

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE:  
Meet Goliath  
Message 1  
5125

INTRO: This summer, after a few events, I determined to do a few more messages on divorce and remarriage. A good number of years ago I preached my first messages on divorce and remarriage. However, in those first messages I confessed that I did not understand Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Well, it was some years later that I came to an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 that satisfied me and I will give it briefly later. When I had completed that message I thought I was done preaching on this subject. But still later I did two messages on the reason why God hates divorce and again, I had not intended to speak on this subject again. Now I am in semi-retirement, and yet one more time I feel constrained to do a few more messages on this subject.

A book that was given to me and which I highly recommend to you, is a book written by a British doctor by name of E.S. Williams. It is called, "The Great Divorce Controversy". He mentions a law that nobody tries to remember. It is this, once you allow divorce for one reason, it will never stay with one reason. And when you allow it for two, it won't stay with two either. That is an unfailing law. And when one allows divorce because of compassion for one couple or family member or friend, one is helping to destroy a huge section of humanity. The compassion has become a crime. But few care to look beyond the immediate. It is a sore subject, and we don't want to hear about it.

When this subject was debated in British parliament many years ago, Lord Stowell rightly said, "Marriage is the most solemn engagement one human being can contract with another" (pg. 63). Today we are willing to violate that contract, sometimes without any reason at all, and thereby we condemn thousands upon thousands of people to hell. In judgment someday, Jesus said, many would say to Him, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And here is what He will have to say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

Along with other things, breaking marriage contracts, as in other agreements, is lawlessness!

Let me also add this about Bible interpretation. It is a well known rule of Bible interpretation that unclear passages must give way to clear passages. The Deuteronomy 24 passage we will look at first is, without possible contradiction, an unclear passage. Check any number of commentaries, and you will find that to be true. There is no consistency among interpreters. Who knows, for example, what is meant by the words 'some uncleanness'? It is unclear.

We will look at this subject under two main headings, the sin of divorce and remarriage, and the solution to this sin. Under the heading, the sin of divorce and remarriage, we will look at the theological factors involved, the historical factors and the sociological factors.

Well, I have called these messages, Divorce and Remarriage: Meet Goliath. I believe that if we obey the Bible on divorce and remarriage, we will meet a matter of the same magnitude as facing Goliath. And like Saul, we will tremble and back down.

Let me give you a few reasons for giving these messages. First, I give these because of a few things that took place this summer, and I feel I need to encourage those who have taken a painful stand on this matter. And second, because we are having at least a little impact on the Evangelical Church all over the world, we need to encourage those who take this lonely stand. Our messages on this subject are some of the most listened to messages we have online, and some of our messages have now gone into 156 of 196 countries in the world, and into every state of the United States. And last, when I am done, I think this church will be stronger on the matter and will say, "Thank you for this very important information you have given us." And this time, I think, may well be the last time I preach on this subject.

So, we begin our first point on the sin of divorce and remarriage with the theological factor, and with a brief coverage of the main passages of Scripture involved. For those unfamiliar with this subject, if you want to grasp this message you will have to re-listen numerous times to understand the

points because we will be speeding, without taking time for illustrations. We begin then with the unclear passages.

## I. THE SIN OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

### A. The Theological Factors

#### 1. The Unclear Passages

##### a. Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Turn to Deuteronomy 22. Let me just say, if you are familiar with my previous treatment of Deuteronomy 24, you will notice I am coming at it from a little different approach. Also, having restudied chapter 22, it has shed more light on my understanding which I will not take time to point out for the sake of time.

Now, before we study the unclear passages of Scripture, we need to understand one matter. The Jews had developed what is called a betrothal stage in marriage. When the marriage arrangements were made, and the dowry was paid, the young couple were considered married but did not live together in physical union. The marriage ceremony happened usually about a year or so after betrothal.

And since the marriage began at betrothal, not when they were physically united, it required a divorce to break a betrothal. So a woman who was discovered in unfaithfulness during the betrothal stage or on the day of physical union, it required a divorce to break the marriage agreement. And here is my proposal regarding divorce right through all the Bible: The only case in which divorce was ever allowed was if there was unfaithfulness before or during the time of betrothal. The only possible exception being an illegitimate. With that in mind, we look first at the unclear passages regarding divorce. We begin with chapter 22 to lay the groundwork for understanding 24:1-4. We begin in verse 13:

13 *If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,' then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, "I found your daughter was not a virgin," and yet these are the evidences of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days.*

Now it says 1. that this man discovered or claimed that his new wife was not a virgin while being betrothed to him; 2. he detests her 3. he charges her with shameful conduct. Note very carefully that it does not say that when a man makes such a discovery that he is commanded to bring charges and have her stoned. It is only if he detests her and brings charges against her.

This now leaves the question, what if he does not detest her? Without question, they could have lived happily ever after. Nobody would have known. But what if he makes this discovery and detests her, but does not charge her with shameful conduct? I had not noted this before, but it appears that it had been an acceptable practice among the Jews with the betrothal system, that such a woman could be divorced. This passage is the first mention of divorce in the Bible. But if the husband accepted her during the marriage week, then he could no longer divorce her. According to the verse, only

after he detested her and charged her with shameful conduct, did Moses require that she be stoned.

But if the husband's claim could not be verified, then he had to take her as his wife and he could never divorce her. Why? Because, and here is my proposition: the only ground on which he could divorce her was proof of un-chastity during betrothal.

Verses 23-24 then give the case of rape like this:  
*23 If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.*

In such a case, both the man and the woman are to be stoned. No more problems with that. In the next case, in verses 25-27, in the case of rape of a betrothed woman, only the man is to die. It says:  
*25 But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. 26 But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. 27 For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.*

In verses 28-29 a man forces an un-betrothed woman, and if they are discovered, then the man was required to marry her. It says, *28 If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, 29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has*

*humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.*

Now here divorce is mentioned the second time in the Bible. And in this case it says that he may never divorce her. Why not? My proposition: Because the only case in which divorce was ever permitted was in the case of a young lady who was discovered to have been unfaithful during or before betrothal. In this case, that could never happen.

So we go to Deuteronomy 24. If my proposition is correct in the previous passages, and we approach Deuteronomy 24 from that understanding, we get a brand new picture of this otherwise most, and I mean most difficult passage. We begin in verse 1:

*24:1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,*

All the argument of this passage centers around what is meant by 'some uncleanness'. Here is my proposition: The uncleanness is that she was unfaithful before or during betrothal to him. So as in chapter 22, in such a case he could choose to live with her, divorce her, or make her a public example and have her stoned. Here it says he has chosen to divorce her.

Now let me insert here that the KJV translates this passage with several imperatives like this: *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: first imperative: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, second imperative: and give it in her hand, third imperative: and send her out of his house.*

However, in the original text there are no commands in that section. The NKJV rightly translates it like this, *When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house...* Three things have happened. He has discovered that his bride has been unfaithful. He has detested her and decided to divorce her rather than stone her, and they are divorced.

So he is saying, in the case where a man chooses to divorce his wife in the case of unfaithfulness during betrothal, rather than make her a public spectacle by having her stoned, then he may never take her back. So verse 2 says:

2 *"when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife,*

Now here, we find that such a divorced woman could marry again if the man chose to divorce her instead of having her stoned. Moses then goes on like this in verse 3:

3 *"if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

Here we have two possible situations. If the second husband marries her, also not realizing she is not a virgin, and he too chooses to divorce her instead of having her stoned then the first husband may not remarry her. Second, if the second husband chose to keep her as his wife, but he died, then the first

husband still was not allowed to take her back. This is the only command of the entire passage.

What is the conclusion to the view I have presented? Divorce was allowed in one case, and one only. If a young woman had been unfaithful during betrothal, and it had never been discovered until during her betrothal or right after marriage. In such a case the husband had three choices:

1. He could choose to accept her.
2. He could choose to divorce her.
3. He could press charges, and if the charges were proven true, she was to be stoned. If the charges were not true, he could never divorce her.

And out of all this we learn that Moses never commanded divorce. He permitted it by not condemning it. As these texts are written, he allowed for divorce, but that, only in one case. God's intent was that when the marriage agreement was made, it was for life. I believe that Moses allowed this exception only because of the Jewish betrothal system of marriage.

The dilemma most views end up with is this: God did not allow divorce at all. Moses, contrary to God's wish, allowed divorce for reasons nobody agrees on. And I ask, would it be consistent to say that Moses allowed for divorce, but God did not? Were the writings of Moses divine? Were they inspired? Are Deuteronomy 22 and 24 both inspired by God but they allow what God does not?

I believe that Moses writings were inspired, including Deuteronomy 22 and 24. God's original intent was that a marriage should never be broken. With the Jewish system of betrothal counting as marriage, God permitted divorce if a woman was proven to have been unfaithful during or before betrothal. Once the marriage ceremony and week was

over, no divorce was ever allowed, other than possibly in illegitimate marriages.

And here is the next question: Is there any indication that the interpretation I have given is correct? There is the strongest of evidence. First, look at Matthew 1 (read 18-19). Here we have precisely the case described in Deuteronomy 22, and I think, in 24. It was obvious that Mary had been unfaithful during their betrothal. If I am right in my conclusions, Joseph could choose to accept her; divorce her, or make a public display of her and have her stoned.

Now consider verse 19 that it says Joseph was a just man, and as a just man, he was opting for the Deuteronomy 24 allowance to divorce her. You see, he did not want to make her a public example by having her stoned, so he decided on the Mosaic exception, that is to divorce her. Well, you know the story, how the angel intervened with the truth of Mary's condition, and rather than Mary being stoned, he accepted her and took her as his wife. So he now chose option one, to keep her as his wife.

There is more. We go to Matthew 19 (read 1-6). The Pharisees have questioned Jesus on our precise topic. And Jesus said, "Well, you know what Genesis 2 says. So there is no divorce allowable." And what do they do? They go to the passage they always went to, to show that Moses commanded divorce in certain cases. Note this in verse 7 (read).

Now look at Jesus' answer in verse 8. He said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to divorce your wives." Moses never commanded them to divorce their wives, as we have seen. By not insisting that such a woman be stoned, he was permitting divorce. Joseph wanted to use this permission in the case of Mary.

So, as I see it, both Joseph the husband of Mary and Jesus took the view I am presenting.

(What was this hardness of heart? Not taking care of their young girls and allowing opportunity for them to live promiscuously before marriage?)

b. Matthew 5:32/19:9

That brings us to the two most used passages to allow for divorce and remarriage in the NT. We go to Matthew 5 (read 31-32). This is basically the same as a few verses in Matthew 19, only in that passage there is more added and we will go to that chapter.

So we go to Matthew 19 to continue where we left off before. We had left off in verse 8 before (read). Now look at verse 9 (read). This is the verse along with 5:31-32, that is most used in the NT to allow for divorce. The ground given is that the issue here is marital infidelity or unfaithfulness. Normally it is said that the innocent party is told they may remarry, and the guilty party may not. Some churches will refuse to remarry a divorced person, but if another church marries them, then this church will accept them after they are remarried. Such inconsistencies abound in the modern church.

Well, the controversial part of Matthew 19:9 and 5:32 is "except it be for..." And all new versions fail to tell the truth here including the NKJV. They say such things as, except it be for adultery, or unfaithfulness or marital unfaithfulness or infidelity and suchlike; and none of those words occur in this text.

The word for marital unfaithfulness or infidelity or suchlike is adultery, moichia in the original. But here the word is pornia. Now pornia is a specialized word for a certain kind of physical immorality. It is the sin of unmarried people, not

married people. And you might ask, how can this text speak of the physical immorality on the part of single people, when the woman is called a wife and they seem to be married?

The answer is that Jesus here allowed for divorce in the case of unfaithfulness during the betrothal stage of marriage, that is before they were physically united as a couple. That is consistent with Moses. Why does Matthew include this exception clause and Mark and Luke do not? Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jewish people. I don't think any Bible teacher will argue that. The real question here is, why don't Mark and Luke give this same clause? And the answer is, they were not writing to the Jewish people, and again, I don't think any Bible teacher will argue that if he has studied any amount of time.

Here is the simple answer. Jesus is here giving the same exception that the Lord gave through Moses in Deuteronomy 22 and 24:1-4. This man has found that his wife had not been true before marriage, and in such cases, the Lord through Moses allowed for divorce, or the husband could charge her and then have her stoned.

So the Bible is consistent. Moses in Deuteronomy 24 allowed an exception to be made if unfaithfulness took place before or during betrothal. Joseph, the husband of Mary considered using this exception. Jesus, in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 allowed for the very same exception.

Is there evidence that this is the correct interpretation? Well, let me give you seven points: First, in the beginning, God said that after marriage a man and a woman became one flesh. Divorce violates the one flesh principle. So, a no divorce position was held until the time of Moses. That is consistent with this interpretation of these two crucial verses.

Second, if the Mosaic concession to divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is as we gave it, then that is in favor of a no divorce after marriage position, which is consistent with the teaching of the previous 2500 years. Third, this interpretation is consistent with the case of Joseph's betrothal to Mary in Matthew 1:18-25. Fourth, it is agreed by Bible scholars that the book of Matthew is written to the Jews. Matthew, writing to the Jews would naturally include the exception clause because it is directly applicable to the betrothal system of marriage used by the Jews.

Fifth, Mark and Luke, whose books were not written to the Jews, but to Gentiles, do not include the exception clause. They simply forbid divorce altogether (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Sixth, the word *pornea* does not refer to unfaithfulness after marriage, but before marriage.

So, we ask, is there Biblical support for the view that *pornea* is unfaithfulness before marriage? In other words, is *pornea* physical immorality on the part of the unmarried or does it also include physical unfaithfulness of the married? Physical unfaithfulness of the married is referred to in Scripture as *moichia* (adultery) not *pornea*. Furthermore, if *pornea* and *moichia* are both used in the same lists of sins. If *pornea* is a broad term covering every kind of physical immorality then we have a serious problem when both terms are used in the same list as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21.

Seventh, and last, after Jesus has answered the disciples question in Matthew 19 the disciple's response was, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." If Jesus had meant that in the case of marital unfaithfulness of any kind one could divorce, the disciples would not have responded like that. But when they understood

what Jesus was saying, they were shocked, as most would be today if they understood this.

c. 1 Corinthians 7 (366 words)

The last controversial passage is found in 1 Corinthians 7. In this chapter Paul deals with numerous marriage related issues. In 7:10-24 he deals with separating from one's partner, not divorce. Some view separation as a divorce. I don't. Separation is permissible, as this passage says, divorce isn't.

In verses 10-11 he deals with the separation of a believing couple (read). So separation is permissible, but they must not marry someone else. But in verse 12-17 he deals with unbelievers who marry and then one becomes a Christian but the other does not. And the big question is with regard to verse 15 (read). Now it says a brother or sister is not in bondages in such cases. However, verse 39 says a wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives.

So what is given as an explanation is that divorce for couples where one becomes a believer and the other does not, and if the unbeliever does not wish to stay with the believer, then the believer is free to remarry.

Now if we stuck to this one exception alone, divorce would not be such a big problem, but history has said over and over and over, when you make one exception, there will soon be two and so on. What most do not note is the original word for bound in 7:15 and 7:39 and Romans 7:1-3 is not the same.

Let me quote here from my Catechism notes, "The word bondage in 7:15 is *dedoulotai* (perf. ind. pass), which has as its root the word *douloo*. The word bound of 7:39 and Romans 7:1-3 is *dedetai* (perf. ind. pass), having as its root the word *deo*. The bondage of verse 15, as I understand it, is the

bondage of obligation to keep the marriage together and the obligation to fulfill the partner's needs (7:3-5). The bondage of 7:39 and Romans 7:1-3 is the bondage which obligates one to God and the "one flesh" principle of Genesis 2:24."

In other words, if the unbeliever leaves, the believer is no longer under obligation to maintain normal marital duties. But neither is he or she free to remarry. The marriage bond still holds. It is for life.

## 2. The Clear Passages

### a. Genesis 2:22-25

Well, that is the difficult part of this message. We now go to the easy part, the clear passages. Turn now to Genesis 2. We are going to very clear passages on our subject. We begin with Genesis 1:22-25, *Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."* *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

That is clear enough. No further explanation needed. They are one flesh, and you don't separate one flesh.

### b. Matthew 19:3-6

We go to Matthew 19:3-6, *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 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.*

For Jesus, that was the end of the discussion. That is clear enough. No further explanation is needed. We have seen already that the Jews were not satisfied yet, because they were seeking room for divorce and remarriage. But for Jesus, this was the answer. No divorce.

c. Mark 10:11-12

*Mark 10:11-12, In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.*

That is clear enough. No explanation needed.

d. Luke 16:18

*Luke 16:18 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.*

That is clear enough. No explanation needed. We have explained before why Mark and Luke give this simple answer. Now let me add one point here. Some understand that if a person divorces and remarries, it is only adultery the first time they come together, but not after that. There is absolutely no ground for that as the present tense everywhere attests.

e. Romans 7:1-3

*Romans 7:1-3 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so*

*that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*

That is very clear. No further explanation is needed.

f. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

*Luke 7:10-11 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: 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 his wife.*

That is clear. It needs no further explanation.

g. 1 Corinthians 7:39

*1 Corinthians 7:39 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.*

That is clear enough. The marriage bond is for life. Only death severs it.

Now let me give you the hermeneutical principle to govern all the passages we have looked at, clear and unclear. Here is the principle: Unclear passages must give way to the clear. If that is the case, what is the answer to divorce and remarriage? The answer is as clear as the clear passages.

CONCL: And so we conclude. I have called these messages, Divorce and Remarriage: Meet Goliath. If you are listening to these messages, and you have believed that divorce and remarriage is acceptable by God in one or some or many cases and by listening to this message you have begun to question what you have been taught, and a battle is beginning to rage inside, you have not met Goliath yet. And if you should come to agree with what we have given here, and you have come to believe that to be married to another partner while the first one is still alive is living in adultery, you have not met Goliath yet. It may seem you have, but you haven't. But if you keep going, you will meet him. And

like Saul and his men, you will tremble in your boots, and possibly retreat.

You see, Goliath represents a very large, intimidating enemy of God's people. Behind him is Satan. And if you have come to view divorce and remarriage as constituting a sin that will take a person to hell, Goliath may have been roused out of his sleep and he may have begun to roar. But I think his master's message will be, "Lie down and rest Goliath. This is not serious. I know you don't like it. But this guy won't cause us any damage, and he may even work in our favor yet. Sleep my good friend. Rest assured, I will rouse you if this guy becomes dangerous to us.