CRITIQUE OF STEPHEN GOLA’S BOOK
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SUMMARY OF THE AUTHOR’S POSITION

The author took the view that God instituted divorce from the beginning of humanity, and that it could be used or abused by mankind. He took for granted that all readers of the Old Testament would accept that the separation of the foreign wives in Ezra 9–10 proved that God approved of these divorces. He likewise took for granted that the divorces that took place in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 were approved by God. God also availed Himself of divorce to divorce His own Chosen People (Jer 3; Isa 50). Given these assumptions about God’s approval of divorce the author naturally carried over God’s approval to Jesus and the New Testament writers. Here he looked at all the relevant texts through the eyes of one who was fully convinced that the Spirit would lead all the inspired writers to condone the Father’s approval of divorce, and so he set about exegeting the teaching of Jesus and Paul to conform to this overarching and rigid approach to the subject of divorce and remarriage in the New Testament. Naturally, he succeeded, but at what cost? There is also the question, And at what cost to the lives of all who follow his guidance? The following critique will set out my thoughts and reactions to this book which purports to be unusual in that it deals with the ‘need to divorce,’ which, he claims, is almost unique to him among the hundreds of modern books written on the subject.

This book claims to have been commissioned by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord spoke to the author and said to him, “Son sit down, I want to teach you about divorce,” and this book represents what the Lord Jesus taught Stephen Gola in 1992. The author acknowledges he was ignorant of what the Bible taught about divorce up to the point when God the Holy Spirit said to me one morning as I stepped from my family room into my kitchen, ‘Son sit down, I want to teach you about divorce.’ I immediately acknowledged Him, and gathered up my Bible, concordance and other tools. This book is the result of His command. *(Special Note)*

Well, with a direct commission from the Lord Jesus Himself, and God the Holy Spirit as his teacher, there is nothing left for the reader to do but to pronounce this book as inspired by God, and infallible in its teaching, especially when the author informs us on page 147 that his book is the TRUTH (the capitals are his). If so, then it ought to be placed alongside the Bible as the final word on the exegesis of those texts that relate to divorce and remarriage in the New Testament. And, no doubt, there are many of Gola’s followers who would do just that.

The author claims on the very first page of his book that just as Jesus brings us together in marriage; from being two, He makes us one. But there are other times He is our Physician who comes to do surgery as our last resort to bring healing. The surgical procedure of divorce is one of those times.

One wonders if this is God the Holy Spirit speaking or Stephen Gola. Gola wrote, “when we are faced with the decision of either saving a marriage or the people of the marriage, the marriage must go” (p. 16). The logic of this statement is that “when we are faced with the decision of either saving the Church or the people of the Church, the Church must go!” Jesus protected His seven churches in the Book of Revelation by disciplining its members. The Church is His Bride and the marriage is the culmination of that love union, when the two become one.

Again Gola writes, “He [God] would rather for the marriage to be dissolved and the people of the marriage to go free and not to be condemned” (p. 16). Simplistic. As if this was the only choice. Here there is a very shallow understanding of what God creates when two become one flesh. God creates a bond—a gluing—a coming together that only death can dissolve. There is no mechanism on earth that has the power to unglue what God has glued together. When a glass of blue water and a glass of yellow water are poured into one glass, the action cannot be reversed; so neither can a lawful marriage be reversed once it has been consummated.

Gola wrote, “There is a divorce that God approves of, and there is a divorce that God hates” (p. 18; cf. pp. 85-89). We will see later on what constitutes the divorce that God approves of.

The case of Ezra’s reforms in Ezra 9–10

Central to Gola’s position was his misunderstanding of what was going on in Ezra’s banishment of all foreign wives from Judah. He wrote, “If divorce was ‘always’ a sin, then that would
mean that God sinned when he commanded the people of Israel to separate themselves from, and divorce their wives they married outside of His will (See Ezra 10:3, 11)” (pp. 20, 38).

What Gola failed to understand is that Israel was a theocracy, and as a nation they were under a covenant obligation to keep all of God’s laws perfectly. God commanded His people not to marry non-Israelite women, in order that their foreign wives would not lead them astray from Him, just as Solomon’s wives did. God had a perfect right to demand that these unlawful ‘marriages’ be terminated, and the offspring of them be expelled from among His people. This is what happened in Ezra 10. Therefore it cannot be said that God used divorce to undo lawful marriages. There was no need to write out Certificates of Divorce in any of these cases.

Indeed, Gola himself acknowledged this in his use of the Amplified translation of Ezra 10:3-4:

“Therefore, let us MAKE A COVENANT WITH OUR GOD TO PUT AWAY [SEPARATE WITHOUT GIVING A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE] all the foreign wives and their children, . . .” (quoted on p. 39).

The word for ‘put away’ in the Greek, at Ezra 10:3, is ekbalein (ἐκβάλειν), which literally means ‘to cast or throw out.’ The Hebrew means ‘to cause to send out’ (נָפָל). The normal Greek word for ‘divorce,’ as used by Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospels, is apoluων (ἀπολύω), but it is not used in Ezra 10.

Gola exploited the situation in Ezra 10 whereby anyone who did not appear before Ezra within three days would be banned from the assembly [church], and he applied it to the past and present Church of God as follows: “Imagine, people would actually be kicked out of church for NOT divorcing their spouses” (p. 40). The clear inference is that modern Christians who do not divorce their mixed marriages are in danger of being kicked out of Christ’s Church if they do not do something about it quickly.

Gola admitted that the mixed marriages of Ezra 10 were dissolved without going through the Mosaic provision of writing out a Certificate of Divorce, and presumably Christians can annul their mixed marriages the same way, because on page 59 he writes, “There were times God commanded His people to separate from (without giving a certificate of divorce) their mates so they wouldn’t be carried off with their spouses’ rebellion.” And he quotes Ezra 10:11, in the belief that, “The Old Covenant (Testament) is just as much grace as the New Covenant (Testament). And the New Covenant is just as much law as the Old Covenant” (p. 50). So he can freely take some of the old leaven of the Mosaic Law and mix it in with the unleavened dough of Jesus’ new teaching (1 Cor 5:7-8).

It should be pointed out that the mixed marriages of Ezra 10 were simply annulled as illegitimate and unlawful, and an abomination in God’s eyes from the beginning. The subtle way in which Gola presents Ezra’s reforms is designed to win over the reader to the notion that God approves of divorce, because here is His servant Ezra, divorcing ‘bad’ marriages because they are spiritually harmful to His people. Here Gola sows the false idea that God took the initiative in divorcing ‘bad’ marriages, and he will use this thought later on to justify God divorcing ‘bad’ Christian marriages. Time and time again throughout his book he deliberately comes back to the Ezra example to justify divorce in the Church today. This is a well recognised reinforcing technique and unless the reader is aware of the technique used by manipulative writers, which I have called the ‘nodding head syndrome’ (NHS), readers will nod through the idea that God used divorce to separate ‘bad’ marriages in the past, and so He can do the same today, because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let’s take a closer look at his pivotal example.

Ezra said [dates in square brackets are mine],

O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day [from 1446 B.C. to 458 B.C.] we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings [up to 568 B.C.], and our priests have been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity [in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605, 597, and 568 B.C.], to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day [under Persian domination]. And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape [since the return in 536 B.C.], and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us [in 536 B.C.] in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, . . . (Ezra 9:6-9).

In his determination to defend God’s use of divorce, Gola picked out the words, “And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God,” and he decided that the ‘grace’ that was shown by the Lord was the ability to separate and divorce the wives they married outside of God’s will (p. 38). He went on, “Doesn’t this ‘grace’ to separate sound like the ‘peace’ to separate, given by God in 1 Corinthians 7:15?” Gola latchèd on to the word ‘escape’ and made it apply to escape from their mixed marriages; so that ‘escape’ in this context means ‘divorce,’ he claimed.

This is not so, the grace referred to is a reference to the seventy years since they were brought back by God into their own land again. That was what Ezra alluded to in his historical sweep of Israel’s history down to his own day, as my embedded dates reveal. Ezra wrote, “to leave us a remnant to escape,” and this refers to the remnant who returned from the Babylonian exile.
Throughout Gola's book he relies heavily on Ezra 9-10, and Nehemiah 13 (see pp. 77; 86f.), to justify his new doctrine of divorce among the followers of Christ. He ignores the unusual circumstances recorded in these biblical books. The 113 cases where Judean husbands put away their wives (but did not use Moses's divorce procedure) were never joined in marriage by God in the first place, and the children were 'unclean.' This fundamental difference is brushed to one side as irrelevant, and Gola insists on divorcing lawful marriages as if they were in the same category as the 113 Judean, unlawful marriages. Indeed, I would class Gola's total dependence on Ezra 9-10 as the lynching-pin of his entire system, but it is built on sand, because these marriages were unlawful from the beginning, and so no Certificate of Divorce was necessary, because there was no divorce. These marriages were annulled or disqualified. They are unique. They shed no light on the normal life of the Israelites as they went about divorcing their wives.

Time and time again, Gola switches back to the Ezra annulments (which is the correct term to describe them, because they were not divorces) and parades them as examples where God used divorce to 'heal' His people (cf. p. 88). This is disingenuous and misleading. The parallel to these illicit unions would be the case of the Christian man who had sex with a prostitute. Paul helpfully expands on the physical and spiritual dangers to Christian men of having unlawful sex:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh.' But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:15-17).

One of the most infamous manipulators of the 'nodding head syndrome' (NHS) technique was Anthony Hort, who turned the entire 19th century Church of England away from the Byzantine Greek New Testament and got them to accept a minority Greek text. He broke up his argument into small sections and had his readers nodding through point by point until he got them into a logical position where they had to nod through his conclusion. He fooled a complete committee through this subtle way of getting their heads nodding, until he had them nodding vigorously by dint of persuasive argument and his considerable grasp of the subject.

Alas, in the case of Gola, he admitted that he was totally ignorant about divorce and remarriage before he was commissioned by God to write his book on the topic. But he considered that this ignorance meant that he was an empty vessel whom God could fill with His truth. The claim that he had been taught directly by none other than God Himself neutralised or cancelled out this ignorance as a barrier or objection to its acceptance. Indeed, his ignorance was looked upon as proof of his inspiration, because his explanation was not his but the explanation of God Himself!

On page 23, we have a wrong translation. Gola, claiming to be under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit mistranslates God's word as follows: "For . . . if any brother has a wife who does not believe, and SHE IS WILLING to live with him, LET HIM NOT DIVORCE her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, IF HE IS WILLING to live with her, LET HER NOT DIVORCE him" (1 Cor 7:12, 13). Note the use of 'divorce' throughout this translation.

The truth is that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, never uses the term for 'divorce,' which is ἀπολύω ('release'). Instead, he uses the verb 'to abandon, to leave' (ἀφεῖναι). Paul deliberately refuses to use the term 'divorce' because he does not believe any man or woman has the authority to dissolve a lawful marriage. Instead Paul can only talk about 'separation' (χωρίζω).

In Paul's theology—and he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—the unbeliever can separate himself or herself from the believer, but they cannot dissolve what God has glued together. Now Paul's careful choice of 'separation'—and his deliberate avoidance of the term 'divorce'—meant that the door was always open for reconciliation. If he had carelessly referred to 'divorce' (ἀπολύω), as Gola has assumed, then Paul would have believed that divorce dissolved the marriage bond.

This is one clear case where Stephen Gola has attributed something to God the Holy Spirit which is untrue. Lack of knowledge of the Greek language meant that Gola was dependent on a false translation of 1 Corinthians 7:11-14. Many English translators carelessly jumped to the conclusion that Paul must have been talking about divorce, when, if they had been more diligent, they would have seen how careful Paul was in his choice of words to describe the reaction of unbelievers to separate from their Christian spouses.

If the Holy Spirit guided Gola to misrepresent Paul's teaching, then we have a contradiction between Gola and Paul. Is it possible that Paul was not inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that Gola was inspired? If Gola is speaking the truth, then Paul is a false teacher. If Paul is speaking the truth, then Gola is a false teacher. Both cannot be right, unless the Holy Spirit has changed His mind.

This is another case of Gola operating his NHS. And unless the reader is knowledgeable in the ways that false teachers can manipulate the ignorant, the weak, and the immature, they do not stand a chance of seeing through them, and they must fall for the false doctrine, and be led astray into error and sin and condemnation, because the arguments are so subtle and plausible.
On page 24 Gola limits his readership to one interpretation of the word ‘bound’ (δεσμός) in 1 Corinthians 7:15. He reads, “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed [for selfish reasons].” Are you loosed [divorced] from a wife [In my opinion says Paul, the Apostle] do not seek a wife. BUT EVEN IF YOU DO MARRY, YOU HAVE NOT SINNED” (p. 112). This is Gola’s proof text that a remarriage can follow a divorce. For this to be so he needs to prove that the Greek verb δεσμός must mean ‘divorced.’ The reader is not told about the alternative meanings that would allow Paul to be consistent in viewing a lawful marriage as an indissoluble union. Instead Paul is made to teach that, “If the unbeliever divorces, let him or her divorce, the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor 7:15). By getting Paul to use the term ‘divorce’ and by getting him to view a broken marriage as a ‘bondage,’ it was easy to associate ‘bondage’ with ‘marriage,’ and to associate ‘divorce’ with ‘freedom.’ The assumption is that one is in a state of peace if he or she is not in bondage with an unbeliever.

It does a disservice to Paul to put into his mouth the word ‘divorce’ when he deliberately avoided using that word. He talks only of the unbeliever ‘separating’ himself or herself. Now if we credit Paul with consistency, then when he comes to use the term ‘bound’ it cannot refer to divorce but to separation.

The ‘bond’ and the ‘bind’ of marriage

There is the BOND and the BIND in every marriage. God is the one who does the bonding; the couple are the ones who do the binding. The BOND refers to the marriage union itself where two become one flesh. This BOND can never be dissolved by any human institution or court. On the other hand the BIND is the marital duty (or care) that spouses owe to each other. The Spirit commanded, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Cor 7:3). But how can this command be fulfilled if they split up? The unbeliever can deprive himself or herself of these marital duties by physically separating themselves. Consequently, the BIND (= what they owe to each other) can be suspended, where the unbeliever physically departs from the believer.

It is the BIND that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 7:15, not the BOND. A ‘divorced’ Christian is assured by Paul that their inability to fulfil their marital duties is not going to be held against them by God, and that is a very reassuring message to hear. Until separated Christians heard directly from Paul that they were not to worry about their failure to comply with God’s command that they were ‘not to deprive one another’ (1 Cor 7:5), they would have been in state of anxiety. But Paul reassures them that ‘in such cases’ God has released them from their perpetual state of anxiety, because He has called them into a state of peace, which He will not allow anyone to take away from them.

Nowhere in Scripture is marriage likened to being in a prison, or being in bondage, or in a state of being in bondage, unless 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the sole exception due to the unbeliever abandoning the believer. However, in 1 Corinthians 7:26 Paul used the Greek verb δεσμός (δεσμός) ‘to bind’ to refer to the married state. No doubt he has the indissoluble union of the marriage bond in view here. Consequently, when he adds, “Are you loosed from a wife?” he is thinking of widowers and widows, not people who have been divorced.

The fact that Paul wrote, “Now if the unbelieving spouse separates himself/herself, let him/her separate himself/herself,” shows that the believer is not to do all in their power to continue to abide by their marital duties, which they owe to one another. His very next statement is significant: “The brother or the sister is not bound in such cases.” Now if Paul had used the term ‘divorce’ instead of ‘separate’ then the term ‘bound’ could have referred to the BOND, and not to the BIND. As it is, because ‘separate’ refers to distance in space, the Christian spouse is physically unable to be a helpmeet to the other. But distance in space does not affect the BOND. It transcends space and time.

Gola has chosen to impose the term ‘divorce’ on Paul, and so he renders the text as: “they are not bound to the unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife in an indissoluble union in cases such as these” (p. 25).

On page 25 Gola overturns Paul’s advice that if the unbeliever is content to live with the Christian spouse, the Christian should seek a divorce. Gola objects to this, because the unbeliever will pollute the believer who, presumably will lose their faith and salvation. So he urges married Christians not to be unequally yoked to unbelieving spouses if they are disruptive in the marriage. His reason for demanding the break-up of these mixed marriages is that Ezra broke up all the mixed marriages in the Church in the Old Testament.

Paul gives no guarantee that the unbeliever who stays will not retain his or her pagan religion and rites as before. He does not lay down any conditions on the unbeliever regarding his or her behaviour or beliefs. He or she could be a nasty individual, but the Christian spouse has no say in

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1 By this Gola means, Do not seek to be divorced for selfish reasons, but you can for unselfish reasons.
the matter; the choice lies with the unbeliever to stay or to depart. The reason why the Christian spouse has no say is because every lawful marriage is permanent. There is no escape from it. A ‘wife is for life,’ and a husband is until death.

The one-flesh concept and its implications for the family unit (1 Cor 7:14)

Paul’s concept of the unity of the physical family unit is a difficult subject, and many believers, understandably, find Paul’s theology in 1 Corinthians 7:14 incomprehensible, especially Baptists, and other Western denominations which stress the individuality of each person to decide for themselves to be sanctified by a personal, rational decision.

In Paul’s new understanding of the coming of Christ to dwell physically among His people, each family on the earth is either unclean (unsanctified to God) or clean (sanctified to God). This goes back to his concept of the ‘lump,’ which partakes of all the attributes of the lump. He sees units—family units—not individuals. The two become one flesh, and the children partake of this one flesh, being the extension of the one flesh; so the one flesh concept envelopes the whole unit.

The immediate and obvious implication of this concept is that if two unbelievers marry then their one flesh is not sanctified, so the extensions of their one flesh, that is, their children must also be unsanctified or unclean, and it is this logic that Paul applies in 1 Corinthians 7:14, “… else were your children unclean,” to convince those in mixed marriages to stay yoked to their unbelieving spouses, provided the unbeliever wishes to remain in a Christian family under those conditions.

This new revelation of Paul must have come as a relief to all those in mixed marriages because they must have thought that if their spouses were not Christians then they were unclean, and if they were unclean then by being one flesh with them, they would be contaminated and their bodies would become unclean or unholy, and if unholy how could the Spirit of Christ dwell in an unclean/unholy body?

Most Westerners find Paul’s idea that the unclean does not pollute the clean difficult to incorporate into their Western, systematic theologies, because it is the complete reverse of all that the Jews had been brought up to believe by God (cf. Lev 10:10, “to distinguish between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean”).

If we take Haggai 2:13-14 as the contemporary situation after the Jews came back from the Babylonian exile in 536 B.C. Haggai asks the people, ‘If an unclean of body comes against any of these, is it unclean?’ And the priests answer and say, ‘It is unclean.’ Haggai answered and said, ‘So is this people, and so is this nation before Me — an affirmation of Yahweh — and so is every work of their hands, and that which they bring near there — it is unclean.”

Gola takes up this Old Testament idea of impurity and argued from James 3:11, 12, “This is a Bible principle. When sin (salt water), is mixed with holiness (fresh water), that which was holy becomes corrupted and sinful. Thus, no spring yields BOTH salt water and fresh. When polluted water is mixed with clean water, the clean ALWAYS becomes polluted.” He believes a marriage partner can become unclean through alcoholism, drugs, lustful sex, or a party spirit (p. 81), and very likely through the occult and witchcraft (p. 61). The coming of Jesus changed all that. He taught that it is not what enters a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of him; that is what makes him unclean. No matter what physical or spiritual state an unbelieving spouse is in, nothing can make the believing spouse unclean from the outside.

Gola appears to be unaware that when Christ indwells the believer, the principle of pollution that obtained under the Old Covenant is reversed. Instead of the unclean polluting the clean, the clean sanctifies the unclean/unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:14), otherwise, Paul deducted, “your children would be unclean, but now they are sanctified.” The same goes for the unbelieving spouse, and it comes about because no one can pollute Jesus, who lives in the believer. God abides in the believer, and the believer in Him. This did not happen under the Old Covenant.

The Lord Jesus abolished the direction of pollution. Instead of the polluter polluting the clean believer; the clean transforms the polluted to be clean. The direction has been reversed. This was a totally new revelation given to the Church through the Apostle Paul. Christians who took seriously the revelation of Jesus that when a couple marry they become one flesh, and if they are one, then surely the Old Testament principle must apply that if part of an object or person becomes unclean then the whole lump must also be unclean. And under Old Testament law this is exactly what would have been the case. But the coming of Jesus completely altered the direction of influence.

Even the body of the unbeliever, whom we would regard as polluted by sin, cannot alter the clean status of the believer. Christ in the body of the believer is stronger than the body of the unbeliever. Can a clean thing come out of an unclean thing? asked Job (14:4), and his answer was No. But now the answer is Yes. When a believing husband has infants through the body of his unbelieving, polluted wife, the children are clean. Likewise, when a believing wife bears the seed of an unbelieving, unclean, and polluted husband, the children are clean. It takes only one spouse to be clean and the flesh of the whole family is considered clean, even though the spouse may be the only
person in the family who is clean, that is, a believer. It is on the basis of this reversed principle that Paul could reassure all Christians in mixed marriages that their unclean, polluted, unbelieving spouses do not transfer their uncleanness to them, but rather the reverse happens, and so they can continue to have marital relations with unbelievers. Paul’s argument is that the unclean status of the unbelieving spouse is no ground for separation from them, let alone a divorce. Gola is adamant that Paul is wrong and he is right, and he urges all believers to get a divorce as soon as possible on the principle (p. 25):

The ‘slave’ living under the ‘master’ and the ‘fresh water’ being mixed with the ‘salt water’ is the godly spouse being polluted by the ways and actions of the ungodly spouse. The godly spouse will become a slave and polluted. Good apples in a bushel do not make the rotten apples better. The good become rotten. God is always saying, ‘come out of her my people, lest YOU share in her sins, and lest YOU receive her plagues’ (Rev 18:4). ‘DO NOT BE DECEIVED: “EVIL COMPANY CORRUPTS GOOD HABITS. A WAKE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND DO NOT SIN; FOR SOME DO NOT HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD”’ (1 COR 15:33, 34).

In his ignorance, Gola, is living as if Jesus had never come into this world and set up a new kingdom on the earth. He is living as if the coming of Jesus changed nothing, and that the unclean person contaminates the clean person. This a different Gospel to the one that Paul preached. Gola is on a crusade to persuade all mixed marriages to be terminated in divorce as soon as practicable.

The new revelation that Paul brought to light is that the clean person sanctifies the unclean person. Gola has no place for this new teaching revealed by the God the Holy Spirit to Paul. Either Paul or Gola is a false teacher, for they both cannot be right.

Given Gola’s objection to mixed marriages he will always choose a translation that reinforces his point of view. Thus, in the case of 1 Corinthians 7:15, he singles out Wuest’s translation because this says what he wants the Greek text to say:

Let’s read verse 15 from the Wuest translation: ‘But assuming that the unbelieving husband departs, let him be departing. A [CHRISTIAN] BROTHER OR [CHRISTIAN] SISTER IS NOT IN THE POSITION OF A SLAVE, NAMELY, BOUND TO THE UNBELIEVING HUSBAND OR UNBELIEVING WIFE IN AN INDISSOLUBLE[sic] UNION IN CASES SUCH AS THESE; but God has called us [to live] in peace’ (1 Corinthians 7:15 WUEST)

Note his switch from the BIND to the BOND. Paul is referring to the BIND and not to the BOND.

On page 27 Gola gives another reason why a mixed marriage should be dissolved as soon as possible. Gola asks, ‘How can a person live a godly life and at the same time submit that life to someone who practices ungodliness?’ In his mind it is not possible. His solution is that you get a divorce as quickly as possible to be free from these ungodly influences. Simplistic. Presumably he would apply the same principle to slaves, and urge them to run away from their ungodly masters. But Paul is of a different spirit. He urges the slave to stay in his master-slave relationship and not to run away. Here is Paul’s advice to Christian slaves:

Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of inheritance; for you serve the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:22-24).

Paul repeats his advice in Ephesians 6:5-9,

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.

Paul does not advise Christian slaves, who have Christian masters, to assert their right to be freed men. Rather, his advice is:

Let as many slaves as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and of His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brothers, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. If anyone teaches otherwise . . . he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, . . . from such withdraw yourself. (1 Timothy 6:1-2)

In Titus 2:9-10 he offers the same consistent, pastoral directive:

Exhort slaves to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Paul is not alone in giving this advice. The apostle Peter wrote:

Slaves, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God (1 Pet 2:18-20).

Now slaves are in a far worse state of being abused by someone else than wives are, yet there is no hint anywhere in Paul’s theology that they are to run away. And neither does he advise any believer to run away from their unbelieving spouse. His advice is to remain in the relationship that they are in (slave to master; wife to husband), and use it in a positive manner to the glory of God the Father.
Paul adopts the same consistent theological solution to the slave and to the wife; both are to be submissive to those who are over them. Paul instructs the wives:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Eph 5:22-24) Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Col 3:18).

Paul is not alone in giving this advice. The apostle Peter wrote:

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. . . . For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid of any terror (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Both Paul and Peter recognised that slaves and wives could have unbelievers ruling over their lives, some good and some harsh, but never do they exhort the slaves to run away, or the wives to get a divorce. They took the view that the Person of the Lord Jesus had taken up residence in their bodies and they could endure all things for the sake of the Gospel. With Christ in the vessel they could smile at the storm.

How different is this from the attitude and advice of Gola!

Gola claims that God knew “there would not only be divorce, but the NEED for divorce. God Himself had that need” (p. 59). He refers to Jeremiah 3:8, as proof that God had need of divorce, but here the LXX Greek term is exapesteila (ἐξαπέστειλα), which comes from the root ‘apostle’ (‘to send out’). This translates the Hebrew Piel form of שלח (shillach), which also means ‘to send out.’ The text reads, “And I see when (for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery) I have sent her away, and I give the bill of her divorce, that treacherous Judah her sister did not fear, and she goes and commits fornication, even she.” The bill of her divorce is the biblion apostasiou (βιβλίον ἀποστασίου). This is the same term that is used in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 (and Isa 50:1) to denote a Mosaic divorce.

Now ‘Israel’ here refers to the ten tribes, and ‘Judah’ refers to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The ten tribes were sent into exile, and God likens this to a human divorce. However, Judah behaved herself worst than Israel, which promoted God to invite Israel to come back into her marriage relationship with Him again.

What we have here is a metaphor—not a reality—by which God conveys to His people how He feels toward them. Using the marriage metaphor, God calls on His ‘wife’ Israel to come back to Him, saying, “Turn back, O backsliding Israel” (Jer 3:12). Without the metaphor He says the same thing directly to His people on the ground, “Turn back, O backsliding sons” (Jer 3:14).

Now there is no sense in which God was married to the twelve tribes of Israel at Mount Sinai, or at any other time. No such marriage service is recorded anywhere in the Old Testament. It is purely a teaching analogy to convey truth. If you press the analogy then you end up with God marrying two sisters at the same time, which was against the law; God would also be a bigamist; He would have broken the law of Deuteronomy 24:4 whereby a divorced wife could not return to her first husband after she was defiled, which Israel was.

Gola makes the mistake of assuming that in the case of Isaiah 50:1 there was no Mosaic divorce between God and His wife Zion. But the terms, Hebrew and Greek, of Isaiah 50 and Jeremiah 3 are the same. In both places the term is exapesteila (ἐξαπέστειλα), and the bill of divorce is the same—the biblion apostasiou (βιβλίον ἀποστασίου). Gola claims that there was no divorce, but only a separation. But, as a metaphor, Zion was divorced for her transgressions.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

As is to be expected from one who had no familiarity with the topic of divorce before he received his commission from God the Holy Spirit to write a book on the subject, he takes the prescriptive interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which is a mistake because he makes God the creator of divorce and remarriage, something which He hates.

On page 91 Gola accepts that Mosaic divorce, not separation, is in view in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but, strangely, he believes that this law is still in operation today, because he states that if a divorce takes place, the divorced wife can be taken back if she has not had relations with any other man in the meantime. But if she has remarried, then he cannot take her back. This is a case of importing into the new teaching of Christ a piece of the old leaven of Moses. On p. 112 he wrote,

Therefore, if our spouse dies, or if we are divorced, we can get married again. Divorce and death are equal before God. The only stipulation in this Scripture [Deut 24:1-4] is that if this is the second marriage, we cannot go back to the first spouse and remarry them because we married someone else after we divorced them.
But this only proves that Paul knows only of separation, not divorce/dissolution, because
divorced couples can be reconciled, even after both of them have unlawfully remarried after
t heir separation. And, strangely, when Gola turns to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, he views Paul’s scenario as a
‘separation’ and not as a ‘divorce’! (cf. p. 91) The only difference in Gola’s mind between a
‘separation’ and a ‘divorce’ is a piece of paper, that is how paper-thin is his difference between the
two states.

Paul rejects any idea of dissolution (= divorce) of a lawful marriage. That is anathema to him
and to Jesus Christ. The most that can happen to any marriage is that they separate and go their own
ways; but they have only one marriage while both spouses live. If either of them remarries after a
separation (or a state divorce) then that person is in an adulterous relationship; such like will not
enter the Kingdom of God on the Judgment Day.

Headship

Gola does not have a coherent understanding of headship. On page 63 he wrote, “We must
accept the fact that no matter how much we love a person, they will still have their own will to do as
they please.” Jesus did not have the freedom that we associate with someone in complete authority
over all men. Rather, He used His will to do someone else’s will. He had no desire to do His own will.
“Not my will, but Yours be done,” He prayed to the Father every minute of His earthly life. This is
the most perfect role-model for all Christian men to follow.

The head of Christ is God, which love-headship meant that He delighted to do His Father’s
will at all times. The head of man is Christ, which love-headship means that every Christian man
should delight to do the will of Christ, and not his own. The head of woman is man, which love-
headship implies that she will do her husband’s will at all times before her own will, because this is
Christ’s will for her. She serves God by serving her husband to the best of her ability.

It is a recipe for disaster to have no doctrine of headship in place before two people enter into
the state of matrimony. Only when they know their place within God’s greater will for His creation
will they see where they fit into it. In summary it is this. If they were born a girl, then their destiny is to serve man by doing his will. If they are born a boy, then their destiny is to serve Christ Jesus by
doing His will. All of humanity is locked into three headships: God, Christ, and man. Woman has no
headship powers. All are accountable to their own direct headship.

There is no room for anyone in God’s creation, male or female, to have their own, supreme,
unchallengeable will, and do as they please. They can try it, but to flout God’s will, as the majority of
men and women do, is to come under His wrath in the coming Day of Judgment. Such humans will
be discarded by God as rejects, for they do not have Christ’s Spirit dwelling in them; they are like salt
that has lost its savour.

The Father has handed every single man on this earth to His Son, and every single man that
has ever lived on this planet will give an account of his deeds to Christ who will assign to each man
his eternal destiny, either heaven or hell.

Accountability

Gola claims that, “There will come a time when we shall give an account for what God told
us to do. We will not give an account to God for our spouse, . . . “ (p. 63). Unfortunately, he is wrong.
Jesus made it explicit in Matthew 5:32 that any man who divorces his wife for any reason, and his wife
had not slept with any other man during her married life, she will be forced to remarry, and that
remarriage, in every case, is an adulterous relationship. But the sin of her adultery will be laid at the
feet of her first husband, because he forced her into that situation when he handed her a bill of
divorce which, he understood (wrongly, as it turned out) allowed him to give her permission to sleep
with any man she chose to. It is the person who initiates the divorce who will be held responsible for
their spouse’s remarriage.

Divorce is a fiction. It does not effect anything. It is a hoax, a sham, a trick. It has no value
above that of a piece of toilet paper. It claims everything, but delivers nothing. Jesus saw right
through the charade and, by implication, declared it worthless and a fraud.

The question arises, Will everyone who heeded Gola’s advice and divorced their lawful
marriages give an account to God for divorcing their spouses? The certain answer is Yes. Will Gola
himself be held responsible for his wrong advice? The certain answer is Yes. And behind these Yeses
lies an eternal death, and a divorcement from God without the hope of reconciliation.

How to escape from an abusive marriage

Gola’s bottom line is: ‘Divorce. Get rid of the problem. Turn your back on it, and begin again.’
It did not occur to him to suggest forgiveness. Nowhere in his book does he recommend forgiveness
as the first reaction to abuse in the marriage. Forgiveness is meekness, and meekness is weakness. He
goes for the manly solution: kick her out! He advocates divorce as a means to preserve yourself from an obnoxious partner, which God heartily approves of as a surgical instrument to remove a cancerous growth.

Gola counsels, many “have been taught that once you’ve been married you can never get a divorce because ‘God hates divorce,’ no matter how wrong, abusive, or unholy the marriage is. The truth is, God is more for the divorce than He is for the marriage” (p. 82). If the abuser doesn’t change, then divorce is the only option, he concluded. He overlooks the option of separation. Nowhere does Gola advise the believer to stay in the marriage if that is the desire of the unbeliever, in the hope that he might become holy. Nowhere does Gola ask the abused believer to forgive their spouse, seventy times seven. The word ‘forgiveness’ does not rank very high on his list of most frequently used vocabulary words in his book.²

Gola will permit a unbelieving spouse to cohabit with a believer provided the believer’s faith and practices are not interfered with, “otherwise, divorce is the order” (p. 77). What he should have said was ‘separation’ is the order, because Scripture nowhere endorses divorce for any reason, no matter how extreme the abuse may be. He wrote: “If God did not put the marriage together, we shouldn’t be in it in the first place. If we are in such a marriage, we can get out” (p. 78). In this case, there is a large ‘if’ hanging over ever marriage, because who can infallibly know if God has joined the couple together? This kind of thinking will undermine and destabilise every lawful marriage, for who is to tell when God did join them together?

The marriage bond can only be broken by death; never by divorce. The marriage obligations can be severed completely if the unbeliever walks away from his believing spouse. Gola only vaguely saw the difference between the bond and the bind of every lawful marriage, when he wrote, “You may be able to physically separate the husband and wife from each other, but not the marriage or ‘oneness’ that they possess in their hearts” (p. 85; but on pp. 90-91 he seems to regard separation and divorce as synonyms). Can he blame God the Holy Spirit for not illuminating his mind on this truth? The Spirit of God led Paul to see the difference. Or is this yet another case where Gola can claim to be inspired and Paul to be uninspired?

Gola’s preferred option to achieve ‘peace’ is to go for divorce, never for separation with a view to reconciliation. “When a marriage covenant has been badly violated, we can ask for our heavenly Father’s help to dissolve it” (p. 85). Note, it does not occur to him to say, “we can ask for our heavenly Father’s help to separate us for a while, forgive one another, and come back together.” It is divorce or nothing, in his world. There is no room for compromise. There is no belief that every lawful marriage is “until death do us part.” Indeed, Gola objects to the use of this vow (cf. p. 89). He always keeps open the door to divorce because God may not have joined the couple, and he has a fail proof method of knowing which ones God joined and which ones He did not join. If the marriage stays together, then God joined them; if it does not, then God did not join them, therefore it is no sin if they divorce and try again with a new partner.

There are two kinds of divorce, ‘divine’ and ‘human’

The reason why divorce is common with God (Gola claims) is because “Scripture does NOT say, ‘therefore what God has joined together, let not GOD separate,’ but ‘let not man (the marriage partners) separate’ out of self-gratification” (p. 85). So we have two kinds of divorce at present on the earth; those where God does dissolve the union,³ and those where man attempts to dissolve the union. If a divorce is used to save the family, then it is of God. If it is used for selfish pleasure it is of man, and is wrong (sinful).

When Gola comes to interpret Malachi 2:11-16 we see the root of his system. Here he imposes a theory on the text that it will not sustain. He believes that there are two kinds of marriages and two kinds of divorces in the text. He wrote: “The ‘divorces’ were not official divorces; they didn’t need to be. They were already previously married and ‘unofficially’ married again” (p. 86). He justified this on the grounds that the Hebrew word shillach (piel of jlv) “never meant divorce, and it doesn’t mean divorce” (p. 86). Yet in Jeremiah 3:8 and Isa 50:1 the same Hebrew verb is used of divorce with a Certificate of Divorce accompanying the severance or sending out! With this lapse his exegesis collapses in disarray. On top of this linguistic blunder, Gola pretends that he knows that the husbands in Malachi 2 were divorcing their wives without a Certificate of Divorce. This has been

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² I found the first reference to forgiveness on page 123, in the throw-away sentence, “We need to have forgiveness in our heart toward our spouse.” But this activity does not play a central role anywhere in his book. The onward march is fixed toward divorce, not forgiveness.

³ Gola frequently attributes divorce to God, see pp. 39, 59, 60 (“Divorce and remarriage was never a question with God.”); 85-86.
plucked out of the air! He claims to know that God is angry only over divorces where no Certificate of Divorce was handed to the ‘separated’ wife. So a piece of paper makes up the difference between God smiling over a divorce and being angry over a divorce!

Matthew 5:32

The closest reading of the Greek is as follows (my translation): “Now it was said that, Who, say, may have put away [ἀπολύω] his wife, let him give her a severance-document. But I, I say to you that, Who may have put away [ἀπολύω] his wife makes her to commit adultery—apart from the matter of infidelity. And who, if say, married one having already been put away [ἀπολύω], he is adulterous with her.” It is clear from Jesus’ statement, and from the question that the Pharisees put to Jesus in Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:2, that each time they used the verb ἀπολύω [ἀπολύω] ‘to put away’ that this action was always accompanied by a severance-document (Certificate of Divorce). The onus is on Gola to show that this was not the case, as he attempts to do in his own translation (his brackets):

Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever PUTS AWAY [separates from {apoluwo}] his wife, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE. But I say to you that whoever PUTS AWAY [separates and remarries without being divorced from] his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery: and whoever marries a woman who is PUT AWAY [separated without being divorced {apoluwo}] commits adultery.’

The assumption Gola made was that the verb ἀπολύω [ἀπολύω] did not by itself carry the idea of the dissolution of the marriage, and that the Certificate of Divorce was only given because Moses commanded it to accompany the action. This is incorrect, because it is used in a legal context, we just need to point out that before Moses insisted on a piece of paper, divorce consisted solely of the act of the husband putting her out of his house, and telling her to clear off; that she was not wanted anymore, and she was divorced without a piece of paper. Moses’ piece of paper did not rob the verb ἀπολύω [ἀπολύω] of its efficacy and power to do what the husband’s actions and words conveyed at the time.

Throughout Hebrew and Jewish history there is no known case where a husband ‘put away’ (ἀπολύω) his wife without writing out a Certificate of Divorce at the same time. It just would not occur, such was the strength and character of Moses’s standing in the eyes of the nation. So we must read the text as Jesus would have read it, and not as Gola has read it. And we must read the verb ἀπολύω [ἀπολύω] as the Pharisees and the Jews would have read it, and not as Gola does.

Gola created a piece of fictional history when he declared that Moses solved the problem of the hard-hearted husband who hated his wife but would not give her a legal divorce so that his “spouse might never enjoy being married to another person. In this case, Moses gave them ‘permission’ to separate without a divorce on one condition: physical adultery” (p. 115). This is pure fiction. God commanded the death penalty for the sin of adultery, so how could Moses commute this punishment to divorce? There is absolutely no record of any kind (biblical or rabbinical) that Moses abolished the death penalty for adultery and substituted his own penalty of divorce in its place.

1 Corinthians 7:11-13

At 1 Corinthians 7:11 Gola mistranslates the Greek verb ἀφίημι (ἀφίημι) as ‘divorce’ and the use of this unfortunate legal term implies a Certificate of Divorce, something that would have been the last thing on Paul’s mind (p. 92). The verb means ‘to dismiss or release someone or something from a place or one’s presence; to abandon; to neglect.’ But its most common use in the Gospels is to indicate forgiveness of sins. No Greek dictionary that I have consulted gives it the meaning of ‘divorce.’ Paul commands Christian men not to abandon or neglect/forsake their pagan or unbelieving wives. He does not use the word ‘divorce’ as if that was an option. He tells them not to abandon them, which they might have been inclined to do in their enthusiasm to devote their entire lives to serving the Lord in an undistracted manner (7:35). They might even have entertained the mistaken belief that “it is not good to touch a woman,” especially an ‘unclean’ woman, as unbelievers were (7:1).

It is clear that Paul got his teaching on marriage directly from the Lord in 7:10-11 because he makes a distinction between what he got from Jesus and what he got from the Holy Spirit. Jesus informed him that “a wife is not to separate [χωρίζοντα ἐξ αὐτῆς] from her husband, . . . and a husband is not to abandon [μὴ ἀφιέσαι] his wife.” These were Jesus’ terms, as conveyed to Paul, and Paul takes up Jesus’ terms and applies them by extension to the situation in Corinth. He never used the term ‘divorce’ (ἀπολύω [ἀπολύω]), which is very significant, because it means that both Jesus and Paul

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4 J. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11,” Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 100 (1981), pp. 601–6. This verb, like any verb involving separation, can be used in classical Greek literature to refer to divorce, but in this context it cannot mean ‘divorce’ because the wife is to remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband. So, in the eyes of Jesus, she is still married after she has ‘departed’ from her husband. This is consistent with Jesus’ view that a marriage is for life.
operated within a world in which divorce cannot occur in the eyes of God, if it refers to the dissolution of the marriage bond.

The justification for ruling out the translation ‘divorce’ (ἀφιέμαι) anywhere in Paul’s writing is the same expression, “not to neglect” (μὴ ἀφιέμαι) occurs at Matthew 23:23 where Jesus warned the Pharisees, “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you give tithe of the mint, and the dill, and the cumin, and you neglected [ἀφιέμαι] the weightier things of the Law — the judgment, and the kindness, and the faith; these it behoved you to do, and those not to neglect [μὴ ἀφιέμαι].” It would not make sense to change ‘neglect’ to ‘divorce’ in any of the NT contexts in which this verb is used.

The closest one can get to a universal, core meaning for ἀφιέμαι (ἀφιέμαι), on page 92, where he wrote (I have interspersed brief comments throughout to aid the reader):

... A wife is not to DEPART from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried OR BE RECONCILED TO HER HUSBAND. And a husband is not to divorce [LMF: Gola should have translated this verb as ‘abandon’] his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

This Scripture is NOT referring to a finalized legal divorce, but a ‘separation’ [LMF: correct] only. The Greek word used for ‘depart’ is chorizo, and it means ‘to place room between, to separate.’ This is clearly seen because the husband and wife before the separation are STILL husband and wife AFTER the separation [LMF: correct]. For the wife to ‘... be reconciled to HER HUSBAND’ (1 Corinthians 7:11a), not, ‘... HER FORMER HUSBAND who divorced her ...’ (Deuteronomy 24:4a). If she were divorced, she wouldn’t have a husband [LMF: incorrect]. But when you’re just separated, you still have a husband [LMF: correct].

Where Gola went wrong in this translation of 7:11 is that he fell into the trap of assuming that ἀφιέμαι (ἀφιέμαι) was a legal term which meant ‘divorce/dissolution.’ And in this he agrees with many faulty English translations, such as the NKJV, ESV, NEB, but not the ASV, Moffatt, Douay, and AV. The situation is not a legal one, rather it is the social effects of families coming to terms with the success of Christian inroads into a non-Christian culture. Christ split families. Spouses had to decide whose side they were on. Christ would not allow His followers to dissolve their marriages. The initiative lay solely with the unbeliever. Did they want to stay, or did they want to depart? Christ removed this option from the believer. The nature of marriage meant that they had to stay in it. The only issue was, Would their unbelieving spouse want to stay with them? The two options open to the unbeliever was to stay or separate (depart); the option to divorce was never on, not that that would stop the unbeliever from going off and getting a State divorce and remarrying, but that remarriage would be an adulterous affair in the eyes of God, and a sin against the first spouse.

Consistency demands that the same Greek word should be translated by the same English word in the three instances where the verb ἀφιέμαι (ἀφιέμαι) occurs in 7:11, 12, 13. Gola is consistently wrong to translate ἀφιέμαι (ἀφιέμαι) as a legal term, ‘divorce,’ which he does in his translation of 7:11, “And a husband is not to [spitefully] DIVORCE HIS WIFE” (1 Corinthians 7:11)(p. 92).

Unless the reader becomes familiar with the Greek terms that the Holy Spirit guided Paul to use in 1 Corinthians 7, he can let mistranslations slip through without noticing the implications that will be absorbed subliminally, as when Gola replaced ‘abandon’ (a social term) with ‘divorce’ (a legal term), but 1 Corinthians 7 is set in the courts of the Lord, and not the courts of the law.

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5 Contrast this with his earlier treatment of ἀπολύω which he divulged of all legal connotation of ‘divorce’ to help his case when he needed it.

6 The ESV, RSV, NKJV, and The New American Bible (1970) have: ‘divorce . . . divorce . . . divorce.’

7 The AV correctly used non-legal language to convey the truth in 1 Cor 7:11-13. It used ‘put away . . . put away . . . leave.’ It is a pity its successor, the NKJV, did not retain this non-legal language. The American Standard Version (1901) has, ‘leave . . . leave . . . leave.’ Moffatt and Douay have: ‘put away . . . put away . . . put away.’ The Jerusalem Bible (1968) has: ‘leave . . . send away . . . send away.’
Gola correctly noted that *chorizo* (χωρίζω) as used by Jesus and Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10 can only mean ‘separate’ and it cannot mean ‘divorce.’ Now Gola has already conceded the truth that *chorizo* (χωρίζω) cannot mean ‘divorce’ in 7:10-11, so when the same verb is used in v. 15 it cannot mean ‘divorce’ there either. So when Paul said, “But if the unbeliever separates (chorizo/χωρίζω), let him separate . . . ” Paul is not referring to a divorce, but to a separation. So when Paul continues, “. . . a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases [of separation]. . . .” the term ‘bondage’ cannot refer to the marriage bond; it can only refer to the duty of care that all married couples are under to look after one another, which Paul reminded them of in 7:3, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. . . . Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time.” But if the couple split up then they cannot shoulder this burden of responsibility toward one another. Hence the ‘bondage’ is the ‘bind’ of the marriage, not the ‘bond’ of the marriage. Paul reassures Christian couples who have been abandoned by their unbelieving spouses—for the split always comes from the unbeliever’s side—that they are not to be overly concerned about this upheaval in their marriage, because they have another life to live in serving their Lord without distraction.

When God divorces is it permanent?

Gola’s answer is Yes. He wrote: “When it’s God desire for us to divorce our spouse, it’s done permanently. When God pulls apart there is no going back. It’s over. He dissolves the union forever.” His justification for this view is not backed up by a single example from Scripture, but rather in the case of the permanent rejection of Saul as king over Israel! Somehow the permanent separation of Saul becomes the model for the permanent divorce that God applies to some marriages. His other examples of permanent separation are the generation that came out of Egypt and Moses, all of whom were permanently separated by God from entering into His possession. Bizarrely, he uses these irrelevant cases as models for permanently separating ‘bad’ Christian marriages.

Gola believes there are two anointings. There is an anointing in making the ‘two into one flesh,’ and there is an anointing to separate or divide the ‘one into two flesh’ again. He believes that God sends—

an anointing to divide the one back into two, otherwise, the couple may never properly separate. . . . God knows how to do it properly, and He knows how to do it completely. Remember, when God separates a man from a woman by divorce, He separates once and for all time.

Whenever God separates a couple and that couple gets back together, they are in a marriage that’s outside the will of God. The ordinance for that marriage has been annulled in God’s heavenly books. Now, if they are in an ungodly marriage. Repenting of daily living in a marriage that God does not approve of does not fix the problem, but repenting and getting out of the marriage does (p. 98). This is a very dangerous doctrine. In Paul’s theology, if the unbeliever separates himself and goes off into the world, gets a divorce, and remarries, this is a temporary state, but from Gola’s perspective this is a permanent state because it is a permanent divorce. He wrote, “When a marriage contract has been badly violated, we can ask for our heavenly Father’s help to dissolve it” (p. 85; cf. pp, 22, 67). But from Paul’s perspective the unbeliever who violates the marriage contract can be forgiven, and he can be reconciled to his Christian wife. This is no longer possible on Gola’s terms. In his view such a reconciliation is a sinful relationship, because he believes that Deuteronomy 24:4 applies today as much as it did in Moses’s day.

Under Gola’s teaching no couple can be sure that God joined them together in a lawful marriage. He offers the following counsel:

God may require us to separate. You must acknowledge that you have married someone against His will. You must ask Him for the anointing to dissolve the marriage (if that’s what He wants) and to receive His strength to bring you through the separation. God requires us to fully pursue Him, which in turn may cause a separation in the marriage if the other spouse does not want to serve God and does not want you to serve God (p. 98).

At what point does one know if they have married the wrong person? If the marriage had the blessing of God on it from the beginning, has He not joined the two to become one flesh? Can God change His mind later on, and rule that what He had joined together at the beginning He must now divorce?

Divorce and Remarriage

8 But if Gola had consulted some reputable Greek dictionaries he would have discovered that *chorizo* (χωρίζω) is used to speak of a divorce, without itself carrying the legal connotation itself. There might be a rare case somewhere in classical Greek literature where *aphiemi* (ἐφιέμαι) could also cover a divorce situation, but these are irrelevant because they would not affect its non-legal use in 1 Corinthians 7.
Gola is incensed at the idea that all remarriages after a divorce are adulterous relationships. He wrote, "‘Forbidding [someone] to marry’ after they have been divorced is a doctrine of the devil" (p. 109). He seems to have forgotten that Jesus pronounced all remarriages after a divorce as adulterous relationships, and all those who marry divorced persons are also adulterers and adulteresses (cf. Mt 19:3-12; 5:32). Jesus could only have said this if each lawful marriage was for life, with no prospect of release from it, hence the consternation of His disciples when they heard His teaching.

It is well-known that none of the Greek words used by Jesus and Paul are legal words. I refer to chorizo (χωρίζω), aphiemi (ἀφίημι), and apoluo (ἀπολῶ). Not one of these words means ‘divorce’ in any legal sense. However, when the Pharisees coupled the verb apoluo (ἀπόλῶ) with the word ekestin (ἐκείστως) ‘it is lawful,’ the combined meaning of the two words does become legal, and reads, ‘it is lawful to put away,’ and a lawful putting away is a divorce. It is the combination of ‘lawful’ and ‘put away’ that brings about the concept of divorce/dissolution of the marriage in the Pharisee’s question to Jesus in Matthew 19:3.

Now the Pharisees engaged Jesus in a matter of Law, not social convention, or public opinion. Consequently they dictated the legal meaning to the words they used, of which apoluo (ἀπολῶ) was central. As a result, both Jesus and the Pharisees used apoluo (ἀπολῶ) with its legal meaning of ‘divorce/dissolution’ of the marriage bond. That is what both intended to convey when they used the word.

We can now translate Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12 on the understanding that apoluo (ἀπολῶ) referred to the practice of divorce as carried out in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which involved the lawful handing over of a Certificate of Divorce. There was no other way to get a divorce in Israel except by obeying Moses’s command to write out a biblion apostasiou (βιβλίων ἀποστασίων) —Certificate of Divorce. The following is my translation of Matthew 19:3-9, keeping as close as possible to the original words:

And the Pharisees came near to him, tempting him, and saying to him, if it is lawful to a man to divorce his wife according to every cause? But he, having given answer, said to them, ‘Did you not read, that the One having made from the beginning, male and female he made them? And said, ‘On account of this shall a man leave behind father and mother and be fused to his wife, and they shall be—the two—into one flesh. Therefore what God joined together, let man not put asunder.

They say to him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a roll of departure, and to divorce her? He says to them that, Moses for your hard-heartedness permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not thus. Contrast this with Gola’s translation (capitals and the square brackets are his, the footnote are mine):

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to release and separate his wife [without divorcing her] for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’ and said, “for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses COMMAND to give a certificate of divorce, AND to release and separate from her?”

He said to them, “Moses, BECAUSE OF THE HARDNESS OF YOUR HEARTS, PERMITTED you to release and separate from your wives [without a certificate of divorce]. But from the beginning [being released and separated WITHOUT a certificate of divorce] was not so. And I say to you, whoever releases and separates from his wife [without a certificate of divorce] except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is separated [without being divorced] commits adultery.

The mistake Gola made here was to ignore the legal use of apoluo (ἀπολῶ) ‘to divorce,’ in this context. He tried to get away with using the general meaning of apoluo, ‘to release,’ but it does not work in a legal context.

If the Pharisees had asked the question, as posed by Gola, Is it lawful for a man to release and separate his wife without divorcing her? Jesus would have scoffingly replied, No, it is not lawful! And Jesus would have been right, for there is no law in the Pentateuch that allows a man to ‘release and separate’ a wife without divorcing her! Pharisaic lawyers would have looked pretty stupid in the eyes of the watching crowds if they had asked such a dumb question. But Gola is adamant that the legal question behind the Pharisees’ question was, “Do you just separate, OR do you separate AND give a certificate of divorce?” (p. 110) It never occurred to Gola that the question might have been, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?! which is what the text of Matthew 19:3 reads!

Gola ignored the Pharisees’ question and in its place he gives them another question to ask Jesus! He claims that they asked Jesus, does “God accepts a separation to get remarried without a

9 The words ‘and separate’ are not in the Greek. He uses two verbs in place of the single Greek verb in order to avoid using the legal term ‘divorce,’ which the context demands.

10 This was not possible or lawful to do under the Old Covenant. But this is no obstacle to an author who confesses he was ignorant of the topic when he started writing his book on the subject!
divorce certificate for just any reason?” (p. 110), and Gola makes Jesus reply that “A separation alone does not break the marriage union. It takes a certificate of divorce” (p. 111). This is an amazing concoction of fantasy.

Gola claims that the Pharisees were in the habit, since the time of Moses, of divorcing their wives without issuing them a Certificate of Divorce, and this was to prevent their wives from getting remarried (p. 111).

The scenario that Gola has created, to suit his case, is artificial, and has no basis in Hebrew or Jewish culture. It would have been impossible to get a divorce without a Certificate of Divorce, but he committed himself to forcing divorce on the Lord’s people, so by hook or by crook, he was going to fit it into the New Covenant Scriptures in whatever way he could, even if it meant adding words to God’s Word which are not there in the original Greek, or implied in the Greek.

What Gola failed to notice—and he is not alone in making this mistake—is that he read Deuteronomy 24:1-3 as God speaking favourably about divorce (i.e., the prescriptive reading), when in fact God was disdainful about the whole process and, in verse four, He placed a punishment on any man who availed himself of Moses’s Certificate of Divorce, in the form of a ban on any reconciliation with his former wife, but under Grace this is now possible.

On top of his misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, he thought he could hijack the annulments in Ezra 9–10, and import these ideas into Jesus’ teaching, and get Jesus to approve of divorce, by twisting His words, as his tenuous, and heavily supplemented, translation demonstrates. The Greek on its own would never have yielded the meaning he has put into the mouth of the Lord Jesus, and this is a dangerous thing to do, because anyone can now heavily supplement Jesus’ words and divert Him to say what they want Him to say, after the example of Gola.

Because of Gola’s ignorance of Old Testament customs and traditions, and especially rabbinic traditions, he imagined he could conjure up a scenario in which Moses permitted some Israelites to dissolve their marriages without giving their wives a Certificate of Divorce, and another scenario in which Moses commanded some Israelites to dissolve their marriages by giving their wives a Certificate of Divorce. According to Gola, Jesus agreed with the latter, but not with the former. This means that Gola has Jesus championing and upholding divorce provided a Certificate of Divorce accompanies the procedure. He has Jesus condemning only those divorces obtained by not issuing a Certificate of Divorce. So a piece of paper makes all the difference! How valuable must this scrap of paper have been to possess, and how devastating it must have been to be divorced without it! The hard-heartedness behind the scrap of paper is ignored!

We are informed that Jesus understood the importance of this sheet of paper and the two types of divorce in vogue in His day, and as a result He condemned the Pharisees who asked the question, because, according to Gola, these Pharisees obtained their divorces without issuing a Certificate of Divorce, and they did not see any reason why they should issue a Certificate of Divorce. Gola’s comment is: “These Pharisees still don’t seem to understand why they have to give a certificate of divorce when they separate from their wives!” (p. 150)

In his comment on his own translation of Matthew 19:3-9 on page 150, he says: “Jesus is saying, ‘haven’t you read that if a married couple separates without an actual divorce, they are still joined’ as ‘one flesh.’ And if they remarry in that condition they are in adultery?’ The Pharisees would have very quickly retorted, “You have made it up! There is no such reading in the Torah!” And they would have rightly laughed Jesus to scorn over His ignorance of what was written in the Torah. Gola has so convinced himself that his ideas are found in Scripture that he could get Jesus to say they could be ‘read’ in the Holy Scriptures!

One of the most revealing statements of Gola is found on page 150. There he says, “In the beginning the Lord never wanted the husband and wife to separate without a divorce.” It is the last three words that give the game away. Jesus taught, “In the beginning the Lord never wanted the husband and wife to separate.” Full stop. But in Gola’s world this was never the case. He expected divorce to appear on the earth and he assumed that God made provision for it from the beginning, but it had to be accompanied by a Certificate of Divorce from the time of Adam onwards, hence he added the three extra words, ‘without a divorce.’

The difference between Gola and Jesus could not be starker. While Gola claims to be a regenerate man there is not much evidence of it when it comes to the messy business of divorce. He acts like any unregenerate man would, and goes straight for what he calls ‘healing’ i.e., get a divorce.

There is very little that is distinctively ‘Christian’ about the counselling that pervades the pages of this book. Take away the religious jargon and the much quoting of Scripture verses, and a secular counsellor could do just as good a job as S. Gola. They would certainly end up at the same place, because ‘commonsense’ is the only pragmatic principle in the playground of the world.

I have read through every page of this book carefully and there is not a single case where he uses forgiveness, and seventy times’ seven forgiveness, as the only effective way of healing splits.
Neither does he have a coherent doctrine of headship, which is foundational to all successful marriages.\(^\text{11}\)

Jesus knew that as all human beings enter this world each of them must have a new heart and a new spirit—His Spirit, if they are to rise to the challenge of being holy as God is holy. Only with a new heart and a new Spirit is it possible to keep a marriage together, because all unregenerate beings are basically selfish, and the norm is for all marriages to break down and end in the divorce courts, because all humans are born in sin and shaped in iniquity, and they are servants of the devil to a greater or larger extent. Some can resist the devil for a while, just as others can resist the Holy Spirit to their eternal shame.

I recall someone with a pocketful of Certificates of Divorce, ready to hand them out to Christians who cannot forgive their Christian partners, in the hope that by getting rid of their obnoxious spouse they can make a new start in life. If the Spirit and love of Christ is in a married couple how can Christ be against Christ? If a love-headship relationship is in place between husband and wife, then God removes all strife and bitterness through this unifying headship.

I pass over other misinformation in Gola’s book.\(^\text{12}\)

1 Corinthians 7:27-28

Gola believed that Paul was addressing unmarried and divorced persons in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28. He translates accordingly, “Are you bound (married) to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed (divorced). Are you loosed (divorced) from a wife? Do not seek a wife.”

Now, given that Paul has not explicitly addressed the category of divorced—as opposed to separated—spouses in the church in Corinth, and he avoided using the verb most commonly used by Jesus and the Pharisees to refer to divorce (accompanied by a Certificate of Divorce), namely, *apōlōw* (ἀπολύω), it seems arbitrary to latch on to a new verb, *lōw* (λύω), which is a non-legal term, and of general purpose, and assume that it has the technical meaning of ‘divorced.’

Unfortunately for Gola, the Greek term *lōw* (λύω) is never used in the context of a divorce or of a separation. However, a study of the 66 cases of *apōlōw* (ἀπολύω) in the New Testament, shows that *this* is the term to use when one refers to divorced persons, as the following examples will show.

A divorced wife is referred to as an *apolelumenhn* (ἀπολελυμένη) from the root *apoluo* (ἀπολύω) ‘to release,’ in Matthew 19:9, “and whoever marries her who is released [= divorced] commits adultery.” It is used when Joseph ‘released’ Mary from her engagement to him (Mt 1:19). It is used of divorce in Matthew 5:32, “whoever may release his wife . . . and marry her who has been released commits adultery.” It is used in Matthew 19:3 where the Pharisees asked Jesus, ‘Is it lawful to release a wife for every cause?’ It is used exclusively throughout the divorce debates in the Gospels. The same root is used when Pilate wanted to ‘release’ Jesus (Jn 18:39; 19:10, 12, 12). In Luke 13:12 the woman bent over for eighteen years was released by Jesus.

It is the augment of the verb, ἀπο— that imparts to the verb *lōw* (λύω) the idea of ‘release.’ On its own *lōw* (λύω) means ‘loose, untie.’ Consequently, the verb *lōw* (λύω) is unfit for purpose to convey the idea of ‘release.’ A study of the 42 cases of *lōw* (λύω) in the New Testament shows that it is never used of divorce or of divorced persons.

At 1 Corinthians 7:27 Paul used the unaugmented form *lelουsai* (λελουσαι), meaning ‘loosed,’ and not the augmented form *apolelουsai* (ἀπολελουσαι), meaning ‘released.’ But for Gola’s exegesis to be sound he requires the augmented form, but it does not exist in this place in any critical apparatus. Consequently he has no linguistic foundation to alter ‘loose’ to ‘divorce.’ Only if Paul had written *apolelουsai* (ἀπολελουσαι), meaning ‘released’ in 1 Corinthians 7:27, would Gola have had a linguistic case to change his translation to read: “Are you bound (married)[LMF: correct] to a wife? Do not seek to be released (divorced). Are you released (divorced) from a wife? Do not seek a wife.” The underlined words, ‘released,’ are what Gola could have used had Paul used the word for ‘release’ which, unfortunately, for Gola’s exegesis Paul didn’t, and that demolishes Gola’s case.

In any case, even if Paul was addressing fully divorced persons in 7:27 he could not go on to say, “But even if you do marry, you have not sinned” (7:28), because this would have contradicted his earlier statement that those who were separated were to stay separate or be reconciled. They would have sinned if they had remarried.

\(^\text{11}\) The first passing reference to the husband as head of the family comes on p. 125, and there it rises no higher than leadership, which does not define what biblical headship is all about.

\(^\text{12}\) The daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 36:6-9). Gola made the mistake of assuming that each of the twelve tribes of Israel had to marry within their own tribe (p. 49). He was unaware that Israelite men could marry girls from any tribe they chose, provided these girls had no brothers, and they were the only inheritors of their father’s land. In which case these heiresses had to marry males within their own tribe. They had no choice in the matter, because God wanted the land to descend through the male line of inheritance. God the Holy Spirit, in this instance, did not guide Gola into the correct understanding of Numbers 36:6-9. If He failed him in this instance, could He have failed him in other instances?
Any author who presents Paul as inconsistent with himself has misunderstood Paul’s argument. Only the exegete who can bring out the full consistency of Paul’s thinking in all its parts should be trusted.

The conclusion of the matter is that the section 7:25-28 is addressed to the ‘Unmarried and Widows’ and does not include any of the ‘separated’ or ‘divorced’ spouses. In the eyes of Paul and the Lord Jesus, those who are married, but separated, are still married in their eyes, even if their unbelieving spouses have got remarried in the meantime. So these ‘separated’ spouses would not come under this section of Paul’s detailed categories of marital status. They would come under section 7:10-16, ‘Paul’s Commands to the Married.’

I conclude that Gola was wrong to translate *luo* (*lu0w*) as ‘divorce.’ In its context it means ‘free.’ Paul’s question was, “Are you free from marriage?” and he expected the answer to be Yes; to which he responded, “then do not seek a wife.”

1 Corinthians 7:39

Having convinced himself that Jesus and Paul fully believed in the efficacy of divorce to dissolve any lawful marriage, when Gola came to Paul’s statement in 7:39 he put an unusual twist on it to make it appear that Paul endorsed the existence of divorce among God’s people as a natural phenomenon and, indeed, an instrument of blessing and healing at times. Paul wrote: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” As it stands, this is crystal clear; a wife can only remarry on the death of her first husband. This infuriated Gola, who responded abruptly (p. 116):

> When a person is divorced, they don’t have a husband or wife. This means they are not ‘bound’ to someone. This Scripture is for the person who is MARRIED and wants to marry someone else while they are still married to another. You can’t be married to two people at the same time. If you’re divorced, you CAN get married again because you don’t have a husband or wife. Simply, you’re single or unmarried, if divorced.

If Gola is correct then Paul has made a serious oversight in neglecting to include the divorced woman in this summary. Paul should have said, “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives OR DIVORCES HER; but if her husband dies OR DIVORCES HER, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” Given that the divorce rates have been high throughout human history, Paul has made a serious blunder in not including divorced wives in this all-important, principled statement. Could Paul have made such a blunder? Is this a case where, once again, Gola is the inspired writer and Paul is the uninspired (and defective) writer?

However, if you look at the same text from the standpoint of Jesus and Paul, for whom divorce was an anathema and a violation of God’s will for every marriage in the New Covenant era, then it makes perfectly good sense to leave the text as it stands. If divorce is a fiction of human society, and it has not dissolved a single, lawful marriage from Adam to the present day, then Paul is correct in his statement: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives.” This law goes back to Genesis 2:24 where God joined Adam and Eve in marriage and that was how it was to stay until one of them died. There was no alternative. And now that Jesus has come and restored a new nature in each of His followers, they can now live to the end of their lives in the light of this new, born-again experience. His followers have been given a new nature—the nature of Christ Himself—which enables them to live a harmonious married life just as Adam and Eve were able to do before their natures were corrupted and their world fell through, and they began to experience disharmony and discord and disagreements through their descendants, descending ever lower and lower into the depths of depravity and murder and divorce.

Divorce belongs to the effects of sin. It is the fruit of fallen, human nature. It is as inevitable as weeds. It multiplies adultery. It leaves behind a loveless landscape. Memories are full of unforgiven wrongs. The new leaf that should have turned over, keeps turning over, and running off into the distance, blown about by the demons of doubt over whether divorce was all that it was made out to be. Divorce turns out to be a mirage in the desert. It has a lure of its own that will surely lead to the death of all who pursue it in the hope of finding happiness and peace at the end of its shimmering glean.

END OF REVIEW

SUMMARY CRITICISMS OF STEPHEN GOLA’S BOOK, *God’s Will? The Truth of Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible for Christians*

The event that set Gola off in the wrong direction was the incident of the mass ‘divorces’ in Ezra 9–10. A simplistic reading of the text fooled him to thinking that this was God doing the divorcing through Ezra. So he came to the conclusion that God was involved in divorcing ‘bad’ marriages. It was but a short step to see God at work doing the same thing among His own people in
Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Next, he assumed that when God spoke through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah to reveal that He had divorced His people that this meant that God did not view divorce as an evil thing, but as a necessary thing when all other avenues were closed to Him.

These three stages of growth in Gola’s understanding of God’s attitude toward divorce convinced him that there was a positive aspect to divorce that the Church had shied away from.

What happened next was predictable. Gola associated God with divorce, and viewed it as a necessary ‘discipline’ to end even lawful marriages. Hence it was inconceivable to him that God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would banish divorce forever from the New Kingdom of God; that Jesus would build a Kingdom whose citizens would not sin deliberately and that all His followers would be taught by God. Indeed, Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to dwell within the bodies of all His followers, and lift them up to a higher form of life and living, such that it would be possible to please God in the flesh. Through Jesus came a new generation of human beings on the earth who would be different from all the peoples of the earth. Whereas the ‘world’ would go on divorcing and sinning, His Elect People would rise out of this sordid world and walk with white, spotless garments because they all have been given a new heart and a new Spirit. Because Jesus imparted His own life into each of His followers, the idea of divorce would be an alien idea in their world of love and forgiveness.

Because Gola could not get his mind round the possibility that divorce was incompatible with having the Spirit of Christ abiding in one’s body, mind, and spirit, he sunk down into the mire of the religion of Moses, and borrowed what he could from that debased sub-normal culture to create his own nest in which to hatch his own disciples after his own likeness.

What Gola needs to do is to retrace the route he took that led to his confrontation with the Lord Jesus. First, he must abandon the idea that God loves divorce in some sense, or in any sense. This is not true. He hates divorce of lawful marriages. He must hold to the idea that God never approved of the attempt of man to bring about the dissolution of any lawful marriage, from the beginning of human existence.

Secondly, he must abandon the idea that the divorces in Ezra 9–10 are in any sense models to follow in the New Testament. They were not divorces; they were annulments.

Thirdly, he must abandon the idea that in Deuteronomy 24 God approves of the divorces described in those verses. He has taken the ‘prescriptive view.’ He should abandon it and take up the ‘descriptive view.’ There many good, evangelical commentaries which expound the ‘descriptive interpretation.’

Fourthly, he must recognise that because God takes up a particular analogy or metaphor to use as a teaching aid in Jeremiah and Isaiah, it does not necessarily mean that he is to see any historical reality behind the metaphor, any more than one is to see history behind every parable that Jesus spoke. God, in His sovereignty, could take up the analogy of marriage and divorce, because these were familiar to the nation, and through them He could get His message across to them, without necessarily approving of the metaphor itself. After all He can describe Himself as a thief in the night.

Fifthly, he must abandon the idea that Jesus supported divorce. He did not, and He made that very plain in the Gospels. He must go back and read Jesus’ teaching in the light of the truth that His Father hated divorce, and that divorce is incompatible inside His new Kingdom of God.

Sixthly, he must abandon the idea that Paul supported divorce, or the use of divorce to separate the believers from the unbelievers, or condone divorce in any shape or form. He did not. Paul permitted separation, but never divorce/dissolution.

Seventhly, he must abandon the idea of remarriage after divorce while both spouses are still alive. All such remarriages are adulterous relationships, and all such cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

Eighthly, I would strongly advise him to read my e-book (free download from my website) on Good Order in the Church, to get a good understanding of what Headship means, and the principles that govern a successful marriage and a life well-pleasing to the Head of the Church.

Lastly, Gola must come to terms with the biblical truth that divorce cannot occur. Every man and woman who got a divorce must return to their first spouse if they are to enter the Kingdom of God and be with Christ in Heaven. Otherwise, they are lost for all eternity.

END OF CRITIQUE
Dr. Leslie McFall
14 September 2013