

Matthew 5:31-32 & 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

- A. This message is entitled “Lawful Divorce” because that is what the WCF describes here.
1. This title also fitting because so many divorces in our nation are not lawful.
 2. The conclusion of sec 6 describes the root cause of the problem. Sec 6 says that “the persons concerned in it [divorce proceedings should not be] not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.”
 - a. That should remind us of the times of the judges of Israel wherein the Holy Spirit led the author to condemn the fact that, **“every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6b).**
 - b. itsovereasy.com: “We've organized the top 13 reasons sourced from our analysis of surveys that reported 20% or more of respondents citing the following reasons:
 1. Conflict, arguing, irretrievable breakdown in the relationship
 2. Lack of commitment
 3. Infidelity / extramarital affairs
 4. Distance in the relationship / lack of physical intimacy
 5. Communication problems between partners
 6. Domestic violence, verbal, physical, or emotional abuse by a partner
 7. Realization that one’s spouse has different values / morals
 8. Substance abuse / alcohol addiction
 9. Absence of romantic intimacy / love
 10. One partner not carrying their weight in the marriage
 11. Financial problems / debt
 12. Marrying too young
 13. Lack of shared interests / incompatibility between partners”¹

Many of the items above can be summarized in the statement, “I want a divorce because I just don’t love him/her anymore.” Just as a couple fell in love; they fell out of it again.

sec 5. “Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract.”

- A. The “contract” spoken of here is an engagement to be married.
- B. The language here indicates that it wasn’t always easy to break off an engagement; sexual infidelity of one of the members of the contract was surely given legal & moral ground to break it off.

Sec 5 “... In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.”

- A. The innocent party in such a case can “sue out” or go through the legal & ecclesiastical means to obtain a divorce. → **Mat 5:31-32: “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality [fornication] causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (NKJV).**

¹ <https://www.itsovereasy.com/insights/causes-of-divorce>

- a. “**sexual immorality**” is better translated here as “fornication.” This is precise term.
- b. Someone could press the matter of “**sexual immorality**” too far for lesser sins.
- c. LC 138 “*What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?*”

- One of those duties is “conjugal love.” A chronic refusal of this right of marriage is a breaking of one’s wedding vows & can give the denied party legal ground for a divorce.

- 2. If someone has relations with another person outside of the marriage, the innocent party is free in the sight of God to marry another person.
- 3. The guilty person is not given this right to marry another. For them to do so would be to commit adultery.

B. This sentence in sec 5 does not mandate that the innocent party has to pursue a divorce. It is lawful if they choose to; however, her or she could forgive & remain in the marriage especially if the guilty party demonstrates true repentance over their sin. A stubborn persistence in the sin should result in a divorce.

Sec 6. “Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage...”

A. Secs 5 & 6 demonstrate how the Westminster assembly let Scripture interpret Scripture.

- 1. In Mat 5 & Mat 19:3-9, Jesus said “fornication” (i.e. adultery) was the just only cause.
- 2. In 1 Cor 7:8-16, Paul provided the just cause of abandonment. Lets turn there.

B. Perhaps you questioned why didn’t Jesus mention abandonment as Paul later did. It likely had to do with the audience each man was addressing.

- 1. In Mat 5 & 19, Jesus was preaching to Jews.
- 2. In 1 Cor 7, Paul was preaching to gentiles who came to faith in Christ. Many of them had spouses that were not converted to Christ along with them.

- a. Both parties should stay together even in the case of mixed marriage if the unbelieving spouse may be difficult to deal with at times. The sake of the children is of key interest according to Paul (**v14**).

- b. Dr. Jay Adams gave an application of how 1 Cor 7 could apply to 2 persons who are both members of a Christian church.

- 1) If one person falls into sin and is excommunicated, they are no longer considered a believer.
- 2) If the unbeliever wants to remain in the marriage, the 2 should stay together.
- 3) If the unbeliever later wants to depart, the other is free to marry again.

C. Sec 6 says that “the persons concerned in it [divorce proceedings should not be] not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.”

- 1. There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors
- 2. Godly leaders in the church should be key among those.
- 3. Marriage & family therapists may be consulting people to get divorces much more than they should. After all, the key purpose for them is not God’s covenant and what His word says. Instead, the world says what really matters is “individual fulfillment and satisfaction.” This gets back to where we started; doing what is right in one’s own eyes.