
**SUMMARY OF MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THIS NEW TEACHING**

There are a number of serious problems, conjectures, and imaginative leaps, behind the pages of this work, resulting in a new doctrine. These will need to be addressed before a single church leader would even begin to countenance its conclusion as a serious understanding of the Jesus’ teaching, let alone a proficient understanding of the rabbinic material itself.

First, there is no engagement with Jesus’ own statements in which He refuses to allow divorce on any grounds in His new Kingdom of God. When Jesus was asked the question about permitting divorce in Matthew 19:3, He replied by asking them a question. And the question expresses His surprise that they have not read what His Father had said in Genesis 2:24. They ought to have read it, is his rebuke to them. Instead, they had focused on Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Following His rebuke for not concentrating on Genesis 2:24, He then quotes it. But it is His deduction from this text that really surprised them. The lesson Jesus drew from this proof text was that it was illegal for any man to divorce his wife. That they understood Jesus correctly comes out in their second question: “(If you are right) Why, therefore, did Moses command to give a bill of departure and to divorce her?” They evidently saw a clear contradiction between what Moses commanded and what Jesus commanded. Jesus had overridden Moses and sidelined his teaching as obsolete and irrelevant for His followers. Jesus then undercut their own position by pointing out that the law on divorce did not come from His Father, but from Moses. And to press home His case, Jesus points out that the law did not so much come from Moses as from themselves. They demanded it. They refused to forgive their wives. They hardened their hearts. Moses simply gave in to their demand. So the origin for the law of divorce sprang from the unregenerate heart of man, and not from God. It originates from sin.

The author claims to have read the passages on divorce through the eyes of contemporary Jews, but he has failed to read Jesus’ teaching through the eyes of His contemporaries. They clearly recognised that Jesus had abolished divorce for any reason, and this astonished them so greatly that they were impelled to ask, “Why, therefore, did Moses permit...?”

Second, the author makes a bold claim, which he cannot substantiate with any evidence, that the phrase ‘any cause’ in Matthew 19:9 is a ‘highly specialised legal term’, and refers to a particular kind of divorce created by Rabbi Hillel prior to the birth of Jesus. This is pure conjecture.

Third, the author overlooked the important word “all” in the Greek in Matthew 19:9. He has mistranslated it as “any”, with the consequent error of identifying Matthew’s “every cause” with Hillel’s so-called ‘Any Cause’. The author has created the fiction of a legal divorce procedure called the ‘Any Cause’ divorce. Nowhere in rabbinic literature is Hillel’s difference
of exegesis with Shammai over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, captured in a slogan or catch-word phrase. The author, himself, has created the fiction of a legal divorce called ‘Any Cause’.

Fourth, throughout his work the author refers to ‘Any Cause’ as if it was known by every Jew living in Jesus’ day. Indeed, the author claims that so well-known was the legal term that Mark felt he could omit it without confusing his readers. This conjecture and claim comes out of the imagination of the author. There is no evidence for such a claim.

Fifth, another claim without any evidence is that the Hillel interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 was universally accepted by all Jews everywhere, and that all divorces from the second-century onwards were based on Hillel’s interpretation. We simply have no evidence for this. This, too, emanates from the imagination of the author.

Sixth, Hillel argued that the Hebrew term dābār in Deuteronomy 24:1 meant ‘a thing’, which is correct. The author, however, has subtly altered this to mean ‘any thing’, and from there he created the legal fiction of an ‘Any Cause’ style of divorce. If he had kept to what Hillel had said, he should have conjectured that Hillel created ‘A Matter’ divorce. So that if someone wanted to use some fault he found in his wife, he could call it a ‘Matter’, a dābār, and he could obtain his separation under this single word term. But the author was drawn to the translation of ‘any cause’ in the English translations, and assumed that it might refer to Hillel’s ‘Matter’ divorce.

Seventh, the above instance of following English translations of the primary material, led the author to make two more similar errors. He noticed that Josephus was translated as: “for whatsoever cause (καθ᾽ ἄσπιτον αἵτινα)” The similarly with Matthew 19:9 is obvious in the English, but not in the Greek. The author clearly did not consult the Greek. The same methodological error was repeated when he noticed that Philo was translated as: “for any cause whatever [καθ᾽ ἢπ].” (See §13.1)

Eighth, the similarity in the English translations, led the author to make a fundamental error. He made the following false steps. First, he took Hillel’s ‘matter’ and added ‘any’ to it, to give ‘any matter’. Why? because he wanted to connect it with ‘every cause’ in Matthew 19:9. He then converted his newly created ‘any matter’ into a legal phrase with initial capital letters. Why? because the question in Mark asked if it was lawful to divorce, which was a stupid question to ask, given that Moses authorised divorces. By altering ‘every cause’ in the parallel in Matthew 19:9 to ‘Any Cause’, he could then claim that he had found a connection between Hillel’s legal term and the very popular ‘Any Cause’ divorce which Hillel introduced into Judean life. From this conjecture he then needed to explain why ‘every cause’ (which he misread as ‘any cause’) was omitted in Mark, so he needed ‘evidence’ that everyone was so familiar with the term that it could be left out. The ‘evidence’ he needed, he found in the English translations of Josephus and Philo.

It is clear from this catalogue of errors and from the fact that they are all connected through English translations, that the author is either slap-dash in his approach or he is unable to work with the primary material itself. This work is totally based on English translations, and this has proved its downfall.

Ninth, the author has a low view of the integrity, inspiration, and infallibility of Scripture, when it suits his argument. This comes out clearly in Chapter 12 with his imaginative scenario of a series of ‘barriers’ through which Jesus’ teaching had to pass to reach us. These
were no barriers to the Church because Greek was the universal language. But the author needed ‘barriers’ in order to explain why his new discovery could have got lost. If one has to lessen the integrity of Scripture, and the integrity of the Apostles and the leaders who followed them, in order to facilitate the acceptance of a new doctrine, this is a weakness in itself. It has the appearance of being contrived for the purpose of raising its chances of being accepted.

Tenth, one marvels at the extent to which a writer will go to distort in order to gain a place for his view. The author makes the surprising assertion that: “In the context of this emphasis against sex, it was natural that the 2nd-century Church would assume that Jesus taught remarriage was equivalent to sexual immorality and would not be surprised when he [Jesus] appeared to identify remarriage with ‘adultery’” (p. 145). He also states, “The stand which the 2nd-century church took against sexual immorality made their new emphasis against remarriage (a misinterpretation of Jesus’ teaching) seem normal. Once this new interpretation had become church doctrine it was difficult for the church to come to terms with the fact that a misunderstanding had taken place” (p.154).

This illustrates compartmental thinking. No regard is taken of a full century of abiding by Jesus’ teaching on ‘no divorce, and no remarriage’. Instead, the author begins the second-century as if the Church had no past history, and no tradition, and no memory of what Jesus taught. The author conjures up a scenario in which the Church was faced with promiscuous sex all around and it reacted so strongly against this free sex that it assumed that Jesus taught that remarriage was equivalent to sexual immorality or adultery. Even if the Church took a stand against sexual immorality, how did it get from that position to condemning all remarriages as adulterous relationships, unless they were already regarded as adulterous unions? As early as the first Council of Jerusalem, the Church took its stand against sexual immorality (Acts 15:29, ‘to abstain from fornication’), and this was before AD 70! The second-century was no different from the first-century in this regard.

Eleventh, there is the assumption throughout the book that the rabbis, particularly Shammai and Hillel, permitted divorce for adultery, and that in Jesus’ day the death penalty was no longer applied.

First, Jesus said, ‘And I say to you, that, whoever may put away his wife, except for adultery, and may marry another, commits adultery; and he who did marry her that has been put away, commits adultery.’ (Here I have retained the translation of all major English translations.) If Jesus is making provision for divorce for adultery, then He is in direct conflict with the Law of God.

Second, even the Mishnah upheld the death penalty for adultery (Mish. Sanh. 7.3, 9; B. Sanh. 52b, 55b, 66b). The tractate Sota provided the interpretation of the Num 5 passage, stating that the bitter water test ceased when adultery became common (Mish. Sota 9.9). The spirit of adultery (Sota 4b) and lust were censured (Yoma 29a, Nid. 13b), which Jesus took from His own theology.

We simply have no evidence at all that the Jews up to the time of the codification of their laws in the Mishnah and the Talmuds ever permitted divorce for adultery. It is unlikely that Jesus was the first rabbi to change the Torah Law and substitute divorce for the death penalty for adultery. Indeed, the most natural translation of Matthew 19:9 shows that Jesus reinforced the Law that divorce could not be had for fornication. , ‘And I say to you that who, say, may put away his wife—not [he may put away] for fornication—fornication—and may marry another, commits adultery.’

That Jesus did not demand the penalty of stoning the adulterer (cf. NIDNTT 2:582–84) can be explained on a number of levels. (1) He did not come to judge the world or individual adulterers. He was an ordinary citizen of the Jewish nation. He had no position of authority within the leadership of His nation. (2) Two witnesses were required to put anyone to death
(Dt 17:6). These would need to be examined by judges, not by an ordinary citizen who was shunned by the religious establishment. (3) According to the Law (Dt 22:22), the man who committed adultery with the woman also had to be stoned. If she was caught in the ‘every act’ then the man should have been too. Why was he not brought before Jesus? (4) Jesus stood between the two Covenants, fulfilling the Old and introducing the New. He gave priority to the New, while fulfilling the Old in His lifestyle. He lived ‘under the Law’ to redeem those under the Law. (5) God would judge those outside the Church who committed adultery, while Christ would judge those inside the Church, who made up His Body (1 Cor 6), the new Israel of God. All capital offences in the Old were commuted to excommunication from His Body by being ‘handed over to Satan,’ resulting in a spiritual death penalty if repentance did not follow. In this higher and deeper sense Jesus affirmed the death penalty for adultery.

Twelfth, A surprising methodological defect is the complete absence of a detailed study of the divorce texts themselves.

Thirteenth, another surprising defect about this book is that the author is so intent on reading the text through the eyes of Jesus’ contemporaries that he failed to notice that even if Matthew 19:3 was a direct reference to Hillel’s teaching on divorce, and that Matthew 5:32 was a direct reference to Shammai’s teaching on divorce, the references are irrelevant to Jesus new teaching on divorce. Jesus dismissed in one sentence all Pharisaic teaching on the subject because they bypassed the teaching in Genesis 2:24 and settled for something less than His Father expected from all human beings. This teaching, He intimated, preceded Moses’ teaching, therefore they should go back to the first thing God taught about marriage and focus on Genesis 2:24 and forget about Deuteronomy 24:1-4 completely as a sub-standard, debased and degrading level of existence, which was introduced by men for men. No wonder Jesus threw the lot out as vigorously as He threw out the money-changers in the Temple.

By abolishing divorce altogether, Jesus made it clear that a power outside man—the Holy Spirit—was needed to come in and lift man out of the sordid, hard-hearted world into which all men are born, and enable them to rise to a level of spirituality that could forgive seventy times seven. This power is what distinguishes Jesus’ followers from all other religions of the world. And Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce distinguishes His true followers from all other religions. No other religion can rise above the fleshly level of the Mosaic divorce law, for all, without exception, practice divorce with hard, unregenerate hearts. They all share in a theology of accommodation and compromise from the spiritual law written in Genesis 2:24. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ stands head and shoulders above all other religions, because it alone makes no allowance for hard-hearted and unforgiving individuals. Many attempts have been made to bring Christ down to the level of Moses, and this book, sadly, is in this category.

END
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Note the errors in his translation of the Aramaic texts under §13.1