I have chosen to include Parunak’s interpretation of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 because this is the logical way to interpret the text if one starts off with Erasmus’s Greek text as translated by all modern English translations. All modern English translations attribute to Jesus the exception clause, “except for fornication.” On the basis of these translations hundreds of thousands of Christian marriages have been dissolved. I have shown that the very attempt to dissolve a lawful, one-flesh marriage is a sin against God, because He alone reserves to Himself the right to dissolve any marriage. The only instrument He uses to do so is death, not the sin of fornication.

But Parunak also reveals the modern trend not to be seen to be condemnatory or critical of any remarriage, no matter how it came about. His bottom line is that if you are presently in an adulterous, remarriage relationship, this is fine. It is not an adulterous relationship. There is no need to separate. His book provides a defense to ‘remain in the calling’ in which you presently find yourself in. This book is a handbook on how to get round Jesus’ teaching in a very plausible manner. The title sums up his conclusion, “Let not man put asunder” any remarriage once it has got under way.

H. Parunak made two crucial mistakes right at the very outset of his study of the topic of divorce and remarriage, that threw the whole of his research off course. He chose the wrong Greek text, and he assumed that the exemption clause in Mathew 5:32 was identical with the exclusion clause in Mathew 19:9.

The reviewer’s conclusion is that this book distorts the teaching of Jesus as a direct result of these two crucial errors. The distortion is on a scale such that Jesus’ teaching is completely wiped out. It makes no difference what Jesus said or thought if one accepts the practical, pastoral results of this work. This work sets out to defend the status quo of every remarriage.

Following an 8-page critique of Parunak’s work, I have abstracted excerpts from his work which I have annotated using footnotes and embedded comments under “LMF,” pointing out what is useful and what arises from his false premises. Wherever possible I have given the section in Parunak’s book where the extracts have been taken from, e.g., (chap. 9.6.2).

PARUNAK’S INITIAL ERRORS

First of all, H. Parunak accepted a faulty Greek text. Next he translated the so-called exceptive clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 as:

5:32, “except for the cause of fornication,”
19:9, “except for fornication.”

In Mt 5:32 the Greek for ‘except’ is παρεκκοσμός, which means, “apart from.”
In Mt 19:9 the Greek for ‘except’ is εἰ μη. They are not interchangeable in Greek.
Parunak was unaware that εἰ before μη is not found at Matthew 19:9 in a single Greek manuscript anywhere in the world. It is found only in the margin of a
fifteenth-century Greek manuscript in England, known as Codex Leicestrensis (MS 69).

If we remove the εἰ before μη the text now reads, “not even for fornication.” In other words, there is no exceptive clause in Matthew 19:9, which permitted divorce for the sin of fornication. It was Erasmus who added εἰ before μη, because he wanted to introduce divorce for fornication in Matthew 19:9, as well as for desertion in 1 Corinthians 7:15. He was a humanist at heart, but outwardly a Roman Catholic. Parunak totally confused himself by giving the same English translation to two different Greek words by translating παρεκτός and εἰ μη by ‘except.’ All the way through his book this confusion dominates his work, deceiving the reader into believing that 5:32 and 19:9 referred to the exact same exception to divorce. Parunak did not realise that Jesus was teaching two different truths in these two places. He regarded the exceptive clauses as duplicates. In this he was, and is, not alone. This confusion is found in many modern commentaries.

The difference between Jesus’ teaching in Mt 5:32 and 19:9 is this. One refers to an exemption clause, and the other refers to an exclusion clause. Neither of them is an exception clause. In 5:32 Jesus teaches that the man who divorces his wife will be held accountable for her subsequent adultery in the form of a remarriage, except for the sin of fornication that she herself committed without her husband’s consent, permission or knowledge. So the ‘exception’ clause relates to exempting the husband from his wife’s sin of fornication which she committed before he divorced her. That is natural justice.\footnote{Natural justice will also cover those situations where a wife was divorced but instead of remarrying, she lived as a prostitute, to make a living. She chose to live that style of life, so she bears her own punishment.}

In Mt 19:9, on the other hand, the Pharisees came to Jesus to find out what grounds He would list that would warrant a divorce. Jesus replied that there were no grounds at all, not even for the sin of fornication. So the ‘exception’ clause relates to excluding the sin of fornication as a grounds for divorcing anyone.

It never occurred to H. Van Dyke Parunak that there were two different types of qualifying clauses in 5:32 and 19:9. The assumption was that they were both exception clauses. This was a costly mistake to make, because where Jesus specifically ruled out divorce for fornication in Mt 19:9, Erasmus turned it round so that he made Jesus teach that fornication was a grounds for divorce. This was the exact opposite to what Jesus taught.

The lesson to learn from Parunak’s mistakes are now plain to see. The correct Greek text to follow is the Majority Greek text (not Erasmus’s Greek text, or the Textus Receptus behind the AV). And the key to interpreting Mt 5:32 and 19:9 is to see the former as teaching an ‘exemption to accountability,’ and the latter as teaching an ‘exclusion of fornication’ as a grounds for divorce.

In what follows I shall point out the serious consequences for individual lives and for church life that flowed from these two very early, and avoidable, blunders.

PARUNAK PERMITTED DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

H. Parunak quotes Mt 5:32: “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.” He then quotes Mt 19:9 and then adds:
These verses are puzzling, because the clause about fornication applies only to the divorced wife and not to her second husband. If her divorce results from fornication, she appears to be protected from committing adultery, but her future spouse is not!

What this amounts to can be seen if we write out the same verse, one with the exception clause relating to non-fornication misdeeds, and the other with the exception clause relating to fornication.

DIVORCE FOR NON-SEXUAL MISDEEDS
(A) “Whoever dismisses his wife for causes other than fornication makes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.”

DIVORCE FOR SEXUAL MISDEEDS
(B) “Whoever dismisses his wife for the cause of fornication does not cause her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.”

By an unusual piece of exegesis H. Parunak worked out that if someone was divorced for (A) then their subsequent remarriage would be adulterous, 2 but if they were divorced for (B) their subsequent remarriage would not be adulterous. He arrived at this strange conclusion from noting that the sin of fornication was punished with death in the OT, so technically, the divorced woman in (B) was ‘dead.’ So it was alright to marry her, but not to marry any other divorced woman who was divorced for a non-sexual offense, because somehow these spouses were still, legally ‘alive.’

He wrote:

The fornication clause complicates things. “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.” This suggests that whoever dismisses his wife for the cause of fornication will not cause her to commit adultery. Why not? Has fornication somehow dissolved the marriage bond, so that she may remarry without being guilty of adultery? .... The real puzzle about the fornication clause is that it does not apply equally to the woman and her second husband. It prevents her from committing adultery, but offers him no such protection. Why is fornication so unbalanced in its effects on the woman and her future suitors? To solve this puzzle, we must consider the context in which the Lord presents it. (Chap. 9)

The answer to the puzzle turns out to be another unusual piece of etymology. He noticed that the Greek verb used by Jesus for ‘dismiss’ (ἀπολύω) has been used in exceptional cases outside the Bible to mean “dismiss from life.” This exceptional use of the word, plus the death penalty laid down in the OT for fornication, suggested to him that Jesus was using ‘dismiss’ in two different senses at the same time (i.e., in the same sentence). So in (A) Jesus used ‘dismiss’ to mean ‘divorce,’ but in (B) He used ‘dismiss’ to mean ‘stoned to death,’ because this was the punishment for fornication. Scholars are aware that ellipsis is a frequently used device, so that in Matthew 19:9 when the ellipsis is supplied (in square brackets) it reads: “Whoever dismisses his wife, unless [he dismisses her] for fornication, ...” The second occurrence of “dismisses” is frequently dropped without affecting the sense.

Parunak suggests that a second understood “dismisses” is required in the exceptive clause, but that the ellipsed form has a different meaning to its first use. Parunak

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2 However, Parunak will go on to show that these adulterous remarriages should not be undone if they are repented of. He believes that in such circumstances a person is married to two spouses. This seems to stem from his belief that divorce does not dissolve any marriage.
suggested that the verse should be translated as: “Whoever dismisses [= divorces] his wife, unless he dismisses [= executes] her for fornication, . . . .” (9.6.2). In another place (14.2) he states: “We saw in Chapter 5 that Moses does not excuse her action, but considers her “defiled” as a result of it, and expects the original husband to prosecute her for infidelity.” In Moses’s day this meant stoning her to death. Parunak nowhere in his book states what is the equivalent punishment today for such a cheating wife. The assumption is that the marriage is dissolved through the divorce courts, and this would be the equivalent of ‘stoning’ her to death, but Parunak does not resort to this as a way round the absence of the death penalty in modern societies. He does not recognise the right of any State to divorce a lawful marriage.

If the second use of the verb “dismiss” did not need to be supplied, then Parunak might have had a case, but clearly, this is an ellipsis, and in an ellipsis the meaning of the first occurrence of the verb will be supplied by the reader automatically. But to argue that the supplied verb has a meaning different from its first meaning is linguistically confusing, if not impossible. Parunak cannot bring forward a single, analogous case to prove his point, and this is where his case breaks down finally and disintegrates into thin air. But rather than admit he cannot find a single example that proves his point, he diverts attention away to other types of figures of speech such as ellipsis, antanaclasis, and even paronomasia, in the hope that the reader will give him the benefit of the doubt. But upon closer inspection of each of these figures not one of them supports his case.

NEW TRANSLATIONS FOR MATTHEW 5:32 AND 19:9

If we write out Matthew 19:9 as proposed by Parunak it would read: “Whoever divorces his wife, except [he executes her] for fornication, and marries another commits adultery, and whoso marries her who has been divorced commits adultery.” In Matthew 5:32 it would need to be translated as: “But I—I say to you, that whoever may divorce his wife, apart from [executing her] for fornication, makes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries her who has been divorced commits adultery.”

H. Parunak thinks that only he has made this discovery, and I would agree. Special pleading of this sort would not occur to the normal linguist.

H. Parunak wrote:
There are two ways in which a man may “dismiss” his wife. He may “divorce” her, putting her out of his house. In this case he causes her to commit adultery, for she will be without support unless she remarries. But if she is guilty of fornication, he has another option. Deuteronomy 22 says that a married woman who commits fornication should be stoned to death. . . . . If she is guilty of fornication, he may “dismiss” her from life by having her tried and stoned. In this case he does not cause her to commit adultery, for she is dead and so cannot remarry. (Chap. 9.3.3)

Going beyond the Sermon on the Mount, he [Jesus] adds that the husband who dismisses her and marries someone else commits adultery, unless he dismisses her for fornication. Once again, we understand from Deuteronomy 22 that in the case of fornication she is dead, and there is no danger of adultery. (Chap. 10.2.2)

The fornication clause assumes that the reader or hearer understands the laws of fornication defined in Deuteronomy 22. Only in the light of these laws can we understand how a woman can be “dismissed” for fornication and not commit adultery by remarrying. (Chap. 11.2)
Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels. Matthew presents the Lord to a Jewish audience as the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Mark and Luke are written to more general audiences, audiences that include Greek and Roman readers who will not understand the Old Testament very well. Matthew includes the fornication clause because his Jewish readers should know Deuteronomy 22 well enough to catch the Lord’s pun on “dismiss.” Gentile readers, not knowing that the Law requires a fornicator to be stoned, might misunderstand the clause and think that it justifies remarriage in the case of fornication. This is exactly what the Lord does not teach. Mark and Luke, keeping their Gentile audience in mind, avoid possible misunderstanding by leaving the clause out. (Chap.11.2)

Matt. 19:9, Mark 10:11, and Luke 16:18 agree that the man who divorces his wife still belongs to her, and is not free to remarry. In spite of a man's best efforts to break the marriage bond, it remains intact before God. It does not matter how miserable the wife makes the husband, or how grievously she has wronged him. He is hers as surely as she is his. Fornication may separate them, if it is dealt with according to the Law, for then one spouse will die. But it is death, not a man-made divorce, that ends the union. By omitting the fornication clause, Mark and Luke warn us that Gentile responses to fornication, such as separation without capital punishment, do not justify remarriage. (Chap.11.2)

My reply to this is, that this is an odd statement, because where there is fornication in a Jewish context (as set out by Matthew) no capital punishment takes place, which, if it did, would justify a remarriage as being a non-adulterous relationship. However, while the offending spouse is still physically alive (as they must be today), there can be no real divorce, either in Hebrew or in Graeco-Roman culture. But, in fact, all three cultures permitted divorce for almost any cause, and their courts did justify their remarriages without requiring the death of the offending spouse. So the point Parunak is making carries no logic with it.

Each component of the Lord’s teaching emphasizes that marriages are made in heaven, but divorce is a purely human product. Every party involved in divorce and remarriage is guilty of adultery. The Lord condemns the mate who initiates the divorce, and (if remarriage follows the separation) the one who is put away and the second partner. The fornication clause seems to make an exception. But it was only recorded for Jewish audiences, and they should know from their own Scriptures that fornication leads, not to divorce, but to death. (Chap.11.2)

The statement, “Every party involved in divorce and remarriage is guilty of adultery” is true only for (A), but not for (B). Those in (A) can continue in their remarriage, after they have confessed the sin of the remarriage ceremony itself. Once

3 Parunak is misleading here. He means that only those divorces which were obtained through (A) are not truly divorced, and hence a remarriage is an adulterous relationship, but the same does not apply to (B).
4 By ‘separate’ here he means dissolved. The reader should be alert to the exegesis that Parunak is employing here, because only a divorce based on fornication can dissolve a marriage, in his scheme. In his scheme, a person may remarry without being an adulterer or adulteress, provided the divorce was solely on the grounds of fornication, for which the penalty was death.
5 Here Parunak has only divorce (A) in mind.
6 Here Parunak has only divorce (B) in view.
the ceremony is over, and repented of, the newly married couple are then free of the sin of adultery.

Parunak wrote:
If the believer marries someone else, reconciliation becomes impossible, because of the requirements of Deuteronomy 24, and the believer’s channel of influence on the unbeliever is broken. (Chap. 12.2.1)

This is wrong. Reconciliation is always attainable and desirable while both spouses are alive, because nothing can come between them—not another partner, or a divorce certificate.

Parunak wrote: To some readers, Rom. 7:1-3 suggests that it is adultery to continue in a second marriage after divorce. Translations such as the AV, the NEB, and the RSV especially encourage this view. For example, the AV renders the passage,

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.

Parunak commented: The English phrase “be married to another man” is ambiguous.

In reply it should be noted that there is nothing ambiguous about it. It says “another man,” and that could not be clearer.

Parunak continued: It might mean either “enter into another marriage” or “be in another marriage.” If it means, “be in another marriage,” then continuing in a second marriage after divorce would be adultery, and second marriages should be dissolved to avoid this continuing adultery. If it means, “enter into another marriage,” then the sin consists in the act of remarrying, not the state of being remarried, and there are no grounds for dissolving the second marriage.

Parunak wrote: It is adultery for a divorced person to marry someone else while the previous spouse is still living.

... In all four Gospel texts on divorce, the Lord uses a verb in the present tense to describe the adultery of remarriage. Greek literature often uses this tense to emphasize continuous action. If the present tense in these verses served this function, the verses would teach that the adultery of a remarriage is a continuing state, not just a single action, and the second marriage would have to end. ... In the notes, we give technical reasons for understanding the present tense of the verbs in the Lord’s teaching about divorce as general rather than continual. The tense does not emphasize that a second marriage is continual adultery, but identifies the teaching as a general statement about divorce, remarriage, and adultery, a statement that is true regardless of the details of how the divorce or remarriage takes place. Thus these passages do not prove that the adultery of remarriage is continual.

7 Later on, Parunak denies that this is necessary.
8 This is, in fact, Parunak’s true position.
9 This statement is misleading, because in his view a wife who commits fornication is “executed,” but not literally today, so she is still alive. She will, no doubt, remarry. What if she repents and turns to Christ? Is her remarriage to be annulled?
10 This is a purely subjective argument. It has no basis in grammar.
My reply is that this is wishful thinking, because the alternative is too damaging to contemplate. This juggling with the present tense is a desperate attempt to shield all those who have remarried after a divorce which was obtained on non-fornication grounds. Parunak’s theology has brought him full circle and nothing has changed. To the Christian man who hated his wife (Christian or not) so much over non-sexual matters that he took her to court and obtained a civil divorce dissolving his union with her completely, and then has gone off and married another Christian woman (divorced or not), Parunak tells him he has sinned, but now that he has remarried he can stay with his new wife until death do them part. All the aggrieved husband need do is repent of his initial sin in divorcing his first wife and all is well. Parunak reassures the new couple that God has approved their remarriage, and will not be demanding that they de-couple their union, or that he be reconciled to his first wife. “All that is in the past,” is Parunak’s parting words to the happy couple.

WHY PARUNAK SHOULD NOT BE FOLLOWED

The danger inherent in Parunak’s interpretation of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage is that if a wife is hated because of some row over finance or failing in her responsibility to be mistress of the house, and to run it well, and her husband divorces her for a non-sexual offence, when she remarries she is committing adultery against her husband, and the man who marries her is also committing adultery. But if a wife is hated because of some sexual misdemeanour and she is divorced on the grounds of fornication, then when she remarries she is not guilty of adultery, but the man who marries her is guilty of adultery.

The danger in Parunak’s position is that when a wife is threatened with a divorce for a non-sexual offense, she will deliberately commit ‘fornication,’ in order to be divorced for that reason, because when she remarries she will not be committing adultery against her husband, and so she can marry whoever she wants. The snag with this scenario is that while she may not be committing adultery, according to Parunak, when she remarries, the man who marries her is committing adultery. But Parunak has a way round this. He believes that after a wife has been divorced for fornication (which she acknowledges is a sin), and then commits a further sin of remarrying (which she again acknowledges is a sin), if she asks for forgiveness for these sins, she is permitted (according to Parunak) to remain married to her second ‘husband’ without it being classed as an on-going sin of adultery. Somehow, Parunak believes, the remarriage is not a continuing sin of adultery, because the grounds for the divorce was ‘fornication,’ and not some other reason.

It is difficult to know why Parunak introduced his unique idea that some remarriages are not adulterous, but others are. Did he know too many friends and relatives who had been ‘cheated’ by their spouses, and he sided with them as the ‘innocent’ party? Did this sympathy for them draw him into a false interpretation of Jesus’ words so that he would not be drawn into confrontation with them, or into condemnation of them? Was it too painful to take the view that Jesus was an absolutist? Parunak could not explore that possibility because of the English versions he was following, all of which have Erasmus’s so-called exception clause, which Parunak assumes all along to be a genuine record of what Jesus taught on the subject. He was duped by Erasmus, who slipped in his own theology, overriding Jesus’ teaching, and Parunak fell for it.

The benefit of the doubt should be given to Parunak, namely, that he genuinely believed that Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 contained an ‘exception clause.’ It was on this false foundation that the whole of his work was established and built up.
Parunak has made the best possible interpretation of these verses *under the assumption that Jesus permitted an exception to His teaching* that every lawful, one-flesh union is indissoluble.

What Parunak never addressed in his book was Jesus’ doctrine of entire forgiveness. This is an inexplicable oversight on his part, and he cannot blame Erasmus for this.

The whole debate on divorce and remarriage boils down to these two statements, and we must choose between them. One or other of them is false.

(A) *If there is no exception in Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness, then there is no exception in His teaching on divorce.* (McFall’s choice)

(B) *If there is an exception in Jesus’ teaching on divorce, then there is an exception in His teaching on forgiveness.* (Erasmus’s choice)

Every scholar falls under one or other of these two statements.

**FINALLY**

There are two questions that Parunak does not answer. The first concerns the duty of the divorcing husband in Deut 24:1 to stone his divorced wife after she remarries.

Parunak wrote in his longer book under: *How is Adultery like Murder?*

Under the one law interpretation of Deuteronomy 24, divorce and remarriage is really adultery, for the divorce has no divine sanction, but is entirely man-made. In spite of the “certificate of divorce” that the first husband gives the woman in Deut. 24:1, she is still his wife. When she marries the second man, she commits adultery against the first, and threatens the land with pollution.

He then contends that the first husband has a duty to stone his first wife to death. He wrote:

However, once she marries someone else, she commits adultery against her first husband. Now he is responsible to prosecute her sin. If he accepts her back, he effectively pardons the sin. Yet he has no authority to pardon her, for it is God’s law, not his, that demands satisfaction. By refusing to satisfy that law, he leaves the land polluted with adultery.

However what he overlooks is that Deut 24:1 gives us a *description* of a divorce whose origin lies in some non-sexual fault found in the wife. Now, according to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:32, if a man divorces his wife for any reason (fornication or non-fornication), he, and not his wife, will be held responsible for her post-divorce sexual experiences, that is, her remarriages, because (Jesus informs us) “he caused her to commit adultery” against himself. She will not be punished; her husband who divorced her will be held responsible for her sins. She will be held accountable for any sins of fornication which she committed *before* he divorced her. This is what the “exemption clause” in 5:32 refers to. So the cut-off point is the point at which he divorced her.

Consequently, the man in Deut 24:1 who initiated the divorce, and who caused his wife to commit adultery against him, cannot punish her for her adultery. That would be unfair to her.
Parunak conceded the husband’s guilt under: The Divorcee (A) (See 11.2 Interpreting the Pieces of the Sayings).

Furthermore, the first husband shares in the guilt of her adulterous remarriage, because he opened the door to that marriage by divorcing her in the first place.

Again, under 12.5.1 1 Cor. 7:11: “Remain Unmarried” Parunak wrote:

civil custom recognizes the original marriage as dissolved, but God considers a union still to be in effect between the original partners.

I put it to him that if we substitute “Moses” for “civil custom” we have the situation that prevailed in Israel from the time of Moses to the coming of Christ. The ordinary Israelite believed that divorce dissolved a lawful marriage. The man who divorced his wife for non-sexual reasons (Deut 24:1) had no idea that his marriage continued intact in the eyes of God. He was oblivious to that fact, and there was no obligation on him to view his wife’s remarriage as a sin against him, or to consider her to be committing adultery. As far as he was concerned she was a free woman; free to remarry whoever she wanted to, as the Jewish get states explicitly.

Here Parunak has read back into Deut 24 a revelation that was not imparted to Israel until the time of Christ. There was no way that any remarried wife would have been remotely accused of adultery after she received her “bill of divorcement.”

And what about the husband who handed out the divorce? Is he guilty of adultery against his wife if he remarries? Is he to be stoned, likewise, along with his new bride? A retrospective reading of Christ’s teaching back into Deut 24 is not permissible.

The second question is how can an ellipsis word have a different meaning to its first use in the same sentence?

He translates Mt 5:32 as: “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.” But he informs us that the except clause refers to the death of the wife. In effect his translation is, “Whoever dismisses his wife, except [he dismisses her to death] for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.”

Here the verb “dismisses” occurs only once in the sentence where it keeps its first meaning of “divorces.” But when it is repeated in the ellipsis brackets, the same verb (he assures us) takes on its other meaning of “dismiss from life.”

This is a linguistic monstrosity.

But what is more damaging to Parunak’s interpretation is another linguistic trick. In Chap. 14 (see the Extracted Notes below) he wrote”

... In all four Gospel texts on divorce, the Lord uses a verb in the present tense to describe the adultery of remarriage. Greek literature often uses this tense to emphasize continuous action. If the present tense in these verses served this function, the verses would teach that the adultery of a remarriage is a continuing state, not just a single action, and the second marriage would have to end.

... In the notes, we give technical reasons for understanding the present tense of the verbs in the Lord’s teaching about divorce as general rather than continual. The tense does not emphasize that a second marriage is continual adultery, but identifies the teaching as a general statement about divorce, remarriage, and adultery, a statement that is true regardless of the details of
how the divorce or remarriage takes place. Thus these passages do not prove that the adultery of remarriage is continual.

Further on he wrote:

To some readers, Rom. 7:1-3 suggests that it is adultery to continue in a second marriage after divorce. . . . The English phrase “be married to another man” is ambiguous. It might mean either “enter into another marriage” or “be in another marriage.” If it means, “be in another marriage,” then continuing in a second marriage after divorce would be adultery, and second marriages should be dissolved to avoid this continuing adultery. If it means, “enter into another marriage,” then the sin consists in the act of remarrying, not the state of being remarried, and there are no grounds for dissolving the second marriage.

Here we see the true Parunak. Using a dubious technicality based on the tense of a verb, he will permit some remarriages to go through as lawful, and others to be dissolved. This undermines Jesus’ total abolition of divorce for any cause.

END OF CRITIQUE

For those who are unable to access H. Van Dyke Parunak’s electronic book I have collected the relevant sections of his work that bring out his distinctive ideas. Occasionally I have inserted my own comments under “LMF” along with footnotes.

ABSTRACTED NOTES TAKEN FROM PARUNAK’S BOOK
Leslie McFall
18 Oct. 2011

H. Van Dyke Parunak, Let Not Man Put Asunder: A Biblical Study of Divorce
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http://www.cyber-chapel.org/LetNotManPutAsunder.pdf

2.3.2 Should Second Marriages be Dissolved?
How should a pastor counsel someone who is divorced and remarried, and now understands that the remarriage was adulterous? Is it sinful to remain in the second marriage? Should the person try to end the second marriage to avoid continual adultery? Chapter 14 shows that the adultery is in entering the second marriage, not in continuing in it. Remarriage is a sin, and demands repentance. But because our society recognizes the second union as marriage, the believer cannot dissolve it without sinning anew. A remarried couple should repent of their sin of adultery, accept the Lord’s forgiveness, and strive to obey biblical principles of marriage and the home in their new union.

LMF] Probably this one paragraph encapsulates Parunak’s new interpretation of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage. The idea that “the believer cannot dissolve it [remarriage] without sinning anew,” is not true. The sinner must retrace his or her steps by undoing the remarriage, probably by going back to the State court and disannulling the second marriage. It may be that the only way to get this annulment is to get another ‘divorce.’ If so, then use it to disentangle oneself from a sinful relationship. If a man steals something from his neighbour, it is not enough to go to the neighbour and repent of the sin, and keep possession of the stolen goods. He must repent and undo the sin, by restoring the stolen good to his neighbour. Just so with every marriage. Divorce is not permitted by God on any grounds. Therefore
there can never be a remarriage which is not sinful. Repentance means undoing the remarriage and getting back to the first partner. Nothing else constitutes ‘repentance’ in God’s eyes.

2.3.3 May Church Officers be Divorced and Remarried?
1 Timothy 3:5 and Titus 1 lay down a number of requirements for people in prominent ministries in the church. Among these is the marital status of the candidate.

“An overseer then must be ... the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2). “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:12). “Let a widow be enrolled ... the wife of one husband” (1 Tim. 5:9). “Ordain elders in every city, ... if any be ... the husband of one wife” (Titus 1:5, 6).

When we study these passages in Chapter 15 we will see that those who represent God’s people must not be guilty of adulterous remarriage. God does not recognize divorce. When people divorce and remarry, they are joined by God into two marriages at the same time. Such an experience disqualifies a person from certain positions in the church. Furthermore, the stigma of being multiply married persists even if one of the duplicate spouses dies.

The church needs to honor this restriction. At the same time, it should not pretend that divorce and remarriage is the only sin worthy of note. There are problems other than remarriage that disqualify a person from prominent church positions, and there are ways that a person who has repented of remarriage may serve. The church should require its representatives to meet all the biblical qualifications, including the qualification about multiple spouses, but should not ostracize those who have repented of their sin.

LMF] By ‘repented of their sin,’ does not mean that the second wife must be ‘put away.’ So longs as he says ‘sorry’ to God, he can retain his second wife.

2.4 A Summary Principle
Out of the entire study, one overwhelming conclusion emerges: There is no biblical basis for a second marriage after divorce while the first spouse lives. Paul puts it this way, in a more restricted context: Let not the wife depart from her husband. But if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or let her be reconciled to her husband (I Cor. 7:10-11). It is a terrible thing when husband and wife separate. It may be unavoidable, when an unbelieving partner initiates it. Subsequent marriage to someone else is not unavoidable. As long as the first spouse lives, remarriage violates the Lord’s solemn command, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

LMF] On the face of it, the statement, “There is no biblical basis for a second marriage after divorce while the first spouse lives,” is deceptive. What Parunak will go on to show is that a wife who is divorced for adultery (and only for adultery) is to be considered ‘dead,’ because death was the penalty for this sin under the Law. So the cheated husband can regard his adulterous wife as ‘dead,’ so that she is no longer really ‘alive’ (although she is very much alive and kicking!). So his statement “while the first spouse lives” does not mean what you think it does, but only what he thinks it does, and it takes some time before the reader may catch on to Parunak’s idiosyncratic use of the English language. There are many such statements in Parunak’s book which are deceptive and misleading. And yet among all his discussion there are quite sensible patches, particularly his treatment of OT passages dealing with marriage of female slaves, concubines, and polygamy. His treatment of 1 Cor 7:15 is excellent. There he dismisses the case that desertion justifies divorce. This is sometimes known as the ‘Pauline Privilege.’

11 By this Parunak means that they got a divorce for a non-sexual offense, because only these marriages are considered by him to be an ‘on-going sin of adultery.’
12 This is quite a strange new teaching.
3.2.4 The church has higher standards for marriage than does secular society. For instance, in I Cor. 7:39, Paul teaches that a single woman (in this case, a widow) is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord. Because of this teaching, a church should not allow its members to marry unbelievers. Believers who enter such unions, against the instruction of the church, should be disciplined. If their unions meet the three conditions of a binding marriage, the believers are not guilty of adultery. However, they are guilty of disobeying biblical teaching about separation. In a society that sanctions polygamy, a man may legitimately have several wives at once. A believing man who takes several wives is not living in adultery, but he has disobeyed the biblical standard of monogamy. The church should discipline him, and (as we will see in Chapter 15) should not allow him to serve in positions of leadership. Godly believers seek the sanction of their local church when they marry, and ask God's blessing on their union. It is wonderful when believers marry in the presence of other believers, and thus dedicate their life together to the Lord. The religious ceremony can be of great spiritual value. However, it does not make the marriage legitimate unless the state gives it that role.

3.3 True Marriages and Happy Marriages
We have found three criteria that must be present in unions that the Bible recognizes as marriage:
1. Physical union;
2. A promise of mutual commitment;
3. The approval of their society or government. These are important conditions.

The three criteria we found in this chapter are not enough to guarantee a good marriage. Instead, they are the fewest conditions under which God considers two people married at all. Two people who satisfy only the necessary criteria will probably not be happy together. Still, God has joined them together, and if they divide their union they are guilty of divorce. It takes very little to be biblically married. The simplicity of the criteria gives a strong warning. God allows no trial weddings, no apprentice marriages, no middle ground between fornication and lawful union. We cannot later break a sad or sinful marriage because we think there is no love in it, or because it lacks church approval, or because one member is a believer and the other is not. If a couple is married at all, God considers them married until he separates them in death.

4.3.2 The Question of "Never Put Away"
In two of the situations discussed in this section, Moses forbids the husband ever to put away his wife (verses Deut 22:19 and 29). Some people feel that these prohibitions shed light on the status of divorce in general under the Law of Moses.

13 Here Parunak is thinking only of divorce for non-fornication causes. Divorce for fornication is not a sin, because the offending spouse is technically ‘dead.’
Perhaps Moses must rule out divorce in these situations because they are exceptions to ordinary situations in which he approves it.

The Law of Moses contains no global condemnation of divorce. It also contains no blanket approval. The only references it makes to divorce are negative, either forbidding it or restricting those who have been divorced. On the one hand, the Pentateuch does not give us grounds to read the Lord Jesus’ explicit prohibition of divorce back into early Israelite society. Moses does not tell us in general terms what God thinks of divorce. We do know that the Law never approves it explicitly, and does condemn some specific instances of it. If the Law approves of divorce in general, then it differs not only from the New Testament but also from later portions of the Old Testament. It seems preferable to understand that Israel at Sinai has problems that are far more pressing than divorce, and so the Law focuses on these questions, treating divorce only in specific situations. The argument that prohibiting divorce in some situations approves it in all others is only valid if we assume that Moses’s Law is exhaustive. Clearly, it is not. What it condemns explicitly, we know is wrong. What it commands explicitly, we know is right. There are some things, including divorce in general, that it neither condemns nor commands. On these subjects we must await the revelation of later Scriptures. When that revelation comes, it clearly condemns divorce, and we should not soften that condemnation by pretending that the silence of earlier Scriptures contradicts it.

LMF] Note the repeated error of attributing laws to Moses which should be attributed to Yahweh. Moses was only Yahweh’s penman.

4.4.2 How did the Law Terminate Marriages?
The means by which the Law terminates a marriage is death by stoning. This verdict is very severe to the guilty, but unlike modern divorces, it leaves no nagging questions about whether the innocent spouse may remarry. The survivor is not divorced, but widowed. The old union is over and done as only death can make it.

LMF] Here Parunak is thinking only of divorce for fornication. Because the penalty was death, a remarriage after the stoning could never be an adulterous relationship.

5.2.1 The Grammar of Deut. 24:1-4 The simplest reading of Deut. 24:1-4 is as one law rather than three. The prophet Jeremiah alludes to this passage in his prophecy. He knows biblical Hebrew much better than any modern scholar, for he speaks it as his native tongue. It is interesting that he paraphrases the law as a single command, not as three: If a man puts away his wife, and she goes from him, and becomes another man’s, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? (Jer. 3:1)

In English, the words "if" (or "when") and "then" show the difference between the one law interpretation and the three law interpretation. In Hebrew, the difference between a condition (an "if-then" sentence) and an ordinary sentence is much more subtle. Hebrew does have several words for "if," but most conditions do not use a special word to introduce the "then" clause. Other features, such as word order or verb tense, sometimes show where the "if" stops and the "then" begins. It is even possible to have a condition in which the "if" clause and the "then" clause can be distinguished only by meaning. Perhaps the spoken language marked these with special intonation, but we cannot detect this from our written text.

Hebrew words for "if" occur three times in Deut. 24:1-4, but they do not correspond to the three conditions in the three law interpretation. The first occurs at the beginning of 24:1, "when a man takes a wife ...." The second is in the middle of 24:1,

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14 What Deut 24:4 does convey is Yahweh’s explicit disapproval of divorce.
15 God does convey His hatred for divorce by banning reconciliation.
16 The condemnation is implicit in the ban on reconciliation.
"if she does not find favor in his eyes ...." The third is in 24:3, "when the latter husband dies ...." There is no "if" at the beginning of 24:2 or 24:3. Furthermore, of the three "then"s required by the three law interpretation, only the one at the beginning of 24:4 corresponds to a distinctive Hebrew construction. Hebrew conditions are not always marked clearly. The three law interpretation is not impossible. However, there is nothing in the text to suggest that it is correct. We will see it there only if we bring it with us to the text. If we follow only the clues that the text gives us, we will read 24:1-3 as one long "if" and 24:4a as the "then."

LMF] Parunak is more helpful when it comes to these kinds of problems.

A Divorce that Doesn't Work.—The first law seems to conflict with the third law, forbidding reconciliation of the first couple. If the first marriage is really gone, there is no relationship between the woman and her first husband. He and she should be like any other man and woman in Israel. If the second husband dies and they wish to remarry, they should be able to marry one another as well as anybody else. . . . Some sort of tie remains between the woman and her first husband. The divorce of verse 1 cannot obliterate this relationship. If we think Deut. 24:1 sanctions divorce as a way to undo marriage, then 24:4a is strange, for it implies that the marriage is not completely undone after all.

A Marriage that Defiles.—The second law expressly permits the woman to remarry, but the third law says that she is "defiled" as a result of remarrying. "Defiled" in this context indicates that entering the second marriage is a sexual sin. Leviticus 18 uses the word to describe the sexual sins of the Canaanites. "You shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her” (Lev. 18:20). “Do not defile yourselves in any of these things, for in all these things the nations are defiled, the nations that I cast out from before you” (Lev. 18:24). “You shall keep my ordinance, so that you do not commit any of the abominable customs that were committed before you, and so that you do not defile yourselves in them” (Lev. 18:30).

In the three law interpretation, the third law says that the wife defiles herself in the second marriage, and thus views the consummation of that marriage as sexual sin. Yet the second law explicitly allows her to remarry. Thus the second law and the third law, like the first law and the third law, are contradictory. If there are three laws in Deut. 24:1-4, they contradict one another. The one law interpretation has no such problem. It sanctions neither divorce nor remarriage, but only tells what to do in one particular combination of these events.

5.2.3 How does Moses explain the Law?
The explanation does fit well with the one law interpretation of Deuteronomy 24. The first verse is not God’s way to dissolve a marriage, but only men’s attempt to do so. People cannot completely untie the knot that God has tied. A special relationship remains between man and wife, in spite of their best efforts to dissolve it. It is the persistence of this special relationship that makes reconciliation so abominable. The explanation in Deut. 24:4 is the only verse in the Bible that uses the word “sinning” to describe “the land.” Jeremiah once again can help us understand this law, for he uses a synonym when he paraphrases it: “Shall not that land be greatly polluted?” (Jer. 3:1). Among other passages, Num. 35:31-33 talks about the pollution of the land. Though the specific causes of the pollution are different in Numbers and in

17 This is correct. The reconciliation cannot constitute the abomination, because reconciliation is actively encouraged by Paul.
18 This is incorrect. The ban on reconciliation is a punishment for the cruelty inflicted on the wife in the first place.
Deuteronomy, both passages talk about averting pollution. The greater detail in Numbers can help us understand Deuteronomy.

**How is Adultery like Murder?** — Adultery, as well as murder, “pollutes the land:” “She polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees” (Jer. 3:9).

Under the one law interpretation of Deuteronomy 24, divorce and remarriage is really adultery, for the divorce has no divine sanction, but is entirely man-made. In spite of the “certificate of divorce” that the first husband gives the woman in Deut. 24:1, she is still his wife. When she marries the second man, she commits adultery against the first, and threatens the land with pollution.

What Parunak overlooked here is that Deut 24:1 gives us a *description* of a divorce whose origin lies in some non-sexual fault found in the wife. Now, according to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:32, if a man divorces his wife for any reason (fornication or non-fornication), he, and not his wife, will be held responsible for her post-divorce sexual experiences, that is, her remarriages. She will not be punished, her husband who divorced will be held responsible for her sins. She will be held accountable for any sins of fornication which she committed before he divorced her. So the cut-off point is the point at which he divorced her. Consequently, the man in Deut 24:1 who initiated the divorce, and who caused his wife to commit adultery against him, cannot punish her for her adultery.

….. Now the reasoning behind the law of reconciliation is clear. A husband may take back his divorced wife if she has not remarried, for the divorce is only a man-made institution and does not change their union in God’s eyes. However, once she marries someone else, she commits adultery against her first husband. Now he is responsible to prosecute her sin. If he accepts her back, he effectively pardons the sin. Yet he has no authority to pardon her, for it is God’s law, not his, that demands satisfaction. By refusing to satisfy that law, he leaves the land polluted with adultery.

The explanation that Moses gives for Deut. 24:1-4 thus presents a paradox if the passage sanctions divorce. If the passage only forbids reconciliation, the explanation makes sense.

LMF] The statement, “Yet he has no authority to pardon her, for it is God’s law, not his, that demands satisfaction.” is wrong. It is wrong because Yahweh uses the term “an indecent matter,” to describe a non-sexual, non-capital punishment sin as the excuse the hard-hearted Hebrew used to divorce his wife. He should have forgiven her 70 times 7, seven times in a day, but he had a heart of stone.

**5.4 Wenham’s Explanation of Deut. 24**

I explain Deut. 24:1-4 as forbidding reconciliation after remarriage on the grounds that the first husband has a divine duty to prosecute his remarried wife for adultery. This interpretation seems to be a new addition to the collection of several that have grown up around the passage. (For summaries of earlier views see Yaron 1966; Heth 1982:52-56.) The latest view to be expounded, and one favored by several recent writers (Steele and Ryrie 1983:26-27; Kaiser 1983:202-203) is that proposed by Gordon Wenham 1979. He observes that the reasons given in Deut. 24:4 for prohibiting the remarriage are characteristic of the prohibitions against incest in Leviticus 18 and 20. He argues that marriage binds a man and woman into a relationship as strong as that between parent and child, a virtual blood relationship. “The result is paradoxical [sic]. A man may not remarry his former wife, because his

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19 This is correct.

20 But her initial sin is not adultery. It is a non-sexual excuse that is used to get rid of her. She is then forced by him into adultery through another marriage to stay alive.
first marriage to her made her into one of his closest relatives” (Wenham 1979:40), and the reconciliation would therefore be incestuous.

LMF] Wenham’s view is internally unsound.

6.2 The Law of the Hebrew Concubine

The first law describes a free-born female Israelite whose father has sold her as a servant, and whose owner has taken her as a wife either for himself or for his son.

“And if a man sells his daughter as a handmaid, she shall not go out as the menservants go out. If she should be displeasing to her master, who appointed her for himself, then he shall cause her to be redeemed. To an unfamiliar people he shall have no authority to sell her, in dealing treacherously with her. And if he should appoint her for his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he takes another for him, her meat, her clothing, and her ointment he shall not diminish. And if he does not do these three for her, she shall go out gratis, without charge” (Exodus 21:7-11).

LMF] He has correctly translated the three terms, especially “ointment.”

The law has three provisions, each specifying how the relation between the master and the servant may end.

1. In contrast to ordinary Israelite servitude, the relation does not expire automatically after six years.
2. The woman may not be sold out of her husband’s family. She may only be “redeemed” and thus restored to her original family.
3. If she is abused, she wins her freedom at no cost.

6.2.1 Expiration of Indenture

The words, “She shall not go out as the menservants do,” allude to the law in Exod. 21:1-6, just before this law. The earlier law shows that one Israelite cannot own another absolutely. The servitude is more like an indenture, with a fixed term. If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve for six years, and in the seventh he shall go out as a free man, gratis (Exodus 21:1). After six years, the master must set the servant free, unless the servant wishes to remain in his master’s household.

In general, the principle of release after six years applies to both men and women servants, as Deut. 15:12 shows. The law we are studying now gives one exception to the six year release. If a man “appoints” his female servant for himself or his son, she “shall not go out as the menservants do” (Exod. 21:7), “in the seventh [year]” (Exod. 21:1). A man may not take advantage of a female servant, and then discard her. If he takes her, he elevates her from servant to family member. Servants leave after six years. Members of the family are permanent.

6.5.3 The Third Obligation

The master is obligated to provide the girl with three things: food (specifically, meat), clothing, and מָנָתָן ʼonātāh. This last term appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. Following the Septuagint, most versions understand the term to refer to the woman’s conjugal rights.

The traditional rendering has two weaknesses. First, it is usually justified by deriving the word from מָן “to afflict, humble,” a decidedly negative word that sometimes refers to rape. The text obviously seeks the woman’s interests, and it seems inconsistent with these to require the master to “afflict” her sexually. One might derive the term from מָן “to dwell,” but this root does not have the same sexual overtones in Hebrew that “live with” does in English. Second, there is no parallel elsewhere in the Old Testament, or indeed in ancient Near Eastern literature, to suggest that a woman has a “right” to sexual attention from her husband.
Citations of 1 Cor. 7:3 are quite beside the point, since the cultural context is entirely different, and nothing in 1 Cor. 7 would suggest that Paul has Exod. 21:10 in mind. My interpretation follows S. Paul, who shows that many ancient Near Eastern law codes identify three things that must be provided for a dependent person (such as a slave, a deserted wife, a dependent sister, or a dependent parent): food, clothing, and oil. These three things were viewed as the necessities of ancient life, and had to be provided for a person who was otherwise without support. Exod. 21:10 describes the same social context as these parallels (maintenance of a dependent person), two of the three items are the same, the third item in Exodus is otherwise unknown in the Old Testament, and there is no other parallel available to explain the Exodus triplet. The conclusion seems unavoidable that Moses is reflecting a contemporary notion of the basic requirements of life, and that sexual attention is not one of them.

6.6 The Translation of Deut. 21:10-14

English translations begin the apodosis of the first conditional at 21:12, with the effect, “If you see a beautiful captive, then you shall bring her into your house.” This analysis recommends the practice of taking captives as concubines. The Hebrew text contains no indication of a break at the start of verse 12. The suffix conjugation verbs with waw consecutive that begin in 21:10 continue through נִקה in 21:13. Only with the disjunctive clause ... נָקַחַת in 21:13 do we come upon the command itself. All that goes before simply indicates the normal circumstances of war and the expected behavior of a female captive. The law does not recommend that warriors take their captives as concubines, but demands that if the captor decides on such a course of action, he must wait for the woman’s mourning to run a reasonable course before taking her. The law is not one of the standard Hebrew conditional forms. It is misleading to render it with a standard English conditional such as “if ... then” or “when ... then.” Hebrew can use its common conditional particle בָּעָשׁ without a formal apodosis, but English does not enjoy the same freedom with “when” or “if.” Using English “when” for the introductory בָּעָשׁ makes it impossible to avoid an earlier apodosis. So I have rendered the waw consecutive chain as a hypothetical situation, “It may happen that.” Even so, it becomes monotonous in English, so I break the sentence when the subject shifts from the captor to the captive. The important point to keep in mind is that there is no command before verse 14.

CHAPTER 9 DIVORCE IN OUR LORD’S SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus raises several practical questions about godly living. One of these is the matter of divorce (Matt. 5:32).

“Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.”

These verses are puzzling, because the clause about fornication applies only to the divorced wife and not to her second husband. If her divorce results from fornication, she appears to be protected from committing adultery, but her future spouse is not! The fornication clause complicates things. “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.” This suggests that whoever dismisses his wife for the cause of fornication will not cause her to commit adultery. Why not? Has fornication somehow dissolved the marriage bond, so that she may remarry without being guilty of adultery?

The real puzzle about the fornication clause is that it does not apply equally to the woman and her second husband. It prevents her from committing adultery, but offers him no such protection. Why is fornication so unbalanced in its effects on the woman and her future suitors? To solve this puzzle, we must consider the context in which the Lord presents it. He is disputing the teaching of the Pharisees on the subject of divorce, and he uses a play on words to emphasize an underlying inconsistency in their thought.

LMF] Parunak creates his own problem because he does not see the point of Jesus’ teaching in 5:32. He is attempting to make sense of an exception clause that Erasmus slipped into the text at 19:9, which has coloured his reading of 5:32.

9.3.3 The Answer to the Puzzle
We now know two important facts about ἀπολύω “dismiss.”
1. It is used in the New Testament, but never in the Old Testament, to describe marital separation. Thus it attracts the Lord’s attention when the Pharisees use it to paraphrase the Mosaic Law on divorce.
2. In both Testaments, it can mean “dismiss from life.”

If we keep these two meanings in mind as we read Matt. 5:32, the puzzle about fornication becomes much clearer. We can now understand how fornication prevents a dismissed wife from committing adultery.

"Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery."

LMF: In effect his translation is, “Whoever dismisses his wife, except [he stones her to death] for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.”

Parunak: There are two ways in which a man may “dismiss” his wife. He may “divorce” her, putting her out of his house. In this case he causes her to commit adultery, for she will be without support unless she remarries. But if she is guilty of fornication, he has another option. Deuteronomy 22 says that a married woman who commits fornication should be stoned to death. (Recall our study in Chapter 4) If she is guilty of fornication, he may “dismiss” her from life by having her tried and stoned. In this case he does not cause her to commit adultery, for she is dead and so cannot remarry.

The law of Deuteronomy 22 prescribes stoning not only for adultery (unfaithfulness after betrothal or marriage), but also for uncleanness before marriage that is concealed from the bridegroom. The word “fornication” covers both of these cases, and so the Lord uses it in his instruction.

The second part of the Lord’s teaching is also clear.

“And whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.”

Remarriage is possible only when the woman is “dismissed” in such a way as to leave her alive. Whenever the woman survives her “dismissal,” remarriage is adultery, both for her and for her new spouse. When a woman is “dismissed” by stoning because of fornication, though, the question of remarriage does not arise. The Lord thus rejects the Pharisees’ notion that God sanctions divorce. Divorce and remarriage is adultery. By introducing the case of fornication, with its associated penalty of stoning, he emphasizes that only death can break the marriage bond.

LMF] What Parunak fails to do is explain how a modern wife who commits fornication is put to death by stoning. It cannot be done literally, so what is his solution. He has none. Nowhere in his book does he ever give the modern equivalent of capital punishment in the NT.

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22 By this he means that the law of the husband (Rom 7:2) has been broken, so that he is free to marry whoever he chooses ‘only in the Lord.’

23 But only in the case of those who divorce for non-fornication reasons.
NOTES

9.4 Further Evidence for “Depart” = “Die”
The assertion that ἀπολύω “depart” can describe death is central to the interpretation of the fornication clause advanced in this chapter. In addition to the biblical examples discussed above, several passages in secular Greek clearly show this usage for ἀπολύω and its cognates.

9.5 Other Explanations of the Fornication Clause
Heth summarizes seven major views of the fornication clauses in Matt. 5:32; 19:9. All differ from the view expounded in this book. The five major variants are conveniently summarized in Steele and Ryrie. For a more thorough discussion, see Heth and Wenham.
The main differences among the views are in the interpretation of porneia “fornication” and the scope of the exceptive clause (whether it authorizes only divorce, divorce and remarriage, or something altogether different). The views agree with one another, and differ with my interpretation, in understanding the “putting away” as a legal separation that leaves both people alive.
LMF] Parunak defines the penalty for non-fornication as “legal separation that leaves both people alive.” Would the penalty for fornication be a “legal separation that leaves one person dead.”?

9.5.1 The Meaning of porneia
Such an interpretation places Matthew in conflict with the other Synoptics and with Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 7 claims dominical authority for his stand that divorce and remarriage are absolutely forbidden.

9.5.2 The Scope of the Clause
As discussed in this chapter, the scope of the exceptive clause is the major problem associated with most of these proposals, and provides the strongest motivation for my view. Three scopes of the exception have been suggested. All but the third lead to dilemmas, unless the “putting away” is by means of executing one partner.
As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 11, both of Matthew’s citations consist of two statements. The first statement is qualified by the exception clause; the second is not, at least in the simplest parse of the verses. The second statement condemns any subsequent husband of the divorced woman for adultery. The first statement has two parts. It forbids the first husband to divorce his wife, and condemns either her (5:32) or him (19:9) in the event of remarriage.

In the first view of the scope of the exception, it applies to both parts of the first statement, thus excusing both the divorce and the remarriage. In 19:9 it excuses the remarriage of the first husband, while in 5:32 it excuses the remarriage of the wife. In 5:32, this view leads to the puzzle with which we introduced this chapter, for the second statement unconditionally accuses the second husband of adultery. That is, the adulterous woman can remarry without adultery, but her new husband cannot!

27 The penalty for fornication is “putting away” which is said to be “by means of executing one partner.” What form does this take in the modern world?
Parunak acknowledged that: Those who hold this view recognize the inconsistency, and insist that the sense of the exception carries over from the first statement to the second. However, this extension clearly stretches the grammar of the verse. In the second view of the scope of the exception, it applies only to the first half of the first statement. On this view, fornication permits the husband to divorce his wife, but in any case she commits adultery if she remarries. 5:32 is again a problem. I say to you, “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.” The first husband “causes her to commit adultery” by leaving her without support, so that she must marry someone else if she is to survive, and this dilemma is the reason that the Lord gives in this verse for not divorcing. The exception clause can justify divorce only if it can remove the danger of adultery, yet this view holds that the exception covers the divorce without the remarriage. Thus, whether the exception applies to the entire first statement or only to the first part of the first statement, we reach a contradiction. The position that I advocate in this chapter avoids the problem entirely. The question of whether the exception justifies remarriage or not does not arise, because the manner in which the separation takes place makes remarriage impossible.

LMF] Here he is thinking only of divorce for fornication, and its punishment of stoning, which leaves the husband free to remarry without committing adultery against a dead wife.

The third view of the exception’s scope also evades the dilemma, essentially by referring the exception to the governing “I say to you” rather than to any portion of what is said. This view, characteristic of the Augustinian or preteritiv interpretation of the texts, understands porneia to refer to the “matter of uncleanness” debated by the rabbis. The Pharisees try to trap the Lord into committing himself one way or the other on this celebrated question, but he refuses to follow their lead, and directs their attention instead to the essential immorality of divorce. We might paraphrase his reply, “Whoever puts away his wife—never mind what the ‘matter of uncleanness’ is—causes her to commit adultery.” The Augustinian view of the scope of the clause avoids the grammatical problems faced by the other views, and its interpretation of porneia is sufficiently Jewish to account for the exclusion of the clause from the other Synoptics. Among the earlier views, I would prefer it. However, it is simpler to apply the exceptive clause to its immediate context than to the metalevel “I say to you,” and the new interpretation allows this smoother parsing of the sentence.

9.6 The Lord Jesus’ Use of Figures

My solution to the problem of the fornication clause proposes that the Lord uses one word, ἀπολύω, with a double sense. When we read the verses without the exception clause, the word means “divorce.” In the case of fornication, though, it means “kill.” Readers may reasonably ask whether there is precedent for the Lord’s use of such wordplay, especially since it seems to obscure his instruction. LMF] I think readers would be more interested to know how the wife who committed fornication is to be killed today, so that her husband can remarry without committing adultery!

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28 It may be possible to give a word two distinct, even contradictory, meanings, but this will require two distinct clauses or sentences to bring out their meanings. Here he is proposing a single word used with two different meanings at the same time.
9.6.2 What Is the Figure?
The full form of the verses would begin, “Whoever dismisses his wife, unless [he 
dismisses her] for fornication, ...” The second occurrence of “dismisses” drops out in 
the surface form of the sentence, but the sentence is understood as though it were 
present. Our interpretation of the exception also relies on a second understood 
“dismisses.” The difference in meaning is really between these two occurrences of 
the verb: “Whoever dismisses [= divorces] his wife, unless he dismisses [= executes] 
her for fornication, ...”

10.2.1 The Pharisees Challenge the Lord
Moses who wrote Deut. 24:1-4 also recorded the institution of marriage in Genesis: 
"From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. Because of this a 
man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and they two shall 
be one flesh. So then they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has 
joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:6-9).

10.2.2 The Lord Takes Control
The Pharisees … carelessly drop their guard, and show their real attitude toward the 
passage by calling it a command. Matthew records this part of the conversation. 
[The Pharisees] say unto him, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of 
divorcement, and to dismiss away?” He says unto them, “Moses because of your 
hardness of heart allowed you to dismiss your wives, but from the beginning it was 
not so” (Matt. 19:7,8).
The Lord answers, not by opposing Moses, but by opposing their interpretation. 
They claim, “Moses commanded.” He responds, “Moses allowed.” Moses’s 
legislation does not command divorce. It only makes allowance for it, by telling 
people what to do if they are divorced.

... The Lord has taken control of the conversation. From this position of strength he 
delivers his teaching:
And I say to you, “Whoever dismisses his wife, except for fornication, and marries 
another, commits adultery, and he who marries a dismissed woman commits 
adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

... The Lord’s teaching on divorce here is similar to that in the Sermon on the Mount. 
He again uses the Pharisees’ word for divorce, meaning literally “dismiss.” He again 
says that it is adultery to marry a dismissed woman. Going beyond the Sermon on 
the Mount, he adds that the husband who dismisses her and marries someone else 
commits adultery, unless he dismisses her for fornication. Once again, we 
understand from Deuteronomy 22 that in the case of fornication she is dead, and 
there is no danger of adultery.
LMF] In what sense would a modern wife be dead? With no death penalty to end 
hers life, what if she remarries? The Law does not cover this loop-hole. The refusal to 
stone her, and substitute divorce in its place, is contrary to the will of God, but how 
many such divorced and remarried women are accepted as full members of 
Christian congregations?

10.3.1 The Disciples Ask about Remarriage
... Mark does not mention the exception for fornication. In the next chapter, we will 
see that Mark may leave it out because his audience would not understand it. 
LMF] Mark does not include the Pharisees’ words “for any cause,” which Matthew 
did, and so Matthew was obliged to include a reply to these words.

CHAPTER 11 SUMMARIZING THE LORD'S TEACHING ON DIVORCE
The Lord’s four sayings on divorce sound similar to one another. They are made up of similar pieces, such as “Whoever dismisses his wife ...,” “except for fornication ...,” and “commits adultery ....” No one saying has all of the pieces, and no piece appears in all four sayings. The Lord’s sayings about divorce are like salads assembled at a salad bar with five ingredients. Each ingredient is a different idea about divorce. Each saying combines two or three different ingredients.

11.2 Interpreting the Pieces of the Sayings
We have identified five ingredients in the salad bar, five main ideas from which the Lord builds his sayings. Now we can look at each ingredient by itself.

The Divorcee (A) – In Matt. 5:32, the Lord teaches that divorce causes the divorced woman to commit adultery by remarrying. He takes it for granted that a divorcee will remarry, for she needs a husband to support her. When she does remarry, she commits adultery. It does not matter whether her first husband was justified in divorcing her or not. Perhaps he abused her and made her life miserable, then discarded her for someone else. Still, she cannot remarry innocently. In God’s eyes, she is still his wife and he is still her husband. Furthermore, the first husband shares in the guilt of her adulterous remarriage, because he opened the door to that marriage by divorcing her in the first place.

LMF] This is correct.

The Fornication Clause (B) – Both times that Matthew cites the Lord’s sayings on divorce, he includes the fornication clause. Furthermore, only Matthew cites the clause. Mark and Luke never mention it. Why does it occur only part of the time? Perhaps the difference goes back to the Lord himself. No two Gospels cite exactly the same saying. Matthew quotes the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s words to the Pharisees in Perea. Mark quotes the Lord’s later explanation to the disciples in Perea, while Luke records an entirely different conversation. The Lord may have used the phrase in two instances, and not in the other two. We are at a loss, though, to know why he would not use it every time. … There is no clear motive for the Lord to include the saying one time but not the other. Two facts suggest another explanation. The two facts are:
1. The fornication clause assumes that the reader or hearer understands the laws of fornication defined in Deuteronomy 22. Only in the light of these laws can we understand how a woman can be “dismissed” for fornication and not commit adultery by remarrying.
2. Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels. It presents the Lord to a Jewish audience as the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Mark and Luke are written to more general audiences, audiences that include Greek and Roman readers who will not understand the Old Testament very well. Matthew includes the fornication clause because his Jewish readers should know Deuteronomy 22 and catch the Lord’s pun on “dismiss” [meaning ‘divorce’ and ‘kill’]. Gentile readers, not knowing that the Law requires a fornicator to be stoned, might misunderstand the clause and think that it justifies remarriage in the case of fornication. This is exactly what the Lord does not teach. Mark and Luke, keeping their Gentile audience in mind, avoid possible misunderstanding by leaving the clause out.

The Divorcing Husband (D) – Matt. 19:9, Mark 10:11, and Luke 16:18 agree that the man who divorces his wife still belongs to her, and is not free to remarry. In spite of a man’s best efforts to break the marriage bond, it remains intact before God. It does not matter how miserable the wife makes the husband, or how grievously she has

29 By this he means executed by stoning.
wronged him. He is hers as surely as she is his. Fornication may separate them, if it is dealt with according to the Law, for then one spouse will die. But it is death, not a man-made divorce, that ends the union. By omitting the fornication clause, Mark and Luke warn us that Gentile responses to fornication, such as separation without capital punishment, do not justify remarriage.

Each component of the Lord’s teaching emphasizes that marriages are made in heaven, but divorce is a purely human product. Every party involved in divorce and remarriage is guilty of adultery. The Lord condemns the mate who initiates the divorce, and (if remarriage follows the separation) the one who is put away and the second partner. The fornication clause seems to make an exception. But it was only recorded for Jewish audiences, and they should know from their own Scriptures that fornication leads, not to divorce, but to death.

**CHAPTER 12 PAUL’S TEACHING ON DIVORCE**

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives the most extended discussion of marriage in the New Testament. Most readers think of this chapter as the one where Paul tells people to remain single if they possibly can. One verse even seems to give people married to unbelievers an excuse to end their marriage and begin another: “But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such cases” (1 Cor. 7:15). When we examine this verse in its context, we see that it makes provision for separation under special circumstances. It does not allow remarriage.

- **The entire chapter** is often misunderstood. Its purpose is not to urge people to remain single, but to encourage them to consider marriage.
  
  LMF] This is a misleading interpretation. Paul is clear in the directive, “Remain as you were when called.” If you are single, remain single; if you are married, remain married. That is the prism through which the light of Paul’s revelation shines.

- **The paragraph** containing verse 15 encourages people in bad marriages to persevere, and takes away some excuses they might have for seeking a divorce.
  
  LMF] Correct.

… His opening words are a summary of the Corinthians’ position: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” There is something noble and exalted about the idea of Christians devoting themselves wholly to the service of God. In practice, though, this idea will not work. Celibacy does not quench physical appetites. It only removes the legitimate channel for their expression. In theory, undivided devotion to God looks better than the distraction of marriage.

LMF] I think the opening words are Paul’s and extracted from his previous (lost) letter.

**12.2.1 Unmixed Homes, Verses 10-11**

Paul first addresses believers married to other believers. To the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, “Let not the wife depart from her husband. But if she should depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Paul traces his instruction to the Lord’s teaching in the Gospels, which is in turn an exposition of the Law of Moses. The Law allows marriages only between two Israelites, and the Lord’s words also assume a Jewish context, in which both partners claim to be under the old covenant. So they are a good basis for Paul’s teaching to couples where both members profess salvation under the new covenant.
Paul adds nothing new to what we have already seen in the Gospels. Neither the husband nor the wife should initiate a separation. Even if they do separate, they are not free to remarry, except to one another.

LMF] I disagree that Paul addresses believers married to other believers. Paul is addressing mixed marriages here.

The Unhappy Spouse — ...Believers must never separate from other believers. If one spouse is unsaved, the believer should persevere in the marriage. If the unbeliever seeks a separation, the Christian should pray for the salvation of the unbeliever, and take advantage of any opportunity for a peaceful restoration of the marriage. Paul’s instructions about reconciliation strongly suggest that verse 15 does not authorize remarriage for the believer. If the believer marries someone else, reconciliation becomes impossible, because of the requirements of Deuteronomy 24, and the believer’s channel of influence on the unbeliever is broken.

LMF] This is wrong. Reconciliation is always on while both spouses are still alive, because nothing can come between them—not another partner, not a certificate.

12.3 Verse 15 AND Verse 39
“...The wife is bound by the Law as long as her husband lives. But if her husband is dead, she is free to marry whomever she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).
In this verse, being “bound” to a husband and being “free to marry” are opposites. If a woman is bound, she may not marry. If she is not bound, she may marry. According to 1 Cor. 7:15, the believer is “not enslaved” if the unbeliever leaves. Is “not enslaved” the same as “not bound”? Does the deserted believer share the freedom of the widowed believer to remarry?
Many English translations emphasize the similarity of the two verses. In the AV, ASV, and NASB, the abandoned spouse is not under “bondage,” while the widow is no longer “bound.” The RSV and the NIV make the similarity even stronger, using “bound” in both verses.
In Greek, the two words are quite distinct. In verse 39, “bound” is the Greek word deo, the same verb that Paul uses in Rom. 7:2 in a similar context:
“The woman who is under a husband is bound by the Law to her living husband. But if her husband should die, she is released from the law of her husband.”
The concrete sense of deo is “to bind or tie.” The death of one spouse unties this bond, dissolves the union, and leaves the survivor free to remarry.
The verb in verse 15 is douloo meaning literally “to enslave.” This verse is the only place in the Bible that the word describes marriage. In other contexts, douloo and related words emphasize that one person submits to, obeys, and seeks the pleasure of another. For example, Paul describes himself as a “slave [a word derived from douloo] of Jesus Christ” in Rom. 1:1, and urges believers to “present your members slaves to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom. 6:19). So, in 1 Cor. 7:15, the word teaches that in a healthy marriage each spouse should serve the other’s well-being. It emphasizes the daily duties of marriage, not the “marriage bond.” When the unbeliever walks out of a mixed marriage, these daily duties end. If an unbelieving wife leaves, her husband does not need to keep her car running. If an unbelieving husband leaves, his wife does not need to consult him on major decisions.
When the unbeliever departs, the believer is no longer enslaved to the spouse. The human duties end. But 1 Cor. 7:15 says nothing about the bond that marriage establishes before God. Verse 39 does discuss that bond, using a different Greek word to describe a unity that it later says ends with death. Because Paul uses different terms in the two verses, we should not assume that they describe the same concept.
LMF] Correct.

12.4 Does Paul Allow Divorce and Remarriage?
Contrary to popular opinion, 1 Corinthians 7 is not a manifesto for bachelors and old maids. It recognizes both celibacy and marriage as gifts of God. It commands believing couples to stay together, and urges people married to unbelievers to do all they can to preserve their marriages. When we understand the chapter in this way, verse 15 takes on a new light. It does not authorize an easy way for people to get out from under the carnal burden of marriage. It simply recognizes that if an unbeliever seeks a separation, the believer may not be able to do anything about it. When the human union is broken, the believer cannot discharge the duties of marriage, and should not feel guilty about those duties. An abandoned believer is no longer enslaved to the departed spouse. But such a believer may not remarry, for only death breaks the bond that ties man and wife together before God.

12.5.1 1 Cor. 7:11: "Remain Unmarried"

In the instructions to believing couples, Paul writes, “To the married I exhort—not I, but the Lord: Let not the wife depart from the husband. But if she should depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to the husband” (1 Cor. 7:10,11). Because Paul calls the woman “unmarried,” Adams (1980:40-44) argues that her departure is a full divorce rather than a separation. Paul endows this statement with the full authority of the Lord. So, Adams concludes, God himself recognizes the result of divorce as being “unmarried,” and we cannot speak of divorced people as “still married in God’s eyes.”

So far as civil authority is concerned, the departure probably is divorce, not just a temporary separation. The verb χωρισθείν “to depart” is the passive of χωρίζω, and is used in the papyri as a legal term for divorce (BAG sub voce). Furthermore, the result is certainly the state of being unmarried so far as secular custom is concerned, for that is both the purpose of divorce and the plain statement of the text. The point at issue is whether or not God recognizes that state. If both God and the state recognize the couple as unmarried, then Paul’s exhortation is confusing, for he enjoins the divorced wife, with an authority he attributes to the Lord, to “remain unmarried.” What is the reason for this injunction?

Adams argues that Paul is seeking reconciliation between the partners, and because Deut. 24:1-4 blocks reconciliation after remarriage, remarriage must be prevented. But Paul does not cite Deuteronomy as the basis for his ruling. He cites the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (as Adams recognizes). In the Gospel passages about divorce, the Lord does not raise the issue of reconciliation. In fact, he does not even say, "Don't remarry." He does say, "If you remarry, you commit adultery."

The Lord Jesus recognizes that divorces happen, and so does Paul.

The Lord condemns remarriage to another person as adultery, and Paul, claiming the Lord’s authority, also condemns remarriage. Because Paul explicitly cites the Lord, it is clear that he is thinking of adultery, not technical irreconcilability, as the motive for his command, “Remain unmarried.” Paul is echoing the Lord’s teaching that a divorced person who marries someone else commits adultery. What, then, does “unmarried” mean? Certainly, civil custom considers a divorced couple unmarried. If God also does, why is it adultery to remarry? Paul forbids remarriage. In support, he explicitly cites the Lord’s teaching, where the reason is adultery. Adultery is only a problem if a union still exists before God. This understanding of the text leads to the conclusion that the Scriptures can call a couple “unmarried” even if that state is only true in a civil sense and not in a spiritual one.

The Bible does sometimes describe events according to their outward appearance. For example, Gen. 3:20 states that Eve is “the mother of every living [person],” plainly referring to the mass of mankind that issues from her. Yet all of them are born “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), and many never know spiritual life at all. The only life they know is physical, yet the Bible does not hesitate to call them “living.” For another example, the Lord in Matt. 23:9 instructs the disciples, “Do not call [anyone] on earth your father, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” Yet Matt. 4:21 describes James and John as being “in the boat with Zebedee their father,” and Matt. 10:37 includes “father” as among those whom believers should love less than they do the Lord. In the most complete sense only God is our Father, yet the Bible sometimes uses the word in a more superficial sense to describe human parents. Words sometimes have a secular sense and a spiritual sense. When they do, the Bible may use either sense, and only the context can show the meaning in a particular passage. The context in 1 Cor. 7:10, 11 indicates that the kind of “unmarried” state in view is one that prohibits remarriage. That is, civil custom recognizes the original marriage as dissolved, but God considers a union still to be in effect between the original partners. LMF] Correct.

So it is not clear that “the release in view [in 1 Cor. 7:27] can mean only ... release by divorce.” It might very well mean release by death, as a believer begs God to remove an intolerable spouse or to be himself removed. In fact, when we take the larger context of the chapter into account, the possibility that Paul is referring to death rather than divorce grows into a strong probability. LMF] Very unlikely.

12.5.2 1 Cor. 7:27, 28: Bound and Released
.... The second section illustrates this ambivalence by showing that both the married and the unmarried are subject to care and distraction, which the believer is to avoid. Care (worry) for the things of the Lord is no better than care for the things of the world. Both are wrong.
LMF] He has got it wrong here. Jesus could not have done His Father’s work if He had been married. He is the supreme model of what it means to be devoted to God.

6. Paul’s Point — At the center, Paul reaffirms his central principle. Christians should be without worry. Whether they marry or not should depend on which state leaves them most free from care, not which state is more “holy.” LMF] But the unmarried state is the less distracting.

Second, the overall structure of the passage links 7:27,28 with 7:39-40, where the only release in view is by death. Since Paul is probably thinking of death in 7:27, 7:28 does not give explicit permission for remarriage after divorce. LMF] Misguided.

We must remember that while seeking escape through death is not unthinkable, it is also not spiritual. Paul exhorts his readers, “Do not seek release.” In helping others, we must know that sometimes they may explore this avenue. For ourselves, we should ask God to solve the problem within marriage, not by breaking it.

PART III: APPLICATION: PRACTICAL MATTERS

CHAPTER 13 SOME PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

• Moses never legislates divorce, but only tells people what to do once it happens (as we saw in Chapter 5).
• The “exception clause” in the Lord’s teaching in Matthew (dealt with in Chapters 9-11) refers to ending a marriage, not by divorce, but by capital punishment. LMF: How does this translate into the modern setting?

• The “Pauline Privilege” of separation from an unbelieving spouse (studied in Chapter 12) does not release the believer from the marriage, but only from certain of its obligations, and in any case is never initiated by the believer. LMF: Correct

13.2 May Divorced People Remarry?
The Bible never authorizes divorce. Yet divorce happens, through the initiative of unbelievers or of misguided believers. Afterwards, the partners sometimes wish to marry others. May they? In Chapter 10, we saw that the Lord Jesus forbids remarriage after divorce. The statements preserved in Mark and Luke are unambiguous. In Matthew, the Lord qualifies his teaching. On the basis of this qualification, some believers allow remarriage in cases of infidelity.

... Many people have suggested that such desertion leaves the believing partner free to remarry. Our study of this text and its context (in Chapter 12) shows that this conclusion is unfounded. Paul does recognize that the believer is free from certain obligations that marriage usually brings.

... In sum, there is no biblical justification for a divorced person to remarry while the original partner remains alive.

13.3 May a Divorced Couple be Reconciled?
After a divorce, the partners may repent and desire to restore their home. ... They may not simply begin living together, for as Christians they are to be subject to the civil authorities (Romans 13), in whose eyes they are no longer married. They should be legally remarried, and then get on with the business of building a Christian home. LMF: They only go back to the courts to reverse a wrong move, which (shamefully) started there.

The situation is different when one partner or the other has married someone else since the divorce. The most direct biblical teaching on the matter is Deuteronomy 24, which forbids any reunion of the original couple. In this case, they should look to the Lord for grace to remain celibate as long as they both live.

LMF: This is wrong. Deut 24 belongs to the old way of living. If one has remarried, they must become single again, so that they can be reconciled.

13.4 Are Marriages between Believers and Unbelievers Binding?
...A legitimate marriage requires civil recognition. In Israel, civil and sacred law are one and the same. That law forbids mixed marriages, so they are not binding. Today, God has separated civil government (the State) from spiritual government (the Church). The Church prohibits mixed marriages, and should discipline its members if they enter them, but the marriages themselves are binding if the State allows them. LMF: Not so, the law of God is higher than the State. If the State legislates for homosexual marriages, they are not marriages. The Church is the supreme authority in matters of faith and morals.

13.5 Can Marriage Problems be “Under the Blood”?
Consider the implications if remarriage were permitted for divorces that take place before salvation but not for those that take place afterward. We would have to conclude that salvation not only forgives the sin, but also dissolves a previously existing marriage bond. Then we would have to conclude that every couple who is
married before salvation should remarry after, and there is no evidence in the Bible that early Christians did anything at all like this. Many things change when one becomes a believer. Marital status — married, single, widowed, divorced — is not one of them.
LMF] Correct.

CHAPTER 14 SHOULD SECOND MARRIAGES BE DISSOLVED?

It is adultery for a divorced person to marry someone else while the previous spouse is still living.30
... In all four Gospel texts on divorce, the Lord uses a verb in the present tense to describe the adultery of remarriage. Greek literature often uses this tense to emphasize continuous action. If the present tense in these verses served this function, the verses would teach that the adultery of a remarriage is a continuing state, not just a single action, and the second marriage would have to end.31
... In the notes, we give technical reasons for understanding the present tense of the verbs in the Lord’s teaching about divorce as general rather than continual.32 The tense does not emphasize that a second marriage is continual adultery, but identifies the teaching as a general statement about divorce, remarriage, and adultery, a statement that is true regardless of the details of how the divorce or remarriage takes place. Thus these passages do not prove that the adultery of remarriage is continual. LMF] This last statement is wishful thinking, because the alternative is too damaging to his theory. This juggling with the present tense is a desperate attempt to shield all those who have remarried after a divorce which was obtained on non-fornication grounds. Parunak’s theology has brought him full circle and nothing has changed. He promised much but delivered nothing. He has emptied Jesus’ teaching of any reforming power.
To the Christian man who hated his wife (Christian or not) over non-sexual matters that he took her to court and obtained a civil divorce dissolving his union with her completely, and then has gone off and married another Christian woman (divorced or not), Parunak tells him he has sinned, but now that he has remarried he can stay with his new wife until death do them part. All he needs to do is repent of his initial sin in divorcing his first wife and all is well. Parunak reassures the new couple that God has approved their remarriage, and will not be demanding that they de-couple their union, or that he be reconciled to his first wife. “This is all in the past,” is Parunak’s parting words to the happy couple.

14.2 What does Rom. 7:3 Say about the Second Marriage?
To some readers, Rom. 7:1-3 suggests that it is adultery to continue in a second marriage after divorce. Translations such as the AV, the NEB, and the RSV especially encourage this view. For example, the AV renders the passage,
“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.”

30 This statement is misleading, because in his view a wife who commits fornication is “executed,” but not literally, so she is still alive. So in Parunak’s world, “It is not adultery for a divorced person to marry someone else while the previous spouse is still living,” on the understanding that the previous spouse has “deceased” in some legal sense.
31 He is thinking here only of divorce for non-fornication issues.
32 This is a purely subjective argument. It has no basis in grammar.
The English phrase “be married to another man” is ambiguous.

LMF] There is nothing ambiguous about it. It says “another man.” He contradicts himself in the fourth paragraph below.

It might mean either “enter into another marriage” or “be in another marriage.” If it means, “be in another marriage,” then continuing in a second marriage after divorce would be adultery, and second marriages should be dissolved to avoid this continuing adultery. If it means, “enter into another marriage,” then the sin consists in the act of remarrying, not the state of being remarried, and there are no grounds for dissolving the second marriage.

LMF] This is an argument dreamed up out of desperation. This is one of those blunders that all false teachers eventually fall into and give away the game. If a man can arrive at this kind of warped thinking, there is no end to what he can get up to. He is not to be trusted—ever.

Paul gives us an important clue to interpreting this paragraph when he tells us that he is writing to those who know the Law. He is not presenting new teaching, but merely emphasizing what the Law of Moses already requires. He chooses his language to bring to mind the Old Testament laws that govern adultery.

One example of this emphasis on Old Testament language is the phrase that describes the woman in Rom. 7:2, “which hath a husband.” This phrase translates the Greek word *hupandros*, literally “under a husband,” which is used in the Greek translation of the canonical Old Testament books only at Num. 5:20. There it describes a woman who is accused of adultery. Because she is “under a husband,” she is guilty if she consorts with someone else. By using this rare word in Rom. 7:2, Paul calls to mind the law of the adultery trial in Numbers 5.

The phrase “be married to another man” is another citation from the OT. It is a precise quotation from the Septuagint of Deut. 24:2, which describes what a woman divorced from a man is very likely to do. She is likely to remarry, to enter into another union. We saw in Chapter 5 that Moses does not excuse her action, but considers her “defiled” as a result of it, and expects the original husband to prosecute her for infidelity. In Deut. 24:2 the phrase emphasizes entering the second union, and we should take it the same way in Rom. 7:3.

The Greek verb “to be” that the Septuagint and Paul use in this expression strengthens this conclusion. Greek has two verbs that the Bible commonly renders “to be.” One describes abstract existence. The other, the one, used here, is closer to the English verb "to become," and emphasizes a change from one state to another. If Paul meant to teach that the state of remarriage (as opposed to its initiation) is adultery, we would expect him to use the other verb. The verb he does use, as well as the source of the entire phrase in the Pentateuch, confirms that Paul is condemning the act of entering the second marriage, rather than describing the state of being in that marriage.

LMF] Parunak must know some close friends who are in a second marriage and he is shielding them. They—not the Holy Spirit—have influenced and determined his exegesis. He must have started out to shield them before writing this book, because all his arguments leading up to this statement do not deny it.

14.3 What Principles can we Glean from Other Scriptures?

Our study of the divorce sayings in the Gospels and in Romans 7 shows that it is sinful for divorced people to enter into a second marriage. Is it also sinful for them to continue in such a relation? When people in this circumstance repent, should they end their union? We have seen that the verses usually cited to urge such separation
do not carry the weight placed upon them. Other scriptural evidence suggests that separation is not the answer in such a situation.

LMF] Jesus said, “Go and sin no more.” Here we must assume that Parunak is defending the remarriages of his friends and close relatives, because this twisted exegesis has only one end in view.

14.3.1 Marriage in the Bible
We have seen over and over how highly God values the marriage union. If a second union after divorce is a marriage, it shares this high position.\(^\text{33}\) We naturally expect that if God wants such unions dissolved, he will say so explicitly. But the Scriptures never command that second marriages be dissolved. So we should be cautious about demanding their separation.

The crucial link in this argument is the statement, “If a second union after divorce is a marriage.” Those who urge separation believe that it is not a marriage, but adultery. We have seen that the Gospel passages and Romans 7 do not support this conclusion. In fact, the Lord’s words in the Gospels explicitly describe the union as a marriage. They use the Greek word for “marry” to describe the second unions of both the husband and wife from the first marriage.

The verb “to marry” in these verses might refer only to the human custom, without implying that God recognizes the union. In the notes to Chapter 12 we saw that another marriage term, the adjective “unmarried, can mean “unmarried so far as people are concerned,”\(^\text{34}\) and apply to people whom God still considers joined together. There is a difference, though, between being secularly married and secularly divorced. We saw in Chapter 3 that God joins people together when there is physical union in the context of a commitment to live together as man and wife and in keeping with the requirements of civil government. Thus, those who enter a secular marriage are joined before God as well. God never sanctions separation, so a divorce can only be secular. There is such a thing as purely secular separation, but we have no reason to think that there is such a thing as purely secular marriage.

LMF] There has to be, hence the Registry Office, where Christ is not present.

Two points are clear.
1. The Scriptures call second unions marriages.
2. The Scriptures never demand, or even authorize, separation of a marriage while the partners live.

If we require termination of second unions, we go beyond the teaching of the Bible, and possibly contradict it.

LMF] Here, more than anywhere else in the book, do we see a decisive departure from the teaching of Jesus, based on very subjective etymology of verbs and nouns.

14.3.2 The Place of Polygamy
A first marriage is (of course) marriage. Though people may seek to end it by divorce, God does not recognize their action. A second marriage is also marriage, according to the Gospels. It is natural to conclude that people who are divorced and remarried are really married to two people.

LMF] So bigamy is taught in the NT?

14.3.3 The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 7
The problem of divorce and remarriage is not new. Moses\(^\text{35}\) gives legislation to control it in Deuteronomy 24, showing that some Israelites of his time are divorced

\(^{33}\) He would say that, wouldn’t he?

\(^{34}\) Probably a reference to 1 Cor 7:11, which should be translated, “let her remain as an unmarried person,” or, “let her remain unmarried to another man.”

\(^{35}\) Not Moses, but Yahweh.
and remarried. The issue does not disappear in the New Testament, for the Lord addresses it in his teaching in the Gospels. LMF] He assumes that God recognises the legitimacy of the dissolution. He does not. He punishes such divorces with a ban on reversing their sin, thus locking them into an unforgivable sin against Him.

14.4.1 An Argument for Ending Second Marriages
Assume that Jim divorces Jane, and she later falls in love with Bob. Jane professes faith in Christ, and understands that it would be adultery for her to marry Bob while Jim is still alive.36

Suppose she [Jane] believes that the adultery of the second marriage consists in entering that marriage, and that once the marriage is established, it is valid in God’s eyes. She might reason, “I’ll go ahead, sin once, and marry Bob. Once we’re together, no one can separate us. Then I will confess my sin, God will forgive me, and I’ll have Bob.”

If, on the other hand, she believes that continuing in the second marriage is adultery, she can never salve her conscience with the thought, “I’ll just sin this once.” She can never be right with God until she leaves the adulterous relationship.

It seems that teaching that second marriages should be dissolved might help keep people like Jane out of sin. LMF] And so it would if she is to follow Jesus’ command, “Go and sin no more.” Adultery is sin.

14.4.2 Paul’s View of a Similar Argument
The argument is plausible, but it has a questionable pedigree. Paul meets the same objection to his teaching of salvation by grace apart from works in the early chapters of Romans. “If you teach people that God’s grace saves them in spite of their sin,” his opponents insist, “people will just keep on sinning.” Paul summarizes their argument in these words: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:2). In other words, his teaching is suspect because it makes it too easy for people to sin.

Paul does not want people to continue in sin, but he does not change his teaching, either. His response occupies the next three chapters of Romans. In them he insists that anyone who would take advantage of God’s grace to continue in sin, shows by his sin that he has not really received God’s grace. “How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:2).

Paul’s response applies to Jane as well. Jane may profess salvation, but if she presumes upon the grace of God and decides to sin “just this once” to get Bob, she shows a sad lack of understanding of the basic gospel. She may plan later to turn back to God, but there is no assurance that he will receive her. Her scheming will probably lead to feigned repentance that cannot win his forgiveness, not to godly sorrow and contrition. Her willful sin suggests that she is not truly saved to begin with. How, then, can she expect God’s mercy if she deliberately transgresses his law? The church should deal with her, not by adjusting its doctrine on pragmatic grounds, but by solemnly warning her of the implications of her attitude, and by disciplining her if she persists in her plan.

14.4.3 Unexpected Consequences

36 This scenario presupposes that it is a divorce granted on non-fornication grounds.
It’s important to warn Jane that even if God does forgive her “single sin,” its consequences may persist for years. “God is not mocked. Whatever a person sows, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). She may be unable to escape the nagging of a guilty conscience. If Bob is willing to cooperate with her rebellion, he certainly is not fit to lead her spiritually, and she cannot expect a Christian home. Her children will probably find her sinful example more forceful than her righteous protestations, and she will live to mourn their rebellion. She may expect smooth sailing once past “the single sin,” but God’s harvest law warns of repercussions at least as awful as the notion of continued adultery advanced by those who would urge a second divorce. LMF] Correct.

In fact, the practical consequences of remarriage are in some ways even graver if we consider the second marriage valid than if we demand its termination. As a valid marriage, it can be ended in God’s eyes only by death.
LMF] This is not so.

With the sinful foundation she is laying for it, she can expect only unhappiness and strife in it. Yet there will be no escape from it that does not sink her even deeper in sin. The day will come when she will wish with all her heart that she were free of it, and she will rue her rashness in seeking to press beyond “one little sin” to the satanic promise of remarried bliss.
LMF] He has just put my case for me, better than I could have done in this whole section.

NOTES

14.5 The Present Tense: General or Continuous?
Both the syntax of the verses and their broader context suggest that we should interpret the present tense of “commit” in the Gospel divorce sayings as general rather than continuous.
LMF] Wishful thinking to uphold remarriages.

Syntactically, the verses in Matthew and Mark are conditional relative clauses. Luke uses an alternate construction with much the same sense. The use of the present tense in the “then” part of such clauses fits a pattern called “the present general supposition,” which indicates that the writer is setting down a general principle without having a specific example or instance in mind (Burton 1898:123). That is, in conditional relative clauses, the present tense is commonly used to present general action.

The context of each of the Gospel sayings also supports their interpretation as present general suppositions. In none of them is the Lord discussing a particular instance of divorce or remarriage. Rather, he is laying down a general principle applicable to anyone who divorces. In such a case, we expect him to use the present tense with general meaning, to emphasize the generality of his instruction.
LMF] This is where he is at his weakest, and everything hinges on his subjective interpretation of the present tense verb ‘commit.’

CHAPTER 15

THE DIVORCED PERSON IN THE CHURCH
• Divorce has implications for a person’s role in the church, but so does the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus.
• Divorce and remarriage do disqualify a person for certain ministries.
• They are not the only disqualification, and should not eclipse other requirements for these positions.

15.1.1 Sin in Corinth
1 Corinthians 5 tells of a man who married his father’s wife, in violation of both Levitical and pagan standards. The Corinthians overlook his conduct, and are proud of their tolerance, but Paul views the matter differently. You are puffed up, and have not mourned instead, that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst (5:2). They should not give the offender their fellowship as long as he continues in his sin. [Do] not associate together, if anyone who is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or an alcoholic, or a thief. With such a person [do] not eat. ... Remove the wicked one from among you (5:11,13). His brazen rebelliousness strongly suggests that he is not a believer,
LMF] But he is called a ‘brother’ so how could he called this by an apostle, who ought to know?

so he has no place in the fellowship of God’s people. "Remove" means to put him out of the church. "Do not eat" emphasizes the most visible consequence of being put out of the church, exclusion from the Lord’s Supper. The church needs to act just as decisively today when its members sin. Divorce and remarriage deserve stern treatment, as do other flagrant violations of God’s law.

15.1.3 The Lessons of Corinth Today
… The first lesson shows that a church should discipline a member who actively seeks a divorce or who remarries after divorce. The broad and consistent teaching on the subject that we have traced throughout the Bible clearly condemns such conduct, and the local assembly should use its authority to enforce this teaching.

15.2.2 The Requirements
Because elders, deacons, and widows are so visible, Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and 5 lays down stringent requirements for their character and conduct. His instructions are not mere recommendations or ideals: "The overseer must be blameless, ..." None of the requirements explicitly mentions divorce or remarriage, but two of them require character traits that a divorced person lacks, and a third cannot be satisfied by a divorced person who has remarried.
LMF] There is a contradiction here.

To be blameless (1 Tim. 3:2,10; cf. 5:10) is more than having one’s sins forgiven. Paul wants church officers to be so exemplary that even unbelievers speak well of them (1 Tim. 3:7). Visible moral failings on the part of prominent members must not be allowed to mar the assembly’s reputation. Divorce is highly visible, and many people consider it a character blemish. Blamelessness is even less characteristic of a divorced person who commits adultery through remarriage.
LMF] There is a contradiction here, as well as double standards.

Elders and deacons must not only be blameless . . . . Divorce is the ultimate breakdown in home life, and such a background is a strong warning that a man lacks the personal equipment for church leadership.

The third requirement relevant to divorce and remarriage is that elders (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:12) be "one-woman men," while widows (1 Tim. 5:9) are to be "one-man women." These phrases do not refer to any specific marital situation, but require that a person be free from any taint of infidelity to a single spouse. Remarriage after divorce is adultery, and so (along with many other conditions) violates these requirements. Furthermore, the death of one spouse does
not turn a two-spouse person into a one-spouse person, for a widow can fail to be a "one-man woman" (1 Tim. 5:9) even though as a widow she currently has no spouses!

LMF] He has not got the right scenario about the widows, in my opinion. The scenario is that she was not the wife of a polygamous husband, because then she would have the support of his other wives and their children to look after her in her old age. If she was the only wife of a husband, and he died, leaving her destitute and none of her grown up children near to look after her (cf. 1 Tim 5:16), then the church should step in and look after her.

15.3 Other Restrictions on Elders, Deacons, and Widows
In general, divorce disqualifies a person for prominent church service, and remarriage only compounds the problem.

For instance, divorce is not the only way a man can fail to rule his house well. Rebellious children give as much evidence for failure to rule well as does divorce. In fact, the elder must have his “children in submission with all graveness” (1 Tim. 3:4). They must be "believing children, not accused of debauchery or unsubmissive" (Tit. 1:6). Yet some churches that would never dream of having a divorced man as pastor excuse his children’s conduct with sympathetic comments about "preachers' kids."

In fact, the requirement that a man rule his house well requires that he have a family, but many churches that exclude divorced men from leadership allow single men to hold the same positions.

LMF] It means, IF he is married, and IF he has children, not that he MUST be married, and MUST have children. Otherwise, it would exclude the apostle himself from being a leader of the churches he founded, and had the oversight of!

… We will not know that a man is blameless simply by asking whether or not he is divorced.

LMF] Yes you will!

We should view divorce, not as the one great unpardonable sin, but as one among many elements that exclude a person from certain positions in the church.

LMF] On its own it would disqualify him.

15.4 What a Divorced Person May Do in the Church
A divorced person can exercise the gift of giving. The experience of marital disaster may uniquely qualify a person for exhortation and showing mercy to those currently facing family tensions.

LMF] If the divorce is a State divorce and the Christian thinks the marriage is dissolved, it is a sinful thought. If the divorced ‘Christian’ then remarries, that is the sin of adultery. The remarriage must be declared null and void, and broken off. If a man breaks off his remarriage and remains unmarried or is reconciled to his first wife, and provided he meets all the other criteria that Paul laid down, he can qualify to be an Elder in Christ’s Church.

15.6 Other Explanations of “One-Woman Man” Several different explanations have been proposed for the phrase “one-woman man” that Paul uses in 1 Tim. 3:2,12 and Titus 1:6 to describe those who serve officially in the church.

• Perhaps Paul is talking about people who are divorced and remarried.
• Some people think the terms refer to polygamy or marital infidelity.
• Another view disqualifies people who have remarried after the death of a spouse.
LMF] The first suggestion is out, because a divorce implies the first wife is still alive. The meaning is that the Overseer and Deacon (if married) must only have one wife. Polygamy is ruled out.

Because the phrase is ambiguous, I have not used it in examining whether remarriage is right or wrong. Precisely because Paul’s expression is ambiguous and without clear parallel, we should not restrict its meaning only to remarriage, or only to polygamy.

LMF] It is only ambiguous to those who have an agenda where it does not fit in.

The simplest position, and the one I take, is that the "one-woman man" requirement excludes any form of infidelity. The Scriptures permit remarriage after death, so it does not exclude a man from leadership. They condemn polygamy, adultery, and remarriage after divorce, so these conditions do disqualify a man.

LMF] The solution is polygamy, because the Overseer/Deacon must set the standard for the upcoming generation of young men.

15.7 Ezekiel 44:22
Jay Adams 1980:85 cites Ezek. 44:22 as evidence that the Old Testament permits remarriage after divorce.

But a widow or a divorced woman they shall not take to themselves as wives, but virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or that widow who shall be a priest’s widow, shall they take.

He remarks, The whole force of the verse is to specify requirements peculiar to priests. If no one was allowed to marry a divorced person anyway, the prohibition would be pointless. Only if the practice was generally acceptable is the verse of significance, since only then would it mark out an exception to the general rule.

The verse occurs in the part of Ezekiel that anticipates the restoration of temple worship in Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Like much of this part of Ezekiel, the verse echoes a provision of the Mosaic Law, in this case Lev. 21:7,13,14:

A harlot woman, or one defiled, they shall not take; and a woman divorced from her husband they shall not take, for he is holy unto his God. ... He shall take a woman in her virginity. A widow, or a divorcer, or one defiled, a harlot: these he shall not take, but a virgin from his people shall he take as wife.

By Adams’ argument, these verses indicate that the Law permits laymen to marry harlots, as well as widows and divorcees. On the contrary, the Law decrees that a girl who plays the harlot in her father’s house is to be stoned (Deut. 22:21). Stoning, not marriage, is the lawful treatment of a harlot.

The legislation of Ezek. 44:22 and Lev. 21:7-14 forbids priests to marry divorcees and harlots, not because it is lawful for ordinary people to marry them, but because it is common for ordinary people to marry them. Unfortunately, the periods when God’s people live completely according to his law are few and far between. The Law sometimes makes provision for man’s sin by describing what to do next after the sin takes place, or by emphasizing contexts in which the sin is especially abhorrent. It is a mistake to argue from such passages that the sin really isn’t sin after all, just as it is a mistake to argue from the law of divorce in Deuteronomy 24 that the Law of Moses sanctions divorce. The passages in Ezekiel and Leviticus show that marriage of divorcees is not unknown, and that it is specifically forbidden to priests. They do not show that God approves of it for anybody else.
LMF] I can use this to show that Moses’s inherited tradition of divorce was alive and kicking in Ezekiel’s day. Israelites did marry prostitutes (who should not have been allowed to live), and divorced women, otherwise, why are they mentioned if the practice did not exist?

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LMF] He is back to talking sense again!

CHAPTER 16

PHYSICAL ABUSE AND DIVORCE

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY Abbreviations


END