. THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST ABOUT DIVORCE APPLIED IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BY PAUL

**Introduce.** As the Christians preached the gospel in other non-Jewish (Gentile) countries, they faced new problems with respect to divorce and remarriage. In this missionary situation, "a mixed marriage" is one in which either the husband or the wife alone became a Christian after their marriage. The Corinthians wanted to know whether the Christian marriage-partner should divorce his or her unbelieving marriage-partner or not. Therefore, the apostle Paul gives more directions for divorce and remarriage under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 7:40). He teaches that Christians may allow a divorce on the basis of spiritual incompatibility, that is, disharmony due to one person not being a Christian (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

#### 1. A mixed marriage in which the unbelieving partner agrees to live together with the believing partner.

**Discover and discuss.** What should be done in a mixed marriage in which the unbelieving partner (the non-Christian) agrees to live together with the believing partner (the Christian)?

**Read** 1 Corinthians 7:12-14.

**Notes.** It must be emphasised that the apostle Paul clearly teaches that a Christian is not permitted to marry with an unbeliever or with a believer of any other religion (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1).

However, some people only became a Christian after they got married as non-Christians. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-14, the apostle Paul speaks about marriage and divorce in such a case. If *the non-Christian partner is willing* to live in marriage with the Christian partner, then the Christian partner may not divorce the non-Christian partner! To continue this marriage relationship is important for God, because the unbelieving partner and the children in this marriage are sanctified through the close relationship to the believing partner. "Sanctified" does not mean "holy" in Christ before God as in 1 Corinthians 1:30, because that kind of holiness cannot be predicated to an unbeliever. It rather means "set apart" in the sense that he and his children no longer feel at home in the circle of unbelievers. Through the believing partner, the unbelieving partner and the children are connected to the community of believers (the Church) and are influenced by that community. In such a marriage the children are raised inside the Christian congregation and the unbelieving partner may begin to attend church.

## 2. A mixed marriage in which the unbelieving partner cannot agree to live together with the believing partner.

**Discover and discuss.** What should be done in a mixed marriage in which the unbelieving partner (the non-Christian) cannot agree to live together with the believing partner (the Christian)?

**Read** 1 Corinthians 7:15-16.

**Notes.** A mixed marriage, in which the unbelieving partner cannot agree to live together with the believing partner, a divorce may be granted. If the non-Christian is unwilling to live in marriage with the Christian, then the Christian should permit the non-Christian to divorce him or her. 1 Corinthians 7:15-16 teaches, “If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound (as a slave) to marriage in such circumstances, because God has called them to live in peace.” This passage literally says, “If the unbeliever separates or divorces himself, let him be separated or divorced. The believing brother or sister is not bound as a slave in such matters.” The non-Christian is fully responsible for the divorce, and not the Christian. The Christian is under no obligation to prevent the non-Christian’s departure or the divorce.

The reason why the Christian should allow the non-Christian to divorce him or her is that God has called Christians to live in peace. The meaning of “peace” is here not the absence of domestic troubles and fights. The peace to which God has called Christians (1 Corinthians 7:15) is the result of salvation and leads to peace with the God of the Bible and peace with people. Disturbing or threatening this peace is called *spiritual incompatibility*. This peace is disturbed when the believing partner wants to be actively involved in the Christian Church or when the believing partner wants to raise his or her children in the Christian Faith, but the unbelieving partner opposes this with verbal or physical violence. If this peace is disturbed or threatened due to the fact that the non-Christian does not want to live together with the Christian, then divorce should be permitted. When the non-Christian wants to divorce, the Christian should *not prevent* the divorce, but *must permit* the divorce.

When the non-Christian does not want to divorce, the Christian is forbidden to divorce. However, in the case of a non-Christian who does not want to divorce, but nevertheless continues to maltreat the Christian or their children, the Christian is permitted to divorce the non-Christian on the ground of *spiritual immorality*, which includes acts of violence and on the ground of *spiritual incompatibility*, which disturbs the peace with God and other people. The governmental authorities or the church authorities will often decide to annul the marriage and in such a case, the Christian should not prevent the divorce.

### D. THE TEACHING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ABOUT DIVORCE APPLIED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT BY PETER

The way a husband treats his wife has a tremendous effect on his relationship to God and his prayers! Malachi 2:13-15 says that if a person breaks faith with his marriage partner, God will no longer pay attention to his prayers, to his crying to God with tears or to his offerings!

In 1 Peter 3:7, the apostle Peter says, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” If a man treats his wife harshly and with disrespect, God will likewise reject all his prayers! This is a warning against all men who use violence to enforce their will in their marriage. This is also a warning against all women who use the sharpness of their tongues to hurt their husbands (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-6). Therefore, the behaviour and attitudes within the marriage relationship have a great influence on whether God hears prayers or not.

### E. TRANSFORMATION, REMARRIAGE AND LEADERSHIP AFTER A DIVORCE

#### 1. Transformation after a divorce.

**Introduce.** Although adultery and divorce are great sins, the gospel is powerful to transform the lives of people who have committed adultery or who are guilty of an unlawful divorce.

(1) Genuine repentance leads to forgiveness.

**Read** Proverbs 28:13; Acts 13:38-39; 1 John 1:9, Matthew 4:5-7.

**Discover and discuss.** What should a person do if he is guilty of adultery or an unlawful divorce?

**Notes.** Whoever genuinely repents of his sin, converts and reforms his life receives forgiveness and transformation. God will have mercy on the repentant sinner. He will forgive and radically transform broken lives by conversion and sanctification.

However, a Christian may not misuse God’s grace and mercy by first wilfully divorcing his marriage partner and afterwards trying to receive God’s forgiveness. Such an act would be equal to putting God to the test!

(2) How Jesus related to people living in adultery.

**Read** Luke 7:36-50; John 4:16-19; John 8:1-11.

**Discover and discuss.** What do the examples of Jesus teach us to do in situations of adultery or unlawful divorce?

**Notes.** Already in the Old Testament God said about David who had repented of his adultery and murder (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12; Psalm 51), “I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do” (Acts 13:22).

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 5:31-32; 19:10). This included people who lived in adultery. Jesus did not condemn or punish the woman who had lived a sinful life in town, but forgave all her sins (Luke 7). Jesus did not condemn the Samaritan woman, who lived in adultery. Instead he revealed himself as the Saviour and her life was completely changed (John 4). Jesus also did not condemn a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. Instead, he warned her to leave her life of sin (John 8)!

(3) If God transformed adulterers in the Bible, he can also transform them today.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:9-11; 7:11; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

**Discover and discuss.** What is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ with respect to all kinds of sexual immorality?

**Notes.** The gospel of Jesus Christ has power to transform sexually immoral people, adulterers and unlawfully divorced people. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 we read about how corrupt and degenerate the people of Corinth were.

And in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, we read God’s judgement of all kinds of sexual immorality. It says, “Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor *adulterers* nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ... will inherit the kingdom of God.”

But the apostle Paul also says that people who have lived like that can be saved and completely changed! He writes, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Therefore, although the elders of the congregation should discipline adultery and unlawful divorce among the Christians (1 Corinthians 5:1-8), they should make it their aim that the offender repents and that his life is changed (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)!

All people have sinned. All people need the mercy and grace of God to be saved and changed. People who have committed adultery or divorce, and afterwards genuinely repent, can also receive from God mercy to be forgiven and grace to be transformed (1 John 1:8 – 2:2).

If neither of the two divorced partners has been married again, he or she should try to be reconciled to their former marriage partner and try to restore their former marriage (1 Corinthians 7:11).

## 2. Remarriage after a divorce.

**Introduce.** Remarriage after divorce is a controversial issue among Christians. Sincere Christian leaders differ in their interpretation of key Bible passages. However, all Christians must consider the evidence in the Bible and the elders of a congregation should give the final verdict what should be done in their congregation. The Bible teaches the following two important principles about remarriage after a divorce.

(1) Teaching for the guilty person in a divorce.

**Read** Mark 10:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

**Discover and discuss.** What should *the guilty partner* in a divorce do?

**Notes.** In many marriages both marriage partners in a divorce are to some extent guilty that their marriage led to a divorce. Maybe they became too busy with the affairs of the world to give adequate time and attention to their marriage and family. Maybe they did nothing to build up their marriage relationship or they did not resolve their conflicts in the biblical way. Repentance on both sides is then necessary.

Nevertheless, Jesus and Paul speak of the partner that separates himself or herself for a reason other than the above-mentioned lawful reasons. The guilty partner in a divorce must reconcile himself to the original marriage-partner or remain unmarried.

Getting married is good or commendable, but certainly not a command (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). However remaining married is definitely a command of the Lord Jesus Christ and not simply good or commendable (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)! While the apostle Paul *may recommend* remaining single or getting married in certain circumstances, the Lord Jesus Christ *commands* married Christians to remain married!

Jesus says, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman, commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). Jesus is here speaking about *the guilty partner*, who unlawfully divorces his or her marriage-partner and then unlawfully remarries another woman or man. Because Jesus does not recognise the unlawful divorce, he also does not recognise the unlawful remarriage thereafter. He regards unlawful divorce and unlawful remarriage as “adultery”. The apostle Paul warns that an unrepentant adulterer will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus addresses the Jewish situation, where most often men divorced their wives. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the Gentile situation, where women were more emancipated and often divorced their husbands! Nevertheless, in both cases what is said of husbands or wives is equally true of the opposite sex.

After a *wilful unlawful divorce* by a Christian partner, the first marriage is not considered annulled by God. The guilty marriage-partner may not remarry, but should undertake steps to get reconciled to the innocent marriage-partner. If he or she does not want to reconcile himself or herself to the innocent marriage-partner, then he or she should remain unmarried.

However, this passage does not elaborate what should be done if the divorce is beyond repair, that is, when the innocent partner has already been remarried by the time the guilty partner repents of his divorce. Some Christian leaders advocate that *the guilty person* may never marry again. They emphasise punishment and believe that the guilty partner must bear the consequences of his or her sinful behaviour.

Other Christian leaders say that a *repentant adulterer* may marry again. They teach that God is merciful. He will forgive the repentant adulterer and remember his sin no more (Luke 7:47-50; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; Hebrews 8:12).

Moreover, 1 Corinthians 7:9 teaches that marrying is better than *burning with passion*. This principle is certainly also applicable to the original guilty, but now repentant and forgiven adulterer!

(2) Teaching for the innocent person in a divorce.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 7:39; 1 Corinthians 7:15; 1 Corinthians 7:9.

**Discover and discuss.** What may *the innocent partner* in a divorce do?

**Notes.** in a divorce is not bound to remain unmarried!

The apostle Paul teaches, “A woman is by Gods law *bound* (as a slave) (Greek: dedetai)(indicative mood, perfect tense, passive voice) to her husband as long as he lives (1 Corinthians 7:39). But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” Here the word “bound” literally means *to remain continually bound by God’s law* to the marriage-partner. Only death of the marriage-partner annuls the bondage to the marriage status and sets the living partner completely free to remarry. 1 Corinthians 7:39 helps to explain 1 Corinthians 7:15.

He also teaches, “If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing brother or sister is *not bound* (as a slave)(Greek: ou dedoulôtai) (indicative mood, perfect tense, passive voice) in such circumstances” (1 Corinthians 7:15). The non-Christians is responsible for the divorce and the Christian is innocent. The word “not bound” literally means, *not have to remain continually bound as a slave* to the original marriage status. Thus the innocent Christian does not have to stay unmarried for the rest of her or his life while waiting for the possible event that the non-Christian becomes a believer and they return to their former marriage relationship. However, the innocent Christian should give the guilty non-Christian enough time to repent and restore the broken marriage relationship (Matthew 5:32). How long the innocent Christian should wait, is not specified. Nevertheless, divorce by the non-Christian annulled the marriage-bond in God’s eyes and the Christian is completely free to remarry. God no longer regards the first marriage relationship as binding.

This is in agreement with what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9: The innocent Christian may not have received the gift of continence and may burn with passion, so that, unless she or he marries again, she or he may be tempted by Satan to fall into sexual immorality due to a lack of self-control. In such circumstances, it is better for the Christian to marry again.

**Conclusion.** 1 Corinthians 7:39 helps to explain 1 Corinthians 7:15.

The marriage-bond may be lawfully removed by:

- the death of the marriage-partner
- the wilful divorce by the non-Christian partner
- the marital unfaithfulness (sexual or religious immorality including acts of violence) of the Christian or non-Christian partner.

In these three cases the innocent Christian is again free to re-marry!

The innocent partner of a divorce must give the guilty partner enough time to repent and to restore the broken marriage. However, if after enough time, the guilty partner refuses to repent, the innocent partner is not bound to remain unmarried. Neither Jesus nor Paul specifies how long this period of time should be (cf. Hebrews 4:7-8).

### 3. Leadership after a divorce.

**Read** Leviticus 21:7,14; 1 Timothy 3:2.

**Discover and discuss.** What does the Bible teach about a divorced person in leadership?

**Notes.** Christian leaders are divided about this issue.

(1) A priest in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament period, an Old Testament priest may not marry an innocent divorced woman (Leviticus 21:14; Ezekiel 44:22).

(2) An elder in the New Testament.

In the New Testament period, the requirement for becoming an elder is that he must be “the husband of but *one* wife”. This requirement does not teach that an elder should be a married man. An elder may be a single man. But as a single man he should set an example of purity (cf. 1 Timothy 5:1-2).

But if the elder is a married man, he must have only one wife. This requirement also does not teach that an elder may never marry for a second time. If his first wife died, he may remarry, but only with a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39). But as a married man he should set an example of absolute faithfulness to his wife, his *one* wife! He may under no circumstances be involved in polygamy or in having a mistress or concubine. He may under no circumstances be involved in adultery or sexual immorality, which includes flirting with other women. God detests flirting, because it is pretending courtship and love in an atmosphere of insincerity, self-love and lack of self-control (Genesis 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:1-6).

(3) Leadership after a divorce.

The question whether a previously divorced person may be appointed to a leadership position is dependent on a congregation's view about remarriage after a divorce. Some Christian leaders are convinced that a previously divorced person may never assume a leadership task in the congregation.

Other Christian leaders feel that if the man was the *innocent* victim of a divorce and qualifies in every other respect to be a leader, then he may be appointed to a leadership task (group leader, elder, teacher).

Most Christian leaders agree that a man *guilty* of a divorce may not be appointed to a leadership position.

However, some Christian leaders feel that if a person *guilty* of a divorce has proved for many years that he has repented of his sin and that his life has been transformed, then he may again assume a leadership task in the congregation. They emphasize the mercy of God towards a repentant adulterer. "Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement (James 2:13)! The Bible does not deal with the issue of leadership after a divorce. Therefore, the elders of every local congregation must make a final decision about this issue and the members of the congregation ought to respect their decision.

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| <b>5</b> | PRAYER (8 minutes) <span style="float: right;">[REACTIONS]</span><br>PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD |
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.  
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

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| <b>6</b> | PREPARATION (2 minutes) <span style="float: right;">[ASSIGNMENT]</span><br>FOR NEXT LESSON |
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(*Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "Divorce and remarriage" together with another person or group of people. Encourage every Christian to be absolutely faithful to his or her one and only marriage-partner and to hate every form of sexual immorality and divorce.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of 1 John 4 - 5, 2 John and 3 John each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Review series H: "Christian parents". (1) Love by spending. 2 Corinthians 12:14b-15a. (2) Develop all areas. Proverbs 22:6. (3) Teach God's Word. Deuteronomy 6:6-7. (4) Bring up in the Lord. Ephesians 6:4. (5) Love through discipline. Proverbs 13:24.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 19. Make use of the five steps method.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.